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FICTION TO FILM: THE CASES OF PAUL AUSTER AND IAN MCEWAN

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TIMELINE

Paul Auster and Ian McEwan: Essential Biographical Data

1947 Paul Auster is born in Newark, New Jersey to Jewish middle-class parents of Polish descent, Queenie and Samuel Auster.

1948 Ian Russel McEwan is born on the 21st of June in Aldershot, England, to the Scotsman David McEwan, a soldier in the British Army and Rose McEwan.

1951-1959 McEwan spends his early life in military outposts in Singapore, Lybia and Germany.

1948 – 1969 Auster is raised in the suburbs of South Orange, New Jersey and Newark, and attends the Columbia High School in Maplewood and the Columbia University in New York. He also travels to Spain, Italy, France and Ireland.

1959-1966 McEwan attends boarding school at Woolverstone Hall, Suffolk while his parents continue to live abroad.

1966 McEwan enrolls at the University of Sussex. He reads English and French and begins writing fiction.

1969-1970 Auster receives a BA in English and Comparative Literature from Columbia University, New York and a Master's degree in Renaissance Literature.

1970-1971 McEwan graduates with an honors BA from Sussex and enrolls for the MA in English Literature at the University of East Anglia. Works on a collection of short stories, *First Love, Last Rites*.

1971-1974 Auster moves to Paris to work as a translator of French literature.

1972 McEwan travels to Afghanistan and Greece and consumes psychotropic drugs. Publishes his first short story, "Homemade", in the New American Review.

1974 Auster returns to New York and marries Lydia Davis, a short story writer. He starts writing essays, poems and novels and publishes his first poetry collection, *Unearth*.

1975 McEwan publishes his debut collection of short stories, *First Love, Last Rites.*

1976 McEwan receives Somerset Maugham Award for his collection of short stories. Travels to the United States. Auster publishes his second poetry collection, *Wall Writing*.

1977 *Fragments of Cold*, Auster's third poetry collection, is published. His son, Daniel, is born.

1978 McEwan's second collection of short stories, *In Between the Sheets*, is published as well as his first novel, *The Cement Garden*.

1979 BBC halts the production of the television adaptation of McEwan's "Solid Geometry". Auster divorces Lydia Davis.

1980 McEwan's *The Imitation Game* is broadcasted on the BBC.

1981 McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers* and *The Imitation Game* are published. The former is nominated for the Booker Prize for fiction. Auster remarries to Siri Hustvedt.

1982 Auster publishes his first memoir, *The Invention of Solitude* and *The Random House Book of Twentieth-Century French Poetry*. McEwan marries Penny Allen, with whom he has two sons.

1983 McEwan is included in *Granta's* list of the 20 Best Young British Novelists. *Or Shall We Die*? is performed at the Royal Festival Hall by the London Symphony Orchestra.

1985-1987 Auster publishes three mystery novels (*City of Glass*, *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*) which are reunited in *The New York Trilogy*.

1987 McEwan's *The Child in Time* is published and awarded the Whitbread Novel Award. The British author visits the Soviet Union with delegation from European Nuclear Disarmament. Auster publishes *In the Country of Last Things* and his daughter, Sophie, is born. Auster also receives Prix France Culture de Littérature Étrangère for *The New York Trilogy*.

1990 McEwan publishes *The Innocent* and the film adaptation of *The Comfort of Strangers* is released. Auster publishes his mystery novel, *The Music of Chance* and the short story "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story".

1992 McEwan's *Black Dogs* and Auster's *Leviathan* are published.

1993 Film adaptations of McEwan's *The Cement Garden, The Innocent* and *The Child in Time* are released. Auster writes the screenplay for the film adaptation of *The Music of Chance* which is screened at Cannes Film Festival the same year.

1994 McEwan publishes *The Daydreamer*, a second children's book, and Auster publishes *Mr. Vertigo*.

1995 McEwan divorces Penny Allen. Auster writes the screenplay for *Smoke* which is well-received by critics and is awarded several prizes; he also directs and writes the screenplay for the film *Blue in the Face*.

1997 *Enduring Love* is published. Marries Annalena McAfee.

1998 McEwan publishes *Amsterdam* and wins the Booker prize. Auster writes the screenplay for the movie *Lulu on the Bridge*.

1999 McEwan is awarded the Shakespeare prize in Germany. Auster publishes a new novel, *Timbuktu*.

2001 McEwan's *Atonement* is published and shortlisted for several prizes.

2002 Auster publishes a new novel, *The Book of Illusions*. McEwan's *Solid Geometry* is adapted for television.

2003 Auster publishes *Oracle Night* and is elected as a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. McEwan wins the National Book Critics' Circle Fiction Award for *Atonement*.

2004 The film adaptation of McEwan's *Enduring Love* is released.

2005 Auster's *The Brooklyn Follie*s is published. McEwan publishes *Saturday* and adapts *Butterflies* for television.

2006 Auster publishes *Travels in the Scriptorium* and is the recipient of the Prince of Asturias Award for Literature. He is also elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters for Literature

2007 Auster's *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* is released. McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* is published and shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction. The film adaptation of *Atonement* is released with seven Oscar nominations and a BAFTA film award for Best Film.

2008 Auster releases *Man in the Dark* and McEwan publishes the Libretto *For You* and receives several prizes. The latter is named by *The Times* among the 50 Greatest British writers since 1945.

2009 Auster publishes *Invisible*, a collection of four short stories that are interconnected.

2010 McEwan publishes *Solar* and Auster publishes *Sunset Park*.

2012 *Sweet Tooth* is published by McEwan and negotiations for its film adaptation start. The British writer also receives from the University of Sussex its 50th Anniversary Gold Medal.

2014 McEwan's *The Children Act* is published.

2016 *Nutshell*, McEwan's most recent novel, is published.

2017 Auster publishes his latest novel, *4 3 2 1*. McEwan works at the screenplay for *On Chesil Beach* which is released the same year.

PART I. PRELIMINARIES

Chapter 1. By Way of Introduction

1.1. Why Fiction to Film?

Emerging in the 1890s due to great technological advancements, motion pictures appealed to an ever-increasing audience up to the point that they became universally acknowledged as *the* art form of the twentieth century. Cinema never failed to pay tribute to older arts such as painting, sculpture or architecture, and, predictably, the fast-growing film industry was to consider their accomplishments foundational. Moreover, it was quite early on in the history of filmmaking that the connection between literature and movies was made, and it became obvious that the two media indisputably shared common ground that could not be easily dismissed. The undeniable influence that literature has always exerted on cinema came to be a two-way process: by the mid-20th century cinematography had already left its mark on most Western novelists. Since watching movies has represented a constant element in their coming of age, most writers after 1945 display an acute awareness of cinematic techniques and of how powerful images and visualization can be. That is why they often employ such techniques in their fiction and, unsurprisingly, a considerable number of such novelists wrote scripts for the cinematic adaptations of their won novels. Alice Walker, Vladimir Nabokov, Paul Benjamin Auster and Ian McEwan are but a few whose oeuvres are marked by cinematic vision, a sort of vision that is confirmed by the prolificacy of the films those oeuvres led to. Not only are their writings highly acclaimed by critics and general readers alike, but they clearly also have that *quelque chose* it takes for them to be propelled beyond the barriers of their medium.

The present paper entitled *Literature and Film. The cases of Paul Auster and Ian McEwan* aims at delivering a comprehensive study of the abovementioned writers' works that have been adapted for the big screen, as well as of their actual adaptations. There is no work in the field of exegesis that contrastively deals with the works of the two writers, and the adaptations based on their works have never been discussed in a common framework. Of course, at first glance, it seems that the differences between Paul Auster and Ian McEwan prevail and,

therefore, a contrastive approach might prove to be futile; nevertheless, as the paper sets out to demonstrate, there are enough common points that the two writers share for such an approach to be not only justified, but also welcomed. Auster and McEwan are unquestionably remarkable authors of English literature; many of their texts are written in the formula of a particular literariness that is really hard to grasp. Therefore, this study distances itself from the critical views that have been put forth so far and sets out to discuss the works of fiction beyond the commonly identified topoi. Moreover, investigating the adaptations provides extra depth to the analysis.

The debate over the cinematic adaptation of literary works has always been dominated by issues of fidelity to the source text and the tendency to prioritize the literary work over its filmic counterpart. Most critics considered adaptations inferior to their source texts, no more than secondary products which inevitably lacked the richness of books. The decisive argument has always been the alleged impoverishment of the content of the book due to the necessary omissions, and the filmmaker's inability to capture and render the deepest meanings of the text. Until very recently, the visual aspect of the film was also considered a problem; it was believed that visualization would destroy the subtleties of the printed word when outlining the universe of a literary work. If the literary work, as Umberto Eco put it, requires creative and conscious cooperation on the part of the reader, viewing a movie obviously involves the participation of a somewhat passive recipient. Thus, if an adaptation was to be deemed as worthy, it had to be done in the spirit of the source book, it had to take into account all of the latter's complexity.

However, interpreting adaptations from the standpoint of their fidelity to the source text may prove to be a problematic and restrictive approach. Literature, as a form of art, does not necessarily take refuge in a well-established virtual order of interpretation. The significance of the work lies above all with the reader. It is therefore necessary to emphasize not only the source but also the way in which its meanings are rebuilt in the reception process. Movie creators can be seen as readers, and each screening as a result of the individual reading process. As Stephanie Harrison (2005) contends, directors are magicians, translators, collaborators, and thieves, all in one. Therefore, screening is nothing more than an original interpretation of a literary text, even though it is trans-semiotic in nature. Seen from this vantage point, an adaptation should not capture all the nuances and complexities of the book; it can remain an independent, coherent and convincing work of art with its own symbolism, depth and subtle meanings.

Consequently, our paper aims at analyzing literary works and their adaptations without establishing a hierarchy of values; literature and cinema are two different media and it is interesting to see what are the means that they use to render the same things. Ultimately, it all comes down to different modes of expression, different arts, each one with its specific tools and ends. At the heart of the debate between literature and film there is a paradox that is difficult to reconcile: on the one hand, literary works and films are at diametrically opposing ends, having as distinctive representations the word and the image, respectively. These two representations are waging a war on each other at both the formal and cultural level. On the other hand, the two may be considered sister arts, since they have the same recipients and share the same values, sources, archetypes, narrative strategies and cultural contexts.

Our research intends to be flexible enough so as to allow correlations and, inevitably, contrastive approaches between the matters under scrutiny. It is impossible to effectively compare a book with its adaptation if we do not recognize the essential differences that underlie the two systems. Clearly, “telling” does not work like “showing”, but to relate what has been said to what has been shown is feasible enough if we find a way to articulate divergences and convergences. In conclusion, the research departs from the war between word and image and tries to identify a path for reconciliation, as it emerges from the adaptations of Auster and McEwan's writings, as the two authors have similar visions when it comes to films and filmmaking.

1.2. Methodological Considerations

Our research will rely both on analysis and on synthesis and the end result will be a comprehensive monographic study. Therefore, a set of methods will be needed to achieve the aforementioned goal. First of all, we begin with thorough documentation since without a systematic and continuous study of appropriate materials, the profile of the writers cannot be effectively outlined in relation to the adaptation of their works, and the research results might be considered too subjective. What is more, the actual writing of the dissertation can only take place against the background of permanent documentation. Then, we use contrastive analysis in order to identify the common points of the authors and works under scrutiny; conversely, the same method will be employed so as to highlights the points of departure. The literary works brought

into question and their cinematic adaptations will, hence, be analyzed by mainly using this method. Similarly, by resorting to synthesis, our research will make use of the opinions that have been expressed so far on the texts and films, either reinforcing some of the claims or disapproving the unfounded ones. The writings and adaptations will be analyzed by taking into account recognizable key motifs that can be found across multiple works. Therefore, classifications and delimitations will be applied and, to do so, the methods of induction and deduction are necessary. Last but not least, our analysis will also deal with the actual content and plot of the works under investigation. As a result, our research will look at adaptations as a result of a complex system of interests. Films based on literary sources will be considered both from an aesthetical and sociological point of view and we will try to avoid taking the traditional path dominated by textual, purely formalist analysis. The resulting hybrid methodology will hopefully provide a clearer picture of the contemporary film industry, an industry that relies heavily on the adaptation of the literary text.

1.3. Outline of the Dissertation

Our dissertation consists of two parts, with the first one mainly focusing on theoretical issues and the second one bent on a more practical approach. Thus, **Part I. Preliminaries**, organized in two chapters, is meant to contextualize both the works of the two writers and their adaptations, providing relevant biographical observations, especially regarding those aspects that influenced their writing. To an even greater extent, it also sets the theoretical framework that stands of the basis of the ensuing contrastive analyses. **Part II.** ***Fiction to Film: Contrastive Analysis of Representative Adaptations of Paul Auster's and Ian McEwan's Works***, is divided into two chapters and explores the texts and adaptations under discussion, according to clear thematic nuclei, by applying the methods mentioned above.

The Introduction, which is the first chapter of the paper, deals with the underlying motivation of our research, the methods that we employed, and the current state of research regarding the two authors, their writings and the adaptations they were turned into, and, generally speaking, adaptation/film studies. Moreover, this first chapter briefly delineates the historical context of the literary works and adaptations, starting from the premise that it has greatly influenced the two authors' approach to fiction writing. The timeline included at the very

beginning of or dissertation enables us to identify some striking similarities and differences between the two authors, focusing on their particular cultural environments. It should be noted that we do not intend to make an *in extenso* inventory of data or biographical reconstructions. We will rather try to discover the coordinates of the writers' existential trajectory that are relevant the analyses included in Part II.

The second chapter, ***Fiction to Film: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework***, introduces the main concepts that are part of adaptation studies, concepts that are quintessential for our investigation in Part II. We also take into account various aspects of the cinematographic industry, so as to reveal the way in which films are marked by both aesthetic principles and inherent commercial concerns. Furthermore, we discuss the issue of fidelity in cinematic adaptations, as it is one of the most valued, yet controversial criterion that is taken into account when studying films based on literary sources. Adaptations have always had an ambiguous position as far as the creative effort is concerned, caught between an original work of art and its subjective re-creation in a different form, sometimes quite different. The transformation has often been considered invasive, self-sufficient, although, from the filmmaker's point of view, it is the essence of someone else's creative endeavor. Considering the source text as superior because of the fact that it belongs to an elitist culture has long been the standard according to which hierarchies have been operated. Thus, it is by no means a coincidence that the research so far in the field of literature and film studies has focused mainly on the qualitative and quantitative changes taking place in the adaptive process. It is necessary to abandon the dichotomy between elitist and popular culture in favor of a more productive approach centered on intertextuality; the focus of attention should be on what gives a film its subtlety and complexity, and not the losses that occur in the process of adaptation. After all, movies have distinct esthetic principles. The next section brings film language to the fore, by discussing the "grammar" of what we see on the screen while watching movies. Consequently, we define the concept of *visual literacy*, since not everyone who watches a movie can notice and understand the relevance of a director's choices about the movie's "grammar", the way they give depth and subtlety to the resulting material.

Part II considers the specificity of the literary and cinematic art respectively, by trying to identify ways of reconciling the everlasting war between words and images, namely the specific means employed during the transition from literature to film. This second part begins with the

third chapter, **Self-Reflexivity in Fiction and Film: the Narrator as Writer and Protagonist**. The focus is on analyzing works such as Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, and Auster's "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story" and *The Book of Illusions*. Their cinematic adaptations are also dealt with in detail. All these works use narrative techniques and strategies that draw attention to the self-reflective nature of writing in order to uncover the fictional illusion. We are particularly interested in how the authors/auteurs make it almost impossible for the reader/viewer to dissociate between reality and fiction, between factuality and counterfactuality; the boundary between the two is, for example, in "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story", like smoke, hence the title of the short story's adaptation. *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* is, in a unique way, the screening of an imaginary movie that appears in *The Books of Illusions. Atonement* deals with the role of the writer both as a narrator and as a protagonist.

The fourth chapter, titled **Eros and Thanatos: Innocence, Initiation, Experience**, explores how the maturation of the protagonists is influenced by crucial events in their lives. *The Cement Garden*, together with *The Comfort of Strangers* and the collections of short stories *First Love, Last Rites* and *Between the Sheet*s, have led critics call their author "Ian Macabre". This reaction is perfectly justifiable if we take into account that almost all of them focus on children who are facing death and are initiated into the mysteries of love in totally unorthodox ways. What is more, *The Cement Garden* in particular is suitable for an investigation of how gender boundaries are overcome, and of how masculinity and femininity are represented in the book and film, respectively. The chapter further deals with a different kind of initiation: the neophyte protagonist of *The Music of Chance* joins a new, dangerous world that will eventually lead to his demise. All in all, the protagonists of the works analyzed in this chapter are drawn into a world that seems innocent *ab initio* but is in fact perilous and will mark their lives irreversibly.

Lastly, the final chapter presents our **Conclusions,** which are meant to be original, the result of a complex analysis based on the work of extremely prolific and high-ranking contemporary authors, as well as on some of the most outstanding cinematic adaptations originating in their fiction. The overall, underlying conclusion is that each medium displays astonishingly rich symbolism and seeing the source text as more than what it actually is, i.e., operating a hierarchy between the two, would undoubtedly represent an act of misperception and misjudgment.

1.4. State of the Art

Unsurprisingly, both McEwan and Paul Auster have received substantial critical attention, as they are, indeed, considered to be some of the best English authors of our time. McEwan's work is thoroughly discussed and analyzed in the following books: *Ian McEwan* (Kiernan Ryan, 1994), *Ian McEwan* (Jack Slay Jr., 1996), *Understanding Ian McEwan* (David Malcolm, 2002), *Ian McEwan: The Essential Guide* (Margaret Reynolds and Jonathan Noakes, 2002), *The Work of Ian McEwan: A Psychodynamic Approach* (Christina Byrnes, 2002), *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* (Peter Childs, 2005), *Ian McEwan* (Dominic Head, 2008), *Ian McEwan* (Lynn Wells, 2009). Likewise, Auster's pieces of literature are dealt with in: *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster* (Dennis Barone, 1995), *An Art of Desire: Reading Paul Auster* (Bernd Herzogenrath, 1999), *The World That is the Book: Paul Auster's Fiction* (Aliki Varvogli, 2001), *Paul Auster* (Harold Bloom, 2004), *Paul Auster* (Mark Brown, 2008), *Paul Auster's Postmodernity* (Martin Brendan, 2008), *Understanding Paul Auster* (James Peacock, 2010). All of these studies, some of them collections of essays, investigate the literary oeuvres of the two authors by mainly taking into account specific thematic nuclei; the cinematic adaptations of their writings are, nonetheless, only disparately discussed.

As mentioned above, a fundamental study that deals with McEwan's fiction is David Malcolm's *Understanding Ian McEwan*, published in 2002 by University of South Carolina Press, as part of the series *Understanding Contemporary British Literature*, whose deliberate purpose is that of offering an adequate introduction to how contemporary literature works. The quoted volume offers accessible information about McEwan's biography, discusses the main influences on his fiction and, in chronological fashion, minutely analyses both collections of short stories, *First Love, Last Rites* and *In Between the Sheets*, the writer's first two novels (or rather, novellas), *The Cement Garden* and *The Comfort of Strangers*, respectively (grouped together under the heading "Fiction and Evil"), *The Child in Time*, *The Innocent* and *Black Dogs* (both of them discussed with respect to their main theme, i.e., "Brushes with History"), and *Enduring Love*. Malcolm also dedicates a chapter to "Other Works", in which he investigates the screenplays, the oratorio, children's fiction and *Amsterdam*. But Malcolm's analysis "when it comes to McEwan's work in other media" is rather general and elliptic, lacking specificity. The literary critic himself admits that "a whole range of visual and auditory elements come into play"

when discussing media other than prose fiction, which requires "a specialized terminology and approach that are different from those of literary analysis". Consequently, Malcolm explains that his chapter will treat McEwan's other media "as written texts on the grounds that the readers of this study are more likely to come across them as such" (Malcolm, 2002: 182). Needless to say, the analysis Malcolm undertakes in his study of McEwan does not take into account the cinematic adaptations of his fictional writings.

In 2006, Palgrave Macmillan publishes *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, edited by Peter Childs. Unsurprisingly, the introductory pages of the book contextualize McEwan's work from a biographical standpoint by outlining the writer's life and career and placing him among contemporary British writers. While focusing on both collections of short-stories, both novellas, *The Child in Time*, *The Innocent*, *Black Dogs*, *Enduring Love*, *Amsterdam*, *Atonement* and *Saturday*, the book considers the perspectives of numerous literary critics (such as Kiernan Ryan, David Malcolm, Jack Slay, Angela Roger, Christina Byrnes, Christopher Williams, Randall Stevenson, Malcolm Bradbury, Dominic Head, Paul Edwards, John Brannigan, John Updike and James Wood, among others), notes the contemporary press response to McEwan's fiction and even discusses the writer's own reflections as they are presented in interviews. Needless to say, due to the richness and depth of the material provided by Child's publication, it represents an invaluable source of research for our thesis when it comes to contextualizing and analyzing McEwan's novels (namely *The Cement Garden*, *The Innocent* and *Atonement*). Nonetheless, the study under scrutiny does not discuss those novels (or any other fictional work, for that matter) in relation with their cinematic adaptations; for us, this represents a limitation which our dissertation aims at overcoming.

Dominic Head's *Ian McEwan* (2007) part of the *Contemporary British Novelists* series, has a similar format to that of Malcolm's and Child's book: the introduction, which accounts for McEwan's current standing "as one of the most significant British writers since the 1970s" (Head, 2007:1), is followed by a chronological analysis of the writer's work, beginning with the so called shock-lit (the short-stories and *The Cement Garden*), continuing with *The Comfort of Strangers* and its "dreams of captivity", then going "towards the 'implicate order'" with *The Child in Time*, "unraveling the binaries" in *The Innocent* and *Black Dogs*, discussing "a mess of our own unmaking" in *Enduring Love*, ensued by *Amsterdam* as "McEwan's spoiler", *Atonement* as "the wild and inward journey of writing" and *Saturday*, with its "accidents of character and

circumstance". Finally, the book concludes with a chapter on McEwan and the 'third culture", which investigates the literary treatment of evolutionary science in his works and its effect on literary criticism. While providing outstanding criticism of McEwan's fiction and thoroughly tracing down the major sources of influence for each particular literary oeuvre, Dominic Head's investigation, like Malcolm's, does not concern itself with any of the cinematic adaptations of those works, in spite of *Atonement*'s (2007) huge success on the big screen.

Contemporary Critical Perspectives is yet another series that provides guides to reading and studying major contemporary authors, such as Ian McEwan. Thus, in 2009, Sebastian Groes is the editor of a companion on the British novelist, companion that brings together original and innovative pieces of criticism dealing with McEwan's work in its quasi-totality. Not only does the reader find in-depth analyses of all of McEwan's greater work, but s/he is also provided with a map of "newness" in his fiction, with a detailed account of "surrealist encounters" in his short-stories and novellas and with an investigation of McEwan's screenwriting, "profoundly dislocating and infinite in possibility". Last but not least, the book also includes an extremely informative interview with Ian McEwan taken by John Cook, Sebastian Groes and Victor Sage (the interview is actually a compilation of two different conversations). What this guide does is bring together a collection of fresh perspectives, incorporating informative, detailed, thorough, lucid and original analyses of McEwan's both early and later work, also covering his writing for the screen. The preface by Matt Ridley, the controversial author on genetics and human behavior, represents a challenging viewpoint on McEwan's obsession with science and is critical of our understanding of McEwan's fiction.

The year 2010 comes with a valuable source of information about McEwan and his work, *Conversations with Ian McEwan*, edited by Ryan Roberts and published by University Press of Mississippi. As the title of the companion reveals, the book is a collection of interviews with Ian McEwan, which provide a useful insight into McEwan's life, career, fictional and non-fictional work. Moreover, through this series of extremely informative discussions, the author offers a unique view into his writing process (being especially forthcoming about the creative impulse that sparks his narratives) and maintains an ongoing dialogue with his works and his readers. The interviews in Roberts' collection are not standard in the sense that they are not necessarily done as part of book tours or in order to promote a new publication, although McEwan's popularity ensures that countless publications of this kind exist. The exchanges in the book under scrutiny

are lengthy and more intimate, interviews with English, French and Spanish scholars, conversations with artist Antony Gormley and psychologist Stephen Pinker, and discussions with fellow authors Ian Hamilton, Christopher Ricks, David Remnick, Zadie Smith, and Martin Amis. Many essential themes of McEwan's writing are clarified in this collection, which, "taken as a whole, provide the greatest opportunity for readers to understand the complexities of his works" (Roberts, 2010: xi). The editor explains that his selection of interviews for this book includes "the most in-depth, substantive, insightful, literate and wide-ranging interviews", trying "to avoid, as much as possible, repetitions" (*ibid*., xii). One of the strongest points of such a collection is that it inevitably contains significant, often essential references to McEwan's non-fictional work and to the cinematic adaptations of his fiction. As a result, Roberts' book represents an essential tool for our research, which, this way, becomes richer and more complex.

Another study published in 2010 (this time by Palgrave Macmillan), Lynn Wells' *Ian McEwan*, at the same time highly knowledgeable and accessible, places the eponymous writer's fiction in historical and theoretical context, discusses the major influences on his work and provides a thorough examination of the ethical issues approached by McEwan, dealing especially with his major writings. The critic's contention is that "McEwan has established himself as one of the world's foremost writers of historiographic metafiction" (Wells, 2010: 16) and that he "was strongly influenced by the postmodernist techniques of contemporary novelists such as Iris Murdoch or John Fowles" (Wells, 2010: 16). Wells' reading of the author's most acclaimed novels (including *Enduring Love*, *Atonement*, *Saturday* and *On Chesil Beach*) is detailed and original, but her analysis does not stop here: it also includes an investigation of McEwan's short stories and novellas, film adaptations and journalistic pieces. The exegete also provides us with an overview of the varied critical reception of McEwan's work; what is more, an interview with the author is also included in her book. Well's clear, theoretically-informed book is essential to our critical understanding of McEwan's work, painstakingly contextualized and discussed from many vantage points, including that of the cinematic adaptations.

Adaptation (namely fiction-to-film) studies are undoubtedly much more consistent; again, this comes as no surprise, as literature has been one of the major sources for movie-making from the very beginnings of the cinema industry. The extant criticism is, however, generally divided; on the one hand, there are numerous studies that tend to favor the written text, proclaiming its supremacy, such as Robin H. Smiley, *Books into Films: The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of,*

2003. On the other hand, there is a significant number of voices who claim that film is an independent art form; consequently, its aesthetic principles (different from that of the literary text) make the analysis of any adaptation worthwhile for its intrinsic value. Brian McFarlane's book *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996) belongs to this category. In one is offered the advantage of hindsight, tout ensemble, it turns out that the interdisciplinary study of literature and filmic adaptations has constantly been marked by this paradox. Thus, there has always been the strand of thought which considers that the two art forms are worlds apart, antipodal, since they rely on words and images respectively, each of them with their won untranslatable, distinctive features. At the same time, critics have been able to identify and analyze formal, generic, stylistic, narrative, cultural and historical between cinematic adaptations and their source-texts, although there is obviously no structural isomorphism between the two which enables us to perform such an investigation. Things get even more complicated when we realize that the two facets of this paradox not, generally speaking, different views of different critics, but, rather, they tend to coexist within the boundaries of individual studies, as it is the case with McFarlane's book.

When it comes to adaptation studies, there is a prevailing myth which derives from the old conception that the trajectory of a cinematic adaptation is necessarily from the "old" book to the "new" media. This alleged linearity is explicitly stated in titles and books such as *Novel to Film* (Brian McFarlane, 1996) and *Literature into Film* (Linda Costanzo Cahir, 2006). This assumption is rooted in the historicist view concerning the development of different types of media according to which new media inevitably cannibalize the old ones. While this is undoubtedly true, the fact is the two media forms continue to exist simultaneously, rearranging themselves in new patterns of mutual dependence and even benefit, as part of a symbiotic-like relationship marked by complementarity rather than hierarchical connections. This rather delayed recognition of the two-way process that concerns adaptations is presented in a highly influential anthology: *Adaptations: From Text to Screen. Screen to Text* (Cartmell and Whelehan, 1999).

There is a number of other books that will also be essential to our research: *What is Cinema?* (Bazin, 1967), *Langage et Cinema* (Metz, 1977), *Fiction and Film: The Dynamics of an Exchange* (Cohen, 1979), *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader* (Corrigan, 1998), *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Stam, 2002), *Novels into Film* (Bluestone, 2003), *Rethinking the*

Novel/Film Debate (Elliott, 2003), *A Companion to Literature and Film* (Stam; Raengo, 2004), *A Theory of Adaptation* (Hutcheon, 2006), *Adaptation and Appropriation* (Sanders, 2006), *Aesthetics and Film* (Thomson-Jones, 2008), *In/ Fidelity: Essays on Film Adaptation* (Kranz; Nancy, 2008). It is also worthwhile mentioning that, in the context of the Digital Age, there are several websites which will unquestionably facilitate our inquiry: International Movie Database (www.imdb.com), Ian McEwan.com (http://www.ianmcewan.com/), Paul Auster (http://paulauster.co.uk/) and so on. Similarly, there is a proliferation of literature-to-film journals available on-line: Adaptation (http://adaptation.oxfordjournals.org/), American Cinematographer (http://www.theasc.com/ac_magazine/August2012/current.php), Literature/ Film Quarterly (http://www.salisbury.edu/lfq/), to name but a few.

All in all, as it has been previously pointed out, our dissertation is particularly relevant against the background of an extant exegesis that simply does not investigate the fiction written by the two authors (let alone the adaptations based on that fiction) contrastively. There are no studies to offer such comparative analyses, be they at a lower scale. However, the necessity for such inquiries becomes obvious if we take into account the common ground that the two authors (like many others of their generation) share: their fiction has that *quelque chose* which makes the crossing of formal barriers possible. Indeed, the proliferation of adaptations proves that cinematic vision is emblematic of their writings. Therefore, it would be very interesting to see what narrative means the two authors employ when it comes to rendering similar ideas (such as metafictional concerns, for instance) so as to understand what brings them together and what takes them apart. Analyzing the cinematic adaptations of their works will undeniably bring depth and complexity to the analysis, by offering a certain degree of distancing form the criticism formulated so far: the discussion of McEwan's and Auster's fiction will go beyond certain overly-examined topics and take the investigation to a completely different level.

Chapter 2. Fiction to Film: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

2.1. Art and/or Mercenariness: the Politics and Economy of Cinema

Despite the fact that the cinema industry is a century old now and that film studies go fifty years back, the extant research on the field focuses almost exclusively on *what* are the adaptations that have been made so far and on comparing them with the original(s); the interest in *how* adaptations have come to be available is rather disparate. The main purpose of our current investigation is to answer the very question of how adaptations are made and marketed and what it is exactly that drives this industry. Without a proper understanding of such "backstage" issues, adaptation studies lack consistency and completeness, as adaptations do not exist *"in perfect quarantine from the troubling worlds of commerce"*. Indeed, they are not *"immune to commercialism, floating free of any cultural institutions, intellectual property regimes or industry agents"* (Murray, 2008: 5).

The interpretative significance of production, distribution, reception and consumption contexts cannot be neglected. Setting aside production and marketing matters would be a major flaw of our scrutiny, since neither books nor films exist in perfect isolation from mercantile concerns. Our aim is, therefore, to pinpoint and describe the main factors that influence the making and marketing of cinematic adaptations based on literary oeuvres; in order to do this, we will take into account the entire intricate journey from book to screen, focusing on how financial interests determine the way the two industries work and influence each other. And it is, indeed, a two-way dynamic: narrative techniques have influenced film and filmic devices are increasingly being imitated and resorted to in literature; moreover, writers get *"well-versed in an increasingly visual culture"* (ibid: 6).

Nothing is arbitrary, though; apart from the artistic, aesthetically driven motives, there is always, of course, the money concern. On the one hand, if you are to produce a film based on a literary work of art, you have to make sure of the profit that will come out of it and there seems to be no better way to do this than capitalizing on the "stocks" of famous writers, be they classic or contemporary. On the other hand, if a writer wants to be published and his texts to cross the boundaries of form by being adapted, s/he needs to adjust his/her écriture in such a way that it becomes relevant and feasible for both the book and the cinema industry. It seems that writers

like Paul Auster and Ian McEwan, who are said to have a profound cinematic vision, have perfectly understood this, since their writing is permeated by filmic devices, incorporated there deliberately so that the possibility of their works being turned into films might increase exponentially. Whether or not the adaptations of their books have been successful is yet to be discussed; but in order to understand the inherent *why* triggered by the answer to the indirect question above, we need to investigate how the contemporary adaptation industry actually functions.

Let's begin our analysis of the individual entertainment industries, as Donald Biederman suggested, with the original: *"Long before films, radio, television, and other technologies, the printed word was a medium of entertainment. A tremendous proportion of the raw material of the other media is derived from print sources."* (Biederman, 1996: 505) For centuries, books have depended upon complex circuits of printers, publishers, booksellers and readers; therefore, *"the book is demonstrably as much the product of institutions, agents, and material forces as is the Hollywood blockbuster"* (Murray, 2008: 8). There is great emphasis placed on Hollywood's political economy, disregarding the fact that books are also driven by commercial concerns prior to their screen adaptation.

Although there are many small publishers that manage to survive, the fact is that most of the larger publishing houses have been absorbed by global media conglomerates. Unsurprisingly, their stockholders' interest is in generating sizeable profits; thus, they are not generally willing *"to gamble on moderate sellers or unknowns"* (Biederman, 1996: 505-506). All profit-making possibilities need to be taken into account, since in today's world the literary work is often published to be sold through various media that involve transformation and adaptation: books on tape, comic books, plays, films, television series, sequels, and so on. Several contracts are to be signed by both the publisher and the author *"before the creative work reaches its ultimate saturation of all available markets."* (ibid: 508), with the aim of controlling the way profits are going to be divided. Furthermore, the author is likely to sign contracts for foreign marketing and for adaptation possibilities. The need to license the literary work for the motion picture industry becomes stringent when the writer is well-known and best-selling. All this is usually mediated by a literary agent.

Whether authors are marketable or not and their work is likely to be optioned for other media or not, these are key questions that publishers typically take into account prior to

contracting; in other words, contemporary media content seems particularly valuable if it can be replicated across other media. The conclusion is undeniably the one that Murray also reached: the production and dissemination of books is governed by a complex literary economy. Furthermore, *"adaptation for the screen is not merely an add-on or after-thought to this complex economy, but is factored in and avidly pursued from the earliest phases of book production"*. As Simone Murray puts it, *"it is impossible to deny that the book industry is as thoroughly complicit in marketing and publicity processes as are its screen media equivalents."* (Murray, 2008: 8-9)

Speaking about screen, film is indisputably an important contemporary art form with significant underlying aesthetic principles; *"but it is also a major entertainment business and industry"* (Kindem, 1982: xvii). Our discussion of the film industry will mainly focus on the way it functions in the United States. This is because, on the one hand, all the adaptations of Auster's and McEwan's writings were produced there; on the other hand, as Lewis (1987: 8) brilliantly put it, *"film is an international language, but it speaks with an American accent"* and American Movies have always been preeminent at a global level. Moreover, Americans have, to a great extent, *"created the language and genre conventions that film audiences recognize and expect"*. It was American cinema that constantly brought about changes: *"from silent to sound, then to color"* (ibid: 12). Movies have always been "a business enterprise" (ibid: 29) and there is no doubt about the fact that Hollywood understands its principles quite well, perhaps better than anyone else. Foreign markets are almost as important as American markets in terms of revenues; Hollywood's success is attributable to the fact that the American motion picture industry has become quite an international one: it considers *"the tastes of consumers in other countries as much as those of U.S. consumers"* (Biederman, 1996: 6).

Beginning in the early to mid- 1980s, after a long period of relative stability and moderate change, the entertainment industries entered an era of tremendous upheaval (ibid: 1). The CD revolutionized the record industry and the CD-ROM opened up new possibilities for worldwide distribution via the Internet, increasing the chance of intellectual property piracy. Following the appearance of television, VCR and DVDs, revenues derived from theatrical distribution no longer represented the major source of income for studios and producers. The technological changes of the 1980s have favored radio and television to the detriment of film. Actually, in Lewis' words, television is *"the centerpiece of modern mass communication media."* (Lewis, 1987: 31) The home viewer, not the cinemagoer, became the primary audience,

and the film industry's profit-focus shifted: *"The 1990s was the decade in which for the first time more money was made from, and more movies were experienced in, the arena of the living room than that of the theatrical auditorium"* (Williams; Hammond, 2006: 325). Filmmakers had to take all this into account if they were to continue to thrive, financially, in their business. Although the film industry has undergone dramatic transformations, *"its basic motivation to maximize profits has remained remarkably unchanged"*. (Kindem, 1982: xviii)

In the United States, the film industry is dominated by seven major film studios that engage in the financing, production, and distribution of films: Universal Pictures, Sony Pictures, Twentieth Century-Fox, MGM, Warner Bros. Inc., Paramount Pictures, and The Walt Disney Company. More and more films, however, are made by independent production companies, as it is the case with most of Paul Auster's and Ian McEwan's films. This is, according to McEwan, a positive thing, since commercial concerns can affect the way the adaptation is made: *"I think it's the luxury of a certain kind of independent moviemaking where you can concentrate on atmosphere and character and psychology rather than intricate and extensive plot."* Actually, he emphasized the disappointment Hollywood can bring and stated the independent market is *"the only way"*. Irrespective of the type of company producing the film, if an adaptation is to be made, the producer has to acquire the rights to the original material; this is done by signing a contract in which payment options and conditions are stipulated. Such contracts usually grant most rights to the producer and, ultimately, to the studio. From that point on, the author of the book or screenplay will have little or no say in how his/her material will be adapted.

The adaptation of a literary work of art into a film may be rather faithful or at least follow the general lines of the original. And yet, there is also the possibility that the adaptation will be radical in terms of the changes that will take place, often to the great frustration and disillusionment of the writer. Talking about the adaptation of novels into films, Paul Auster states that *"there are exceptions, but, generally speaking, one feels disappointed with the result"*. The film has its own "author" now, entitled to creativity, especially if that creativity is to bring a lot of money by turning the script into something that is highly commercial. Since the producer and the studio are in charge with production, financing and distribution, it is only natural that they will also have total control over all creative elements. Although studios typically have *"sufficiently large cash flows to balance successes against losses"* (Lewis, 1987: 67), they are

still not willing to take too many chances. No one can afford to ignore what it costs to make a film. As Penelope Houston argues:

> The production investment is hedged around with safeguards, in the form of the right cast, the right big-screen system, the right sales campaign. It is all a good deal more like launching a battleship, one director has said, than making a film. It has to be. (Houston, 1963: 15)

Apart from *Atonement*, based on the eponymous novel by Ian McEwan, no adaptation of Auster's or McEwan's works was a blockbuster. In other words, films that were based on their books were not high-budgeted and they did not make high profits, either. Their production costs were often quite low and, although the two authors are highly esteemed, award-winning writers, their adaptations did not enjoy the same success of their books, on the contrary. Film critics and audience's expectations were not usually met; what is more, McEwan and Auster themselves have not always been satisfied with the end result of the transformation, feeling that directors and producers have perhaps taken too many liberties with the original book or script. It is noteworthy that the two writers wanted to have their works adapted for the big screen and are aware of their cinematic qualities. Ian McEwan, for instance, stated: *"I've always liked my writing to have a visual quality. I like to think my reader can see what I can see"*. Moreover, he added that language is *"saturated in visual metaphor"*, showing than word and image are actually interconnected, although considered to be at war with each other. Following the same line of thought, Paul Auster argued that *"the great thing about fiction, novels, is that the reader is always making pictures in his head"*.

Films are both cultural and commercial products; *"owing to this duality economic considerations are inextricably interwoven with political, social, and aesthetic aspects"* (Kindem, 1982: xvii). The "cinematic" now reaches out to a wide variety of adjacent products, apart from television arrangements and DVD'S: books, toys, soundtrack CDs, video games, fashion. Therefore, nowadays, film is but *"one element in an entertainment complex, perhaps just the inspiration for a range of products that really make the money"* (Williams; Hammond, 2006: 326). Today, ancillary markets are of great importance, as Linda Williams explains: *"in film industry terms, this means markets for income generation beyond the initial theatrical release"*. These usually mean the rental and sale of the film in video and DVD format, sale to

television networks, but also product tie-ins ranging from video games and toys to novelizations, comic book adaptations and clothing (ibid: 451).

John Gregory Dunne asserted that *"Hollywood motion picture deals had become more interesting than the actual films themselves"* (Apud. Biederman, 1996: 601). Although Penelope Houston claims that *"the fight for peaceful coexistence with television has undeniably weakened cinema industrially"* (Houston, 1963: 7), the current trend proves to be quite the opposite: no money is to be lost and profit is sure to come as long as you are willing to wait. Cinema, the mass medium that was felt to be *"in danger of losing its mass audience"* (ibid: 11), did not really end upon the losing side. The industry has survived, gaining prosperity by capitalizing on the new channel for the distribution of movies. Indeed, theatrical distribution does not bring as much profit as it used to, but this is not the point; we are not dealing with the survival of the fittest, no annihilation has taken place. On the contrary, television and film industries thrive on each other in a kind of symbiotic relationship, and film continues to find most of its sources in books, thus making the book industry flourish as well. It is all interrelated: famous authors get to be adapted for the big and small screen and successful adaptations of first-time authors are likely to ensure high profits from the sales of their future literary works. No choice is arbitrarily made; art for art's sake does not apply to the contemporary media industry, as global media conglomerates prove.

On a large scale, there is no such thing as the autotelic value of books or films, as creation is always connected with consumption, and, inevitably, with marketing and money. We have to remember that cinema is first of all industry and then art; the mercantile nature of films cannot be set aside, as mercenariness makes itself present from the very early stages of filmmaking. Adaptations are not different in any respect – once the studio and the producer acquires the rights for the original, there is no turning back: it is the prospective profit that will dictate the changes to be made. The creative collaborative effort of the director and his/her team will by no means be oblivious to the money issue. Film is, after all, *"an industry with an art locked within it, perpetually struggling to break free"* (Houston, 1963: 11). It is almost impossible to draw clear distinctions between the economic problem and the artistic one: the two are "inextricably linked together" (ibid: 170).

2.2. The Concept of Authorship in Cinematic Adaptations of Literary Works of Art: Writer, Screenwriter, Director and Their Cooperation

This subchapter originates in the observation that the study of literature-to-film adaptation has generally overlooked the actual process through which a source text is transformed into a motion picture. Apart from issues of financing, production and distribution, the question of authorship is of great importance, since an adaptation is the outcome of a highly complex progression from book to film, using a screenplay as an intermediary. Who, then, can be considered the "author" of such a film? Is it the writer, whose work constitutes the basis of the movie? It can't be, at least not entirely, since book and film are autonomous, different media and, ultimately, however faithful an adaptation might be to its original, their creator is not (normally) one and the same person. Could it be the screenwriter, who translates the literary text into a script which has the appropriate language and indications that make filmmaking possible? We are getting closer to an affirmative answer: *"it is the screenplay, not the source text, that is the most direct foundation and fulcrum for any adapted film"* (Boozer, 2008: 4). However, the adapted screenplay is only an *"interim step"* (ibid: 2); a screenwriter does not make a film, this task falls into the hands of the studio, the producer, the actors, the filming crew, the director and virtually anybody involved. But it is the director who has the creative control; s/he decides almost everything (taking into account, of course, the amount of money at his/her disposal): the cast, the setting, the choice of music, the lighting, the techniques to be employed, what to use of the script and what to leave out, s/he even controls the editing process. Is it likely, therefore, that the authorial power belongs to the director? While there are many voices who claim that the director is the author or, better said, the auteur of an adaptation, the fact that so many people have a say in the actual process cannot be overlooked; adaptation is undeniably a collaborative endeavor.

Although, traditionally, identifying authorship involves identifying individual agency, it is argued that not even writers are god-like figures creating literary works of art in a vacuum. Mark Rose, for instance, stated that authors *"produce texts through complex processes of adaptation and transformation"* (Love, 2002: 32). Considering the model of a single author creating a text in solitariness is restrictive if we take into account what precedes the act of writing (education, experiences, readings of others) and what follows it (revisions due to

feedback regarding the text). This is what Love (ibid: 37) terms *"collaborative authorship"*, arguing that it is very common and often disguised. That is why he uses the term "authorship" to denote *"a set of linked activities* (authemes) *which are sometimes performed by a single person but will often be performed collaboratively or by several persons in succession"* (ibid: 39). This is entirely applicable to adaptations since they are, by definition, the result of a painstaking process in which many individuals work either simultaneously or successively, but most times cooperatively. It is also the case of adaptations that, at each stage of the production, have significant earlier contributions. Hence, the author of the original text and the screenwriter are, according to Love, *"precursory authors"* (ibid: 40); the actual maker of the film is the *"executive author"* (ibid: 43). Precursory or executive, they are all, according to Harold Love, authors, and none of them taken individually can declare his/her authorship without acknowledging the others'. And yet, as we are going to see, directors especially often do so, to the disappointment of screenwriters and, sometimes, even writers.

Film began to be considered *"an extension of creative literary authorship that used the camera instead of pen"* (Boozer, 2008: 14) by the French New Wave critics and filmmakers. François Truffaut claimed that the "tradition of quality" represented adaptations of canonic literature was to be replaced by either original films or by more creative, "auteurist" adaptations. Similarly, André Bazin's contention was that adaptations of quality literature disturb the equilibrium of the original, thus requiring a greater creative talent able to restore it. This type of argument succeeded, according to Jack Boozer, in shifting the emphasis from the literary source as fundamentally important for adaptations to the creative power, style and vision of the director (ibid). The director may not be the author, but s/he is the *auteur* of the film. As Robert Stam put it, directors *"orchestrate pre-existing voices, ideologies and discourses, without losing an overall shaping role"* (Stam; Miller, 2000: 6). Auteurism was, nonetheless, rejected by some American film critics such as Richard Corliss; in *The Hollywood Screenwriters*, Corliss writes about the overemphasis of the director at the expense of the screenwriter. He argues that the best films result "from the productive intersection of a strong writer and a strong director" (Corliss, in Boozer, 2008: 16).

The influence of the auteur theory began to fade with the rise of semiotics and structuralism. Focus was again shifted, this time from the director to the signs used to communicate meaning in film. Going even further, in 1968 deconstructionist Jacques Derrida

wrote about "the death of the author", stating that every literary source is only a reinterpretation of previous sources. Likewise, under the influence of Bakhtin's "dialogism", Julia Kristeva talked about "intertextuality", thus challenging the complete originality of any piece of literature, since there is a wide range of potential cultural, social and political influences on authors and, inevitably, their texts. Robert Stam writes that adaptations *"are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin"* (Stam, 2000: 66). By questioning the very possibility of author individuality and autonomy, writers, screenwriters and directors were reduced to mere *"author-functions"* (Boozer, 2008: 20). Nevertheless, literature and film critics have begun to doubt the total lack of an individual creative voice. In her recent collection, Mireia Aragay notices that *"a redefined notion of auteurism has become a central focus in recent writing on adaptation"* (Aragay, 2005: 28). In spite of all the influences that are at work in an adaptation, there are key creative decisions made by different individuals at different stages that cannot be set aside.

Thirty years after the author's theoretically proclaimed dissolution as entity and origin the figure of the literary author has returned: *Adaptation* (2002), presents the viewer with *"a meta-commentary that explicitly refers to the figure of the author of the literary source text on the basis of different conceptualisations of authorship"* (Diehl, in Aragay, 2005: 91). In the realm of the film, the Kaufman twins are both screenwriters, only that one of them is "real", while the other is fictitious. The real writer Charlie Kaufman becomes the character Charlie (played by Nicholas Cage), a professional scriptwriter commissioned to write an adaptation of Susan Orlean's *The Orchid Thief*. Orlean appears in the film as the semi-fictional character called Susan. Donald Kaufman (also played by Nicholas Cage), Charlie's fictional twin brother, starts out on a scriptwriting career by attending a seminar given by Robert McKee (Brian Cox) and goes on to produce an original script, not an adaptation. As the films progresses, the stories of The Orchid Thief, of Susan, and of the twins begin to intertwine, with Donald helping Charlie in his struggle to adapt a "plotless" book. Moreover, Charlie feels unable to adapt the book, because he finds it too beautiful and too complex to be reduced to a feature film, but his twin brother steps in, managing to save the day by taking control of the script. Thomas Leitch notices that Charlie and Donald display *"personality traits suspiciously reminiscent of literature and film"*: the tormented twin is *"highly introspective"*, while his brother *"exhibits the transparent nature*

traditionally associated with film" (Leitch, in Aragay, 2005: 125). It is highly noteworthy that both twins are mentioned in the opening and ending credits of the film, as if they both existed in reality and could have authorial claims. The appearance of the literary author and of the screenwriter(s) on the screen could represent, thus, a return of the author, but it can also signify *"a disempowerment of the author"* (ibid: 104). Since the boundaries between fiction and "reality" are not clear in the film, the viewer tends to suspend his belief, to accept that what he sees is purely fictitious. *"The idea of rendering a truthful account"* is, according to Diehl, subverted (Diehl, in Aragay, 2005: 102).

All in all, as Boozer states, a discussion of adaptive film authorship has to include *"the environments of all three texts: literary, script intertexts and film"*, since all of them *"can be sites of personal and cultural struggle and perhaps revelation"* (Boozer, 2008: 24). Apart from the cases in which the writer is also the director or there is a close cooperation between the two, the moment the writer sells the rights to his/her literary text, s/he loses any form of control over the way in which the original material is going to be adapted; from a legal point of view, s/he can no longer exert any influence on the inevitable changes that are going to be made, however disappointing they might be from his/her point of view. From that point on, the writer remains merely the literary author, but his/her authorship stops there. It is up to the screenwriter and, ultimately, the director to decide what is kept, what is left out, what is emphasized, and, more importantly, how everything is going to be rendered on screen. In essence, the director is granted the greatest power; although the script has been authored by somebody else, most creative choices in terms of filmmaking belong to him/her. Articulating his utter discontent with directors not following the script, Ian McEwan stated that:

> There's a great difference between writing a novel and writing a screenplay - not that you've got to collaborate, although that's significant. It's the fact that you don't own your work. I think it is by convention a director's medium, and I don't see that many aesthetic satisfactions in writing a screenplay. (…) It's finally about artistic control. And screenplay writers don't have it. And what kind of artist can you be if you don't have any control?

How come these metteurs-en-scène, as Truffaut called directors, get to have all the credit? Taking into account the examples of Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick and Walt Disney, Thomas Leitch explains it in terms of the directors' power to defeat *"the claims of*

potentially competing auteurs" and less in terms of their *"artistic aspirations"*; it is all about their ability to become *"an appealing and recognisable trademark"* (Leitch, in Aragay: 107). Leitch contends that directors have to be successful in establishing themselves as *"trade names"* if they are to be seen as auteurs (ibid: 108). Hitchcock summarised his own auteurist attitude toward adaptation in his interview with Truffaut: *"What I do is to read a story only once, and if I like the basic idea, I just forget all about the book and start to create cinema"* (Truffaut, 1966: 49). Similarly, Kubrick contended that directing was nothing *"more or less than a continuation of the writing"* (Leitch: 114).

When texts are adapted into film, however, the director's creativity is only one facet of a collaborative process that is also largely influenced by convention, studio requirements, degree of financing and audience expectations. According to Jerome Christensen (2012: 2), motion pictures only count as instances of "corporate art"; moreover, "corporate art always counts as a tool of corporate strategy" to attain "competitive advantage, whether financial, social, cultural or political." Christensen tries to reconcile the two opposing views extant on adaptation authorship: the auteurist account which stipulates that an individual's contribution, however limited, qualifies him/her as the author, and the materialist account that renders an entire group as the functional equivalent of the individual author; he argues in favor of "a more comprehensible alternative" in which the corporate studio itself, although not an actual person, is the "intending author" (ibid: 13).

The collaborative nature of the adaptation industry cannot be denied; as a corporate art, cinema depends on quite a number of people to create. It is, indeed, directors who take most credit for the success of individual films; nonetheless, they also have to take the blame when failure takes place. But, "like prominent CEOs, they depend a great deal on others" (Harrison, 2005: 3). Unless they write their own material, there is no other possibility than going to the source: writers. But there are as many approaches to this as there are "directorial personalities" (ibid). According to the way in which they handle the original, Stephanie Harrison writes about four different types of directors: translators, magicians, collaborators and thieves (ibid: 1-14); all of them have their own signature directorial style. Firstly, the role of translator involves acknowledging the importance of the source-text, but this does not mean that the director considers himself/herself less than an *auteur*: the book belongs to the writer, but the film is *his/hers*, due to the ability to translate the literary piece for film, filtering it through his/her own

sensibility and creativity. Secondly, the magician director rarely mentions the authors of the stories on which his/her films are based; it seems of no importance, since, as Michelangelo Antonioni put it, *"As a director, I am God. I can allow myself any kind of liberty"* (Apud. Harrison, 2005: 6). For Antonioni, the original is just one of the items that could be *"tossed into his hat before pulling out a rabbit"* (Harrison, 2005: 7). Thirdly, there are also directors who think of themselves as collaborators, always willing to give credit to the writers they work with, sometimes even enjoying close friendship with them. In this case, director and writer are *"completely in sync"*, proving to have the "we" factor, in Harrison's words (ibid: 11). And, finally, directors also work as thieves: engaged in a tireless process of self-promotion, whatever the source material, they would make it their own. Such directors are often accused of not *"offering credit where credit is due"* (ibid: 14). This includes not only writers *per se*, but also screenwriters, whose work for adaptations is, to a great extent, crucial.

By means of granting directors with such great creativity and artistic agency, their status is elevated and seems to somewhat supersede that of writers. Andrew Bennett writes about the paradox of *auteurism*, that *"in an arguably perverse, counter-factual gesture of authorialism, privileges the singular, originating author-figure of the director"* (Bennett, 2005: 95). However, as Jack Stillinger noted, there are multiple and diverse agencies involved in the making of a film and the process is so complex and intricately organized that, *"for all practical purposes"*, authorship remains *"unassignable"* (Stillinger, in Bennett, 2005: 103). By its very nature, filmmaking is, in John Caughie's words, *"a collective, commercial, industrial, and popular medium"* (Caughie, 1981: 13). Moreover, Andrew Bennett suggests that the project of *"discerning an individual subjectivity at work as the ordering agent for the indisputably collaborative medium of film"* is *"counter-intuitive and counter-factual"*; the need for an autonomous and unique author originates in the very notion of art and the cultural prestige on which it is based (Bennett, 2005: 107), although *"the old idea that the lone artist-genius is the exclusive source of meaning (...) is no longer tenable"* (Thompson, Burns, 1990: ix). Cinema and television are "so confusingly polyauthorial" that they appear to be "authorless"; there are only "numerous candidates for authorial accountability" (ibid). Authorial claims are, nonetheless, highly significant, especially for those in non-dominant positions in which asserting even a partial agency may seem to be important for day-to-day survival, as it is often the case with screenwriters.

All in all, the origins of cinematic authorship reside in three different lines of argument. First of all, cinema's technological means of production somewhat disqualify individual creativity, due to the large number of people that can claim to be acknowledged as contributors. Then, it is the very collaborative nature of filmmaking that hinders self-expression; there are too many voices that make themselves heard in the process of creating an adaptation and, therefore, it is next to impossible to pinpoint exactly the source of each and every creative decision. Lastly, the need for commercialism entails a high level of standardization and conventionality which render originality unfeasible. However, so that film could be legitimately considered an art, there has to be a person aesthetically responsible for it; in other words, films are valued when they are considered to be the work of an artist, traditionally identified as the director, since it is the director, not the writer, that orchestrates the visual (cinematic) aspects of cinema. Although film is a collectively produced medium, the auteur infuses his/her work with personal vision and succeeds in creating his/her own signature; as Caughie (1981: 12-13) puts it, *"the auteur writes his individuality into the film"*.

Auteurism is one of the most controversial and criticized theories in film studies. Such a theory becomes difficult to uphold if we take into account the material factors and creative diversity of the filmmaking process in which the collaborative effort is undeniable. Timothy Corrigan argues that the notion of cinematic authorship is nothing but *"the commerce of auteurism"*, *"a commercial strategy for organizing audience reception, as a critical concept bound to distribution and marketing aims"* (Corrigan, 1991: 103). Auteurs are increasingly supported by reviewers and critics and by means of branding. Thus, the question of cinematic authorship can be asked only if both creative and commercial factors are considered as relevant. A film's style is, unquestionably, the result of both creative and institutional practices.

In a nutshell, *"given the circumstances under which particular films* [including adaptations] *are made, it is possible to think of any of the creative individuals who contribute to them as a kind of author"* (Naremore, in Miller; Stam, 1999: 9). The terms can be applied to writers, screenwriters, photographers, composers, actors, producers, directors and so on. Exclusively associating adaptation (and even film in general) authorship with directors would be a fallacy. Our investigation will consider the fact that any adaptation is the result of a highly complex collaborative process. No person can claim to be acknowledged as the sole, individual author of such an artistic product.

2.3. Literary Prestige and Filmic Adaptations: the "Stock Exchange" of Books into Films

The adaptation industry is fundamentally complicit in the mechanisms that seek to elevate the cultural status of film as an art. Feeding on literature and its prestige as "high art", adaptations have always resorted to texts that would enable them to achieve success in terms of audience response and profit-making. In order to reach this goal, directors, especially those of the authorial ilk, would either base their cinematic efforts on classic writings and bestsellers or, on the contrary, they would depart from texts that are almost unknown, written by authors whose alleged obscurity would allow the metteurs-en-scène to become the indisputable auteurs. If the issue of literary prestige is settled in the case of "classic" authors, it is rarely examined, however, how the simultaneous circulation of a literary text and its adaptation can trigger *"the inflation or devaluation"* (Murray, 2008: 10) of the literary stocks of contemporary writers. The purpose of this sub-chapter is, therefore, to offer an insight into how this phenomenon works, focusing on literary reputations in the process of being *"brokered"* within the adaptation economy (ibid).

It seems that cinema has been trying to make acclaimed literary works available to broader audiences by constantly resorting to prize-winning literary pieces and, thus, promoting the same cultural hierarchies that literary history does. As Diehl commented, *"[t]he realisation soon dawned that the middle-class could be won as an audience of the new medium by linking film to literature and more specifically to the classics of a given national literature"* (Diehl, in Aragay, 2005: 89) Indeed, it would appear that there is no better recipe for success, since the public's knowledge and appreciation of the original text normally entails the desire to watch the adaptation, although it does not necessarily bring about appreciation for the filmic counterpart. There will at least be curiosity to see how the adaptation was done, or, for those who are aware of the book's value but have not read it, the film may become a substitute. Conversely, audiences generally look to the *"media industries for markers of cultural prestige"* that could guide their consumption (ibid: 11) and it seems that the existence of an adaptation leads to the public's increased attention for the literary text in which it originates. We deal with a two-way dynamic from which both writers and filmmakers can have a lot to gain, especially if their cards are played well, according to the rules of competitiveness - with all the mercantile interests that it

presupposes. As James F. English argues, it is *"the economy of prestige"* (English, 2005) that matters most in this industry.

Nevertheless, it is not very often that a director, especially if s/he wants to be recognized as an auteur, chooses to adapt a well-known, highly appreciated piece of literature. Jonze's 2002 *Adaptation* shows how the "anxiety of adaptation" works: if the original is considered to be too "good", it would be very difficult for a director to match its success by means of his/her adaptation. Film theorist Béla Balász argues that adaptations based on critically acclaimed texts are doomed to failure: *"One may perhaps make a good film out of a bad novel, but never out of a good one"* (Balász, quoted in Harrison, 2005: xv). Similarly, Stephanie Harrison states that great stories *"contain something indefinable that makes them more than the sum of their parts. It's this X factor that makes their transition to film so difficult"* (Harrison, 2005: xv). Harrison even goes as far as to state that, paradoxically, *"[g]reat stories often make poor movies and vice versa"* (ibid: 363. For this reason, films adapted from brilliant, but lesser-known sources have often been better received. Hitchcock's films, for instance, of which over two-thirds are adaptations, are usually based on relatively unknown literary works, especially because of his wish to be recognized as an auteur. In the eyes of the audience, he needed to *"be pronounced superior to the forgettable authors whose work his films adapted"* (Barr, 1999: 12). Kubrick, another adapter who became a trademark, talked about his failure to find a cinematic equivalent for Nabokov's Lolita: *"If it had been written by a lesser author, it might have been a better film"* (LoBrutto, 1997: 225). Thomas Leitch summed up Hitchcock's and Kubrick's directorial stance: "Auteurs of this sort are made, not born; they emerge victorious in battle with competing auteurs, whether writers, producers, or stars" (Leitch, in Aragay, 2005: 120).

It becomes obvious that the adaptations industry is not oblivious to the sources it draws on, in an attempt to turn filmmaking into a profitable endeavor at all levels and from all points of view. There is hardly any arbitrary or less considered choice: literary reputations, especially those of contemporary adapted writers, rise and fall according to the way in which adaptations are generally received; directors, as well, can experience either an increase or a decrease in popularity, depending on the feedback they get concerning their ability to "translate" the original into a film. There is a great deal at stake, so the "stock exchange" of books into films is not an aspect anyone involved in the process can afford to overlook; the extent to which it affects the industry is simply not negligible.

2.4. "Showing" versus "Telling": Literal versus Radical Interpretations of Source Texts

> **Motto:** *"Generally film is found to work from perception toward signification, from external facts to interior motivations and consequences, from the givenness of a world to the meaning of a story cut out of that world. Literary fiction works oppositely. It begins with signs (graphemes and words) building to propositions which attempt to develop perception. As a product of human language, it naturally treats human motivation and values, seeking to throw them out onto the external world, elaborating a world out of a story."* (Dudley, 1984: 101)

Before an actual investigation of cinematic adaptations of literary texts, we need to determine *if* and to what extent they are even possible, taking into account the fact that book and film are different media, with different underlying semiotic systems; structural isomorphism is, thus, unattainable. This is why adaptations have often been regarded as either insufficiently literary, since they deal with pictures, or as inadequately cinematic, since they stem from words. There is this essentialist argument that both literary and cinematic forms are unique and untranslatable, simply because they are based on utterly different systems: words and images, respectively. Giorgio Bassani, for instance, called cinema and literature *"two fundamentally different media"* (Walton, 1990); likewise, Robert Stam (in Naremore, 2000: 57) argued in favor of the *"automatic difference"* between the two. Going even further, J. Hillis Miller wrote: *"The picture means itself. The sentence means itself. The two can never meet"*. According to Bluestone, both novelist and film director have common intentions, but one sees visually through the eye, whereas the other sees imaginatively through the mind; *"between the percept of the visual image and the concept of the mental image lies the root difference between the two media"* (Bluestone, 1957: 1). J. Dudley Andrew is yet another one of many to note the "absolutely different semiotic systems of film and language". Against this background, Kamilla Elliot (2003: 1) cannot stop but notice:

> At the heart of the novel and film debate lies a particularly perplexing paradox: on the one side, novels and films are diametrically opposed as "words" and "images", at war both formally and culturally (…). On the other side of the paradox, novels and films are integrally related as sister arts, sharing formal techniques,

> audiences, values, sources, archetypes, narrative strategies, and contexts.

In his *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, Brian McFarlane points out that *"the verbal sign, with its low iconicity and high symbolic function, works conceptually, whereas the cinematic sign, with its high iconicity and uncertain symbolic function, works perceptually"* (McFarlane, 1996: 26-27). Apart from this obvious difference between the expressive power of word and image, there is also a long-standing prejudice: words are sacred, whereas the visual is somewhat suspiciously regarded. Moreover, Robert Stam argues that criticism on film adaptations of literary texts continues to be dominated by *"logophilia"* and *"iconophobia"* (Stam, in Naremore, 2000: 58). Ella Shohat compares the theological anxiety concerning the adaptation of sacred texts with discourses about cinematic adaptations of literary works of art. According to Shohat, the anxiety is mainly determined by the passage from the sacred and the canonical to the flesh-and-blood incarnation of film, grounded in the concrete and thus in the profane (Shohat, in Stam; Raengo, 2004: 23-45).

And yet, the rigid dichotomy between the verbal and the visual does not hold for too long if we take into account the fact that words are visually charged, as well: they have the ability to create images in the reader's mind. In addition, images in a film may also elicit words in the viewer's mind, in the form of comments, conceptual analogies and even metaphors. In other words, as Kamilla Elliott contends, the opposition between words as the exclusive realm of novels and images as the exclusive realm of film is not grounded on solid proof (Elliott, in Stam; Raengo, 2004: 1-22). Therefore, adaptation can only be successful if both *"iconophobia"* with its *"blind adoration of the word"* and *"logophilia"* with its *"fetishism of the image"* are overcome (Shohat, in Stam; Raengo, 2004: 43). Both media can be considered as hybrid, as words and images tend to coexist. Elliott underlines that:

> Films abound in words – in sound dialogue, intertitles, subtitles, voice-over narration, credits, and words on sets and props – and written texts form the basis of most films. In the same way, novels have at times been copiously illustrated with pictorial initials, vignettes, full-page plates, fronts pieces and end-pieces and unillustrated novels create visual and spatial effects through ekphrasis (Elliott, in Stam; Raengo, 2004: 2).

However impossible adaptations might seem in theory, the history of cinema has proved quite the opposite: adaptations are *"culturally ubiquitous"* (ibid: 6). There must be, then, something inherent to both literature and film that turns this presumed impossibility into probability; it is a fact: books *can* be turned into films without losing their *"kernel of meaning"*, their *"original core"* (Stam, in Naremore, 2000: 57). It is rather simple: although, *"in the cinema, one extracts the thought from the image"* and, *"in literature, the image from the thought"* (André Levinson), they both stand on the common ground of narrative. Narrativity is intrinsic to both of them; they both have the ability to shape a succession of events into a coherent and meaningful whole. While images and words are considered to be at war with each other, they can be reconciled due to their storytelling ability.

Understanding this fundamental aspect does not mean overlooking the fact that stories are told differently in the two media; as it has already been pointed out, literature and film are not structurally isomorphic. "Telling" is obviously different from "showing": although films can, indeed, "tell", we deal with a pictorial telling, i.e., a showing or a visual displaying of events. Every fiction film *"involves a visual telling of its story"* (Wilson, 2011: 21), but this is not the true analogue to narration in literary fiction. Words, as well, have the capacity of "showing" triggering images in the reader's mind, but these images are not fixed as it is the case with cinema. Each (active) reader, depending on his/her own life experience, will associate the words on the page with images that are very likely to be completely different from the ones the writer had in mind. Nevertheless, as Christian Metz put it, the very difference between words and images is *"the reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptation"* (Metz, 1974: 12).

The distinction between "showing" and "telling" is actually quite old, as old as the Platonic categories of *mimesis* and *diegesis*, later taken up by Aristotle and, much later, still found in Henry James' "The Art of Fiction". In the 18th century, Lessing also differentiated between poetry as temporal and painting as spatial, categorically positing the divergent nature of the two arts. Although film is essentially mimetic and fiction diegetic, the two narrative modes are more often than not intertwined in both fiction and film. As Booth argues in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, authors invariably both show and tell. Similarly, cinematic adaptations tell by means of editing, in spite of the fact that they appear to only show them. What we deal with is the *"hybrid verbal-visual nature"* of novels and films. An approach that fails to consider this hybridity is, in

Elliot's terms, *"at worst inappropriate and at best partial"* (Elliott, 2003:2). Following the same line of thought, J. T. Mitchell (2002: 169-172) calls the tendency to consider film, photography or television as visual media a fallacy that haunts our culture. He claims that vision is not unlike language and that it works like a code which is not free of textual or interpretive elements; hence, images not only show, but also tell. In fact, film images are often referred to as language and film as texts. From the 1960s onward, critical methods derived from linguistics have often been applied to film studies. Semioticians such as Christian Metz enter verbal territory by discussing film as a language or a language system. In addition, film techniques were undoubtedly influenced by novelistic techniques and vice-versa.

All in all, neither film theory, nor literary theory benefit from the word – image dichotomy. The two media share *"a largely beneficial synergy through the intertextual script that links them"*; what is more, *"there appears to be a longing for the audiovisual image in the descriptive suggestion of the word, and a longing for the word to describe the full immediacy of the film image"* (Boozer, 2008: 23-24). Both within and between the two media words and images interact in a fairly complex and permeable manner; going as far as to state that adaptation is impossible because of the fact that it is based on both images and words is, beyond any doubt, an obsolete, out-of-date view.

2.4.1. The Insistence on Fidelity

The deep-rooted cultural assumptions about word and image have led to a general contempt and disregard for cinematic adaptations of literary works of art, explainable, to a certain extent, by a long-lasting insistence on fidelity, on what and how *should* be transferred from one medium to the other, as if there could be any prescriptive approach to adaptation. Nonetheless, for the receiver, adaptation implies a dialogical process in which the work that is already known is compared with the one being experienced (Stam, in Naremore, 2000: 64). Viewers tend to compare their own mental images with those created by the filmmaker. In his *Novel to Film* (1996: 3), Brian McFarlane pointed out that:

> Everyone who sees films based on novels feels able to comment, at levels ranging from the gossipy to the erudite, on the nature and success of the adaptation involved. That is, the interest in

> adaptation, unlike many others to do with films (e.g. the questions of authorship), is not a rarefied one. And it ranges backwards and forwards from those who talk of novels as being "betrayed" by boorish film-makers to those who regard the practice of comparing film and novel as a waste of time.

Problems appear when the images created by the filmmaker do not correspond to those created by the reader. As Christian Metz underlined, *"the reader will not always find his film, since what he has before him in the actual film is now somebody else's phantasy"* (Metz, 1974: 12). It is the very familiarity with the source that constitutes part of the pleasure or disappointment with adaptation, but the connection to the source material and the comparison with it is inevitable. Moreover, a prerequisite of judging films as adaptations is the audience's awareness and remembrance of the original. However, adaptation studies have been haunted by the pervasive feeling of loss in the process of transformation from literature to screen. Although it has often been proved that the insistence on fidelity is misplaced and inadequate, the issue needs to be addressed in order to complete the general picture. Adaptation is, beyond any reasonable doubt, culturally ubiquitous, but it remains to be seen if or to what extent it should be faithful to the original.

Even though the history of adaptation is as long as the history of cinema itself, adaptation studies were not established in the academia until the mid-twentieth century. Significantly, film and adaptation departments began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s out of English literature departments, *"inheriting the assumption that the literary work is unitary and self-contained and that meaning is an immutable essence to be apprehended by the (fundamentally passive) reader"* (Aragay, 2005: 11). The author was considered *"source and center of the reified text" and "the words on the page, emanating from the Author-God, were sacrosanct"* (ibid). In this context, adaptation studies were haunted by the argument that film destroys the authenticity and uniqueness of the work of art. This led to the assumption that the literary work, as the valued original, was superior, whereas the film adaptation was merely a copy, nothing more than "impure cinema". Most of the criticism that followed was predictable, judging an adaptation's merit by its closeness to its literary source, or, even more vaguely, "the spirit" of the book. Bluestone, for example, who argues that *"changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium"*, since *"novels and films are autonomous media"*, believes in the intrinsic superiority of literature. The novel, he claims, is *"more complex"* than the film,

more self-conscious and self-reflexive, and, thus, better equipped to render thought. Bluestone even claims that novel and film are *"mutually hostile"* or *"antithetical media"*, and that adaptation is impossible (Bluestone, in Aragay, 2005: 13).

Nevertheless, as film began to raise its cultural status from entertainment or low-art into high-art, *"literature began to lose its hierarchical control over film"*. Francois Truffaut's "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema", originally published in *Cahiers du Cinema* in January 1954, was the first to attack the "tradition of quality" in French cinema, by dismissing films as literary, not truly cinematic, the work of mere *metteurs-en-scene*. Instead, he praised the cinema of film-makers such as Robert Bresson and Jean Cocteau, auteurs who managed to turn their films into the expression of their personal vision, although they relied on literary material. In spite of this, the assumption that literature is the superior medium would still hold, with film scholars like Maurice Beja unable to break away from it. Beja dismisses *"betrayal"* as a strong, moralistic, word and denounces the use of the fidelity criterion to the detriment of judging adaptations as independent artistic achievements; however, he invokes the concept of *"the spirit of the original work"* as that which an adaptation *"should be faithful to"* (Beja, in Aragay, 2005: 17).

Dudley Andrew, in his "The Well-Worn Muse: Adaptation in Film History and Theory" (1980), was among the first to explicitly reject Bluestone's argument that adaptation is ultimately impossible. Andrew pointed out that the discourse of fidelity was still *"the most frequent and most tiresome discussion of adaptation"* (Andrew, 1980: 12). Similarly, Christopher Orr, writing four years later, stated that fidelity criticism *"impoverishes"* the film's *"intertextuality"* by reducing it to a *"single pre-text"* while ignoring other pre-texts and codes (cinematic, cultural) that contribute to making adaptation possible (Orr, in Aragay, 2005: 19). Andrew's and Orr's contributions to adaptation studies need to be placed in the context of the deep transformations affecting both film and literary studies after Barthes' seminal 1968 essay "The Death of the Author". The literary source need no longer be conceived as possessing a single, univocal meaning that its adaptation(s) must faithfully reproduce. This view was also influenced by the aesthetics of reception: any text can be endlessly (re)read and appropriated in different contexts.

Arguing along the same lines as Orr, Erica Sheen (2000) and Barbara Hodgdon (2002) point out that the discourse on fidelity often involves a *"rhetoric of possession"*, with the critic being convinced that *"s/he owns the Author's meaning as manifested in the work"*, and judging

"the success of an adaptation in terms of its perceived adherence to that meaning". Fidelity criticism also involves an *"articulation of loss"*, as the only possible outcome when deviating from the Authorial meaning (Aragay, 2005: 20). Likewise, Deborah Cartmell wrote that the very word "adaptation" has always had negative connotations, emphasizing what has been lost rather than what has been gained (Cartmell, in Aragay, 2005: 20). Brian McFarlane also pointed out that the discourse on fidelity is rooted in the notion of the text as *"having and rendering up to the (intelligent) reader a single, 'correct' meaning which the film-maker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with"* (McFarlane, 1996: 8)).

Some writers have proposed strategies that categorize adaptations according to how faithful they are to the original. Geoffrey Wagner, for instance, suggests three possible categories a) transposition, *"in which the novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference"*; b) commentary, *"where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect"*; c) analogy, *"which must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art"*. Similarly, Dudley Andrew also writes about *"fidelity of transformation"*, *"borrowing"* and *"intersection"*. There is also a third similar classification system suggested by Michael Klein and Gillian Parker. The two scholars write about three possibilities: a) *"fidelity to the main thrust of the narrative"*; b) the approach which *"retains the core of the structure of the narrative while significantly reinterpreting or, in some cases, deconstructing the source text"*; and c), regarding the source merely as raw material, as simply *"the occasion for an original work."* All these attempts, in turn, are meant to challenge the primacy of fidelity as a valid criterion for the analysis of adaptations, showing that, irrespective of the degree of faithfulness to the primary source text, films based on literature represent autonomous works of art, possessing their own intrinsic value.

The pervading sense of literature's supremacy and the obsession with the issue of fidelity have undoubtedly hindered the study of adaptation; most criticism belonging to the 21st century acknowledges this fact and argues for a firm detachment from such approaches. Instead, scholars should focus on potentially more rewarding approaches to the phenomenon of adaptation, since fidelity:

> (…) [t]ends to ignore the idea of adaptation as an example of convergence among the arts, perhaps a desirable – even inevitable – process in a rich culture. It fails to take into serious account what may be transferred from novel to film as distinct from what will require

> more complex processes of adaptation; and it marginalizes those production determinants which have nothing to do with the novel but may be powerfully influential upon the film. Awareness of such issues would be more useful than those many accounts of how films "reduce" great novels. (ibid: 10)

This leads to an entirely different approach in what concerns the issue of adaptation; instead of viewing the original novel as "source", we can consider it to be an intertext, one of the many that film usually relies on. So far, the discourse on fidelity has been based on the assumption that an adaptation is meant to simply reproduce the source text. However, as Linda Hutcheon puts it, adaptation is *"repetition"*, but it is *"repetition without replication"*, comparable to paraphrase (Hutcheon, 2006: 7). There may be imitation and repetition, but only to a certain extent; the way stories are told is different in literature and film. More often than not, adapters "simplify" the source, omitting aspects that they consider unnecessary for the movie adaptation, or they extrapolate those elements that they consider noteworthy of higher attention. There is, indeed, a relationship to prior texts, but it is not (and needs not be) a hierarchical one. "Prior" does not necessarily mean "better", although the tension between invention and imitation has always been at the core of adaptation studies.

Casetti argues that adaptation is the *"reappearance, in another discursive field, of an element (a plot, a theme, a character, etc.) that has previously appeared elsewhere"* (Casetti, in Stam and Raengo, 2004: 82). Faithfulness to the source is not an important criterion since we are dealing with an entirely different communicative situation. The previous discursive element (the source material) is only present as a memory within the time and space of the new discursive event (the adaptation). Therefore, it becomes essential to focus on both text and context; *"adaptation"*, in Casetti's words, *"is primarily a phenomenon of recontextualization of the text, or, even better, of reformulation of its communicative situation"* (ibid). It s very common that both spatial and temporal displacement take place in the adaptation; in other words, the situation of the source text is often very different from that of the derivative text, and we need to take into account the context for the appearance of the latter. As it has been underlined before, there are many non-literary influences on cinematic adaptations which determine the way a text is adapted.

Adaptations are often compared to translations, but, since literal translation is never possible, there is no such thing as literal adaptation. Any translator needs to bear in mind the

cultural background of the reader; similarly, the adapter has to take into account the addressee's world. Adaptations occur across media and, by their very own nature, involve intersemiotic transpositions that render strict fidelity impossible. Since the early 1990s, translation historian and theorist Lawrence Venuti has insisted that the concept of fidelity needs to be replaced by that of the translator's visibility or palpable presence in a translation, as a reminder that no act of interpretation – translation being, after all, interpretation – can be definitive (Venuti, 1995). The "visible" translator "refracts" the source text (Aragay, 2005: 30) - a view of translation which no doubt resonates with recent views of adaptation as recreation or rewriting rather than reproduction. Pressing further in this direction, Kamilla Elliot's *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* argues for *"a reciprocally transformative model of adaptation, in which the film (...) metamorphoses the novel and is, in turn, metamorphosed by it"* (Elliott, 2003: 229).

The issue of how faithful a film is to its original *"is notorious, but hollow"* (Chatman, 1990:2). The same story can be rendered in discourses that have been constructed within different media, such as literature, film or theatre. Moreover, as Walton stated, adaptation is *"an agoraic domain, (...) the multicultural and multilingual marketplace where a stereophony of citations engages the notion of interpretive plurality in the ongoing production and negotiation of meaning"* (Walton, in Della Coletta, 2012: 2). Against this background, fidelity, i.e., the assumption that a literary source can be faithfully transposed into a film, remains only a *"chimera"*. Rather than searching for an elusive essence, adaptation studies need to focus on the literary text as *"a space of heteroglossia which can generate a plethora of possible readings"* and can be *"reworked by a boundless context"* (Stam, in Naremore, 2000: 57). The model of fidelity criticism is, therefore, inadequate for appreciating the richness of and motivations driving adaptations; no film adaptation is necessarily inferior to the film adaptation it is based on. Adaptations need not be faithful to their sources; in fact, *"willful infidelity"* seems to be *"the very point"* (Murray, 2008: 6), especially for those directors who claim to be auteurs. Turning a book into a film is not a transposing process aiming at fidelity, but a highly interpretative endeavor.

Although fidelity criticism seems to be doomed now, there is also the danger of going too far with the innovation, especially in the case of established authors whose works are well-known to the public. Casetti warns that *"mis-adaptations"* occur either when the film does not distance itself enough from the literary text or when there is excessive distance between the two

(ibid: 88). From a receptive point of view, the film is confronted with the expectation of its viewers, their previous knowledge and their reading experience. All in all, in spite of the bad name the discourse on fidelity has acquired, completely overlooking the similarities and differences between the source text and its adaptation would be a fallacy. Comparative and contrastive analyses are important and welcome in the analysis of adaptations, as long as the investigation is not bent on favoring one medium over the other. It's highly out of date to speak of literature and film as high art and low art nowadays; the old hierarchy does not hold any more. Hence, any approach on adaptations needs to focus on those aspects that can be transferred from text to screen and on the "solutions" adapters find to make the transfer possible.

2.4.2. The "Language" of Cinema: Film "Grammar" and Visual Literacy

Human beings express themselves and communicate with each other in a variety of modes (speech, writing, pictures, actions, etc.). Each of these modes, according to Hodgkinson, may be called "a language" (Hodgkinson, in Manchel, 1995: 95). It has been often claimed that film is one of the three universal languages, together with mathematics and music. Moreover, all technological media are commonly referred to as *"new languages"* (Manchel, 1990: 95), all this in the context of our multi-media culture that tends to replace the print-oriented culture whose domination was indisputable for five hundred years. In other words, *"cinema has hardly been immune to the magnetic attraction of the linguistic model"* (Stam; Burgoyne; Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 28). Actually, a close look at some of the earliest theories of the cinema reveals that the notion of film language is already present from the very beginning. The metaphor can be found in the 1920s writings of Riccioto Canudo in Italy and Louis Delluc in France, who paradoxically thought that it was the non-verbal nature of cinema which gave its language-like character, especially because of its status as a "visual esperanto" transcending the barriers of national language. Similarly, Vachel Lindsay spoke of film as *"hieroglyphic language"* (ibid). One must take into account, though, that this view of film as language was explainable at the beginning because of the very nature of film: there was no sound, but cinema could still communicate effectively.

The Russian Formalists were the first to systematically develop the analogy between language and film. It is in *Poetika Kino*, a collection of five essays published in 1927, that the

hypothesis of *"cinelanguage"* is most explicitly formulated. In his "Fundamentals of the Cinema", Tynianov, for instance, spoke of the cinema's ability to present the visible world by means of semantic signs, which in turn, are the result of cinematic techniques such as lighting and montage (Aumont, 2004: 132). Likewise, Eikhenbaum saw film in relation to *"image translations of linguistic tropes."* and stated that cinema is a *"particular system of figurative language"*, the stylistics of which would treat filmic *"syntax"*, the linkage of shots into *"phrases"* and *"sentences"*. Furthermore, according to Eikhenbaum, in order to "read" a film, the viewer needs to resort to the internal language that characterizes all thought: *"Cinematic perception is a process that goes from the object, from visible movement to its interpretation, to the construction of internal language"* (ibid: 133).

It was only with the advent of structuralism and semiotics in the 1960s, however, that the film-language analogy was explored in depth by theorists like Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Christian Metz. Barthes considered images to be characterized by polysemy, sharing, therefore, with other signs - including linguistic signs - the property of being open to multiple significations. The accompanying images or written material in a film often function, according to Barthes, as anchorage, i.e., as a device which forces the observer's perception into a preferred "reading" of the image, guiding the viewer among the different possible significations of a visual representation (Barthes, 1977). Christian Metz took the linguistic metaphor both seriously and skeptically, *"in order to discern its quantum of truthfulness"* (Stam; Burgoyne; Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 33). He looked for the equivalent, in film theory, of the conceptual role played by *langue* in the Saussurean model. The question which oriented his early work was whether the cinema was *langue* (language system) or language, reaching the conclusion that the former option was not attainable for a number of reasons. Firstly, he argues, *langue* is a system of signs intended for two-way communication, while cinema allows only for delayed communication (ibid: 34). Secondly, Metz argues, cinema lacks the equivalent of the arbitrary linguistic sign; in film, the relation between signifier and signified is not arbitrary, but motivated. Thirdly, Metz claims that cinema does not constitute a language widely available as a code: to speak a language, in other words, *"is simply to use it, while to 'speak' cinematic language is always to a certain extent to invent it"* (ibid: p. 36). Cinema is not *langue*, but it is language. By placing the notion of language in a Hjelmslevian context, Metz argues that any unity defined in terms of its "matter of expression" (Hjelmslev) or in terms of its "typical sign" (Barthes) can be called a

language. Whereas literature's matter of expression is writing, cinematic language is *"the set of messages whose matter of expression consists of five tracks or channels: moving photographic image, recorded phonetic sound, recorded noises, recorded musical sound, and writing"* (ibid: 37).

Having established that film has its own language, we need to decide what the peculiarities of this language are and how it functions. In doing so, it is necessary to depart from the commonsensical observation that there is no "film grammar" in the same sense that is attributed to grammar by linguistics. Written and spoken languages have both prescriptive and descriptive grammars which analyze and determine the selection and combination of words into sentences. But film has no ordering system that regulates the way shots should be combined to create meaning. And yet, we can indeed speak of a minimal grammar of film, especially when taking into account the relations between shots and how these relations are constructed. Film may be said to have a grammar in the sense that there are certain conventions of shooting and editing that are often followed to determine particular emotional responses or to create the illusion of continuous action in time and space. Even when shooting or editing techniques are not used in a conventional manner, they represent key elements of film language, elements that make up the very specificity of cinema. It is helpful, therefore, to talk of film "grammar" in terms of these constitutive elements of filmmaking, by defining notions such as: long-shot, medium-shot, close-up, extreme close-up, low-angle shot, high-angle shot, zoom in, zoom out, tracking, editing, diegetic/non-diegetic sound, soundtrack, lighting, etc. These notions are only going to be touched upon here, as they will be included in the glossary of cinematic terms at the end of our thesis.

When analyzing film grammar, one immediately understands that, generally speaking, the elements to be considered are connected to either sight or sound. The visual aspect centers around the shot; according to how and if the camera moves, we can speak of fixed shots and motion shots. Fixed shots are determined by both the distance from what is filmed and the angle of the camera. Examples include: long-shots, medium-shots, close-ups, extreme close-ups, low-angle shots and high-angle shots. Motion shots are those that suggest movement to the viewer; thus, the camera can pan, tilt, zoom, dolly, and so on. All of these shots can be taken in slow, normal and fast motion. The concept of size is related to shots. Since it is the camera that directs the viewer's eyes, the filmmaker manipulates the dimensions and proportions of people, places

and things for creative purposes. In order to achieve a certain effect, the director may also resort to a number of optical distortions: objects and persons may seem smaller or bigger than they are in reality or color filters may be employed in order to show that a certain shot is a flashback or a flash-forward; images, although recognisable, may be blurred (soft-focus) or superimposed (by means double or multiple exposure). Lighting is also very important in this equation: it can determine what and the viewer sees in an actual frame and how s/e will perceive what appears on the screen. Film punctuation is highly noteworthy as well: by means of cuts, fades, dissolves, wipes, mixes, turnovers, titles and so on, the filmmaker gets from one episode to another, managing to achieve the effect of continuity and, to a great extent, to manipulate time. Sound and sound effects are equally important in a film. The viewer-listener may deal with diegetic or non-diegetic sound, and this sound may be music, voice-over narration, dialogue, noise, etc. the choice of sound and soundtrack is essential for the different kinds of effects that are needed at each step in the film, whether it is about increasing suspense, emotional involvement on the part of the spectator, suggesting a faster rhythm of the action or enhancing humor.

Apart from these elements, there are also other that might be used in bringing a literary work to the screen. In his *Adaptation Studies: Its Past, Present and Future* (2007), Thomas Leitch writes about adjustment (by means of which the source-text is either compressed or expanded), superimposition (the introduction of new material), colonization (deliberately altering the time and place of a literary text as in *Bride and Prejudice*, 2004), metacommentary (the adapter comments directly on the process of adaptation, like in *Looking for Richard*, 1996), parody and pastiche. Leitch's conclusion is that *"there is no normative model for adaptation"* (Leitch, 2007: 196); which renders any grammar of adaptation, including the one Leitch himself delineates, futile. Therefore, since there are practically endless options available for the filmmaker, anyone who engages creatively with the literary text should treat grammatical models of film as descriptive rather than prescriptive. In other words, *"it is impossible to be ungrammatical in film"* (Monaco, 2000: 152). There are countless ways in which the filmmaker can exercise control over the mise-en-scène or soundtrack; moreover, by means of editing, s/he can manipulate what is shown to such an extent that the viewer can no longer tell what is real and what is not. Knowledge of concepts related to "film grammar" is particularly useful for a proper understanding and analysis of any film, be it adaptation or not. However, such knowledge

should come with the awareness that there are no norms in what concerns the usage of film techniques and strategies.

In a nutshell, as James Monaco pointed out, *"An education in the quasi-language of film opens up greater potential meaning for the observer, so it is useful to use the metaphor of language to describe the phenomenon of film"* (ibid: 121). And, as print-oriented literacy requires a recognition of words and the patterns in which they are usually combined, so film literacy requires a recognition of cinematic techniques. A literate reader is familiar with the rules of language, as well as with authors, literary movements, genres, narrative strategies, and so on. However, when it comes to film, our familiarity cannot be so easily assessed, since there is no official canon of cinema, no definitive way in which moving pictures can and should be analyzed. Although, by means of *"total immersion"*, the viewer usually possesses some sort of *"sensibility for visual storytelling"*, s/he rarely comprehends the grammar and specific properties of the media. In other words, *"the average adult has seen hundreds, if not thousands of films and yet many fundamentals of the cinema remain a mystery to the movie-going public"* (LoBrutto, 2005: xviii). If we are to adequately understand the language of cinema, we have to be visually and aurally literate.

James Monaco, in his *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, Multimedia*, asks the following rhetorical question: *"Is it necessary, really, to learn how to read a film?"* (Monaco, 2000: 17). His question stems out of the observation that virtually anyone of minimal intelligence can grasp the basic content and meaning of a film without any special training. And yet, the problem is that our apprehension of movies seems to be much easier than our comprehension of them, especially because this medium "so very closely mimics reality" (ibid). We receive vast amounts of information by means of the images in front of us, but we tend to accept them without any questioning of how they tell us what they tell. This happens because of a lack of understanding in what concerns technique and, implicitly, the way film operates as a language. Simply put, people who are *"cinemate"* (ibid: 152), that is visually literate, see more and hear more than people who are not. The process involves not only our eyes and ears, but also our brain; comprehension is largely dependent on what the brain can do with the information received. When "reading" movies, we deal, that is, with mental experiences that are largely influenced by our previous knowledge and experience. Thus, the answer is, definitely, yes; if we

are to overcome the stage of apprehension, learning how to read a film is not only necessary, but also fundamental.

Learning how to read a page is readily available, but this is not valid in what concerns the reception of images; even if we possess the know-how, we are seldom aware of it. The general assumption is that anyone can "read" a film, that knowledge of film language and film grammar need not be prior to the viewing of a film. Nonetheless, it is precisely because film is easy to understand that it is so difficult to explain. So much occurs at the unconscious level that we often take for granted our ability to understand films. But visual literacy involves a great deal more: in order to complete the process of intellection, the viewer must work to interpret the signs s/he perceives. After all, as Monaco argued, *"The more work they [the spectators] do, the better the balance between observer and creator in the process; the better the balance, the more vital and resonant the work of art"* (ibid: 159).

2.5. The Specificity of Literature and Cinema: Reconciling the Conflict of Specific Media When Adapting Books into Films

> **Motto**: *"Illustrating literature for the cinema is a difficult and inauspicious undertaking, as the cinema has its own methods and devices, which do not coincide with those of literature. Film can only attempt to reincarnate and interpret literary characters and literary style in its own way."* (Tynianov)

Adaptation is, among others, a process of appropriation: the adapter filters someone else's story through his/her own sensibility and interests. The choice of medium, however, exerts the strongest influence upon the entire process. In other words, every kind of adaptation encounters the limitations of its own medium. When adapting books into film, one has to take into account that there are certain unadaptable elements, that some elements might be rendered into film by means of adaptation proper and that there is yet another category of elements that can be easily transferred. In cinematic adaptations, changes are both necessary and inevitable, as we have seen, since strict fidelity is neither wished for nor possible. While the content or part of the content can be found in the adaptation as outcome, there is no question about the fact that

form changes. On the one hand, in terms of content, plot elements might need contraction or expansion and some characters might disappear altogether. On the other hand, the very specificity of literature and cinema, respectively, renders the "translation" of some constituents impossible. Nonetheless, in spite of such obstacles, adaptations exist and are, more often than not, successful; this is largely due to the filmmaker's ability to reconcile the conflict of media specificities by finding efficient equivalents for what cannot be readily transferred.

When transposing a story from literature to film, the technical constraints of cinema will influence which aspects of that story will be adapted and how this will be done. Brian McFarlane argues that cinema achieves its greatest power in telling stories and thus shares the centrality of narrative with the novel. Further on, he distinguishes between *"transfer"* and *"adaptation"*; by transfer, he means *"the process whereby certain narrative elements of novels are revealed as amenable to display in film"*, whereas he employs the term *"adaptation"* to refer to *"the processes by which other novelistic elements must find quite different equivalencies in the film medium"* (McFarlane, 1996: 13). In what follows, our investigation will attempt to capture both the transferable and the adaptable components of literature and, more importantly, some of the ways in which filmmakers decide to cope with the challenge of adaptation, as there are no definitive or normative approaches.

2.6. Auster's and McEwan's Standpoint When It Comes to Cinematic Adaptations and Filmmaking

The second half of the 20th century gives prominence to a new culture "created by film and a full spectrum of recent technological innovations" (Donovan, 2005: 14). Consequently, the novel no longer represents the primary form of art as, arguably, it cannot compete with the media for our leisure time. This comes as natural in the age of Postmodernism, "with the advent of the televisual age and corresponding growth of the media"; the postmodern world displays "a society of the media or the spectacle" (Jameson, in Martin, 2008: 4). The movie industry has undergone an inflationary surge, whereas fiction retains part of its status due to its expandability, that is, adaptability to the cinematic medium. From a producer's point of view, the desire to turn books into films is understandable: most box-office successes originate in literary works of art. Writers such as Paul Auster and Ian McEwan grew up with movies and, well aware of the new *Zeitgeist*,

they considered the idea of becoming involved in the filmmaking process early on in their careers, as we are going to see in what follows. However, whereas their literary work has frequently been the object of scholarly research, their efforts as screenplay writers and directors have seldom been discussed.

The authors' interest in filmmaking is obvious if we take into account the prolificacy and success of their fictional writings adapted for the big screen, but also their contribution as screenwriters and directors. It is this prolificacy and their involvement with movies that demonstrates both their understanding of the filmmaking process, together with the industry issues associated with it, and their predilection towards it. Although they primarily see themselves as novelists, they frequently break "the fourth wall": their writing undoubtedly possesses a cinematic quality. Although Auster is an American writer and McEwan is an English novelist, both of them are born in the late 1940s (1947 and 1948, respectively) and they witness about the same social, cultural and literary paradigm shift. In what follows, we are going to explore the extent to which cinema has had an influence on the two writers, as well as their standpoint when it comes to the movie industry.

Paul Auster described himself as an ardent cinephile: "I was always crazy about movie from early childhood" (Auster, in Clark, 2015). Later on, as a student at Columbia University, he began writing reviews for film by Jean-Luc Godard, and then, as an apprentice in Paris, he considered the possibility of joining the Institute des Hautes Études Cinématografiques. As a matter of fact, as he argues in an interview with Ashley Clark, he hesitated between pursuing a career as a writer or a filmmaker and became a writer primarily because of his personality: he felt he was too shy "to command the required attention of a large staff" (*ibid*.). On a different occasion, he would explain his choice in medium accessibility: "I simply didn't know how to go about it. It seemed a lot easier to write than to make films. All I needed was a pencil and a piece of paper, whereas filmmaking was something I had no access to" (Auster, in Wood, 2003). However, writing scripts for films came naturally to him, and he was highly successful in doing it: he would write the screenplay for *The Music of Chance*, directed by Philip Haas and released in 1993, then he wrote the script for *Smoke*, directed by Wayne Wang and released in 1995. *Smoke*, based on the novelist's "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story" (1990), meant great collaboration with the director, which led to two further films that they co-directed: *Blue in the face* and *Lulu on the bridge*. Finally, he both wrote the script for and directed *The Inner Life of*

Martin Frost (2007), a film that originates in his brilliant metacinematic novel, *The Book of Illusions* (2002).

Apparently, though, Auster was not thoroughly convinced of the potential that resides in films; he voices his doubts in an interview with Annette Insdorf, published with the scripts of *Blue* and *Lulu*:

> I also have certain problems with them. Not with just this or that particular movie, but with movies in general, the medium itself (…). The two-dimensionality, first of all. People think of movies as real, but they're not. They're flat pictures projected against a wall, a simulacrum of reality, not the real thing. (*Smoke and Blue in the Face, 2003*: 6)

Asked how the writing of a screenplay is different from the writing of a novel, Auster's response allows no ambiguity: "in every way" (Auster, in Wood, 2003). However, he does admit that there is one crucial similarity: "you're trying to tell a story". Undeniably, as the novelist contends, the greatest source of dissimilarity resides in the means at his disposal: "novels are pure narration", whereas "screenplays resemble theater" (*ibid*.). As he further confesses, he "had to learn a completely new way of writing, to teach myself how to think in images and how to put words in the mouths of living human beings". What is more, he argues that scripts are far more restrictive than novels, as they do not allow for the depiction of time, for instance: "In a novel, you can collapse a long stretch of time into a single sentence", but "it's impossible to do that in a film". Indeed, "films take place in the present. Even when you use flashbacks, the past is always rendered as another incarnation of the present" (*ibid*.). And yet, Auster contends that there is a very strong point when it comes to filmmaking: the fact that it heavily relies on collaboration. In his own words, "I rediscovered the pleasures of working with other people. (…) I liked being part of a small group, a group with a purpose, in which each person contributes to a common goal" (*ibid*.).

Interestingly enough, Auster's view is that words and images can be reconciled, that they are not mutually exclusive. As he proves in *The Book of Illusions*, a novel in which descriptions of films are outstanding acts of visualization, one medium can be used to foreground the other. Auster explains that it is all "a question of striking the right balance":

> All the visual information had to be there – the physical details of the action – so the reader could "see" what was happening, but at the same time, the prose had to move along at a quick pace, in order to mimic the experience of watching a film, which is rushing past you at twenty-four frames per second. Too many details and you would get bogged down. Not enough and you wouldn't see anything. (*ibid*.)

The novelist's explanation represents an indicator of his knowledge of the cinematic medium, and his eventual foray into cinema is, thus, unsurprising. The significant recurrence of film as an explicit subject in his books shows how clearly and indelibly his work has been influenced by cinema.

Ian McEwan is an extremely productive novelist and screenwriter; when compared with Paul Auster, there is a greater number of his works that were or are to be turned into movies. Apart from *Atonement*, that became the Oscar-winning film released in 2007, there is a number of other novels, short stories and novellas that were adapted for the cinema as it follows: *Last Day of Summer* (1984), *The Cement Garden* (1993), *The Comfort of Strangers* (1990), *The Innocent* (1993), *First Love, Last Rites* (1997), *Solid Geometry* (2002), *Enduring Love* (2004), *On Chesil Beach* (2017). He wrote the following screenplays: *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1983), *Soursweet* (1988), *The Good Son* (1993), *On Chesil Beach* (2017) and *The Children Act* (2017). His view on adaptations in particular and filmmaking in general is somewhat similar to that of Auster, although he finds them "technically challenging and interesting", he is aware that "there are certain things that movies can't do. They can't do interiority and consciousness, thoughts and feelings" (Auster, in Brady, 2018). Which is why McEwan stresses the importance of casting when it comes to adaptations: the actors' performances are crucial in rendering at least part of that interiority.

As opposed to Auster, it seems that McEwan's cooperation with directors is not something he particularly welcomes; he did not direct any films either. In an interview with Stuart Emmrich, he offers an explanation for his approach:

> Films are, by convention, a director's medium. The screenplay writer can often find himself in an awkward position in the process. You might generate all the material – scenes, characters, plot, God knows what else – but you find yourself fairly low down in the pecking order once the filming begins. No one wants you around. (McEwan, in Emmrich, 2018)

However, it is recently that McEwan managed to cooperate very well with Dominic Cooke, for whom *On Chesil Beach* (2017) represented his debut as a film director. Cooke spent almost his entire career as an artistic director in theater, which is why McEwan finds their partnership more fruitful. From his standpoint, theatre directors are much more open "to the idea of the screenwriter as an equal collaborator" (*ibid*.). Similarly, Cooke argues: "I found Ian remarkably collaborative, especially for a novelist, which can be a very solitary undertaking". When it comes to the adaptations of his works, McEwan favors, above all, the fidelity to source text, but fidelity is a very elusive quality in filmmaking, particularly because of the director's own directorial stance. This is why McEwan is so fond of Andrew Birkin's *The Cement Garden* (1993): "practically every sentence of it" ends up on the screen (*ibid*.).

Well aware of the fact that, as part of the filmmaking team, the writer cannot have total control over what is done in the process, Auster argues that it is all mostly due to the commercial issues:

> When you write a book, you have all the time in the world. If you make a mistake, nobody sees you make it. You can just cross out the sentence and start over again. You can throw out a week's work, a month's work, and nobody cares. On a film set, you don't have that luxury. It's do or die every day. You have to accomplish your work every day, and you don't get a second chance. At least not with a tightly-budgeted film like ours. (Auster, in Prime, 2013: 121).

Nonetheless, Auster admits that the entire experience can be deeply satisfying, to the point of becoming addictive, mostly because of the fact that "every day is different from the day before" (*ibid*.). There is a thrill, a sense of adventure connected to the uncertainty of what is going to happen next that the novelist finds most appealing. Moreover, although the director's outward circumstances are quite the opposite as those of the writer, Auster contends that they are not as different as one might think: "at bottom, you're trying to accomplish the same thing: to tell a story" (*ibid*.).

In a nutshell, what the two writers have in common is the cinematic quality of their fiction, together with their interest in filmmaking. Both of them wrote screenplays that were adapted for the big screen and both of them collaborated very well with famous directors. Auster has tried his hand at directing as well, although the resulting film, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* (2007), was not critically acclaimed. Because of the constant commercial concerns that characterize movie-making in general, the adaptations of their books were often low-budgeted,

yet most of them were quite successful. The ones that did not succeed seem to be overly dependent on the source text and to pay too much tribute to literature and fiction writing, such as *Martin Frost*, for instance. Nonetheless, success in the film industry depends on numerous factors and it is a highly elusive concept, especially because it depends on the viewpoint of the one assessing the film, the adaptation in particular. To a great extent, the viewer's knowledge of the source text and his/her expectations concerning fidelity to the story, together with the viewer's expertise when it comes to filmmaking, matter as much as the creative additions that belong to the director: the choice of music, setting, actors etc. This is also the case for the adaptations based on the fictional works of Auster or McEwan.

The books and adaptations explored in the second part of our dissertation are to be assessed from the philologist's (not the film expert's) standpoint, applying basic knowledge of film theory and key film terminology. As the two writers contend, what films and fiction have in common is their storytelling ability. Narrative seems to be, as Cohen concluded, *"the most solid median link"* between literature and cinema (Cohen, 1979: 92). Yet, as we are going to prove in what follows, the language of film is very different from the language of literature. Chatman's contention seems highly plausible: *"Only a general narratology can help to explain what literature and cinema have in common, narratively speaking, and only a good sense of that commonality will permit us to understand what is distinctively cinematic or literary"* (Chatman, 1990: 2).

PART II. Fiction to Film: Contrastive Analysis of Representative Adaptations of Paul Auster's and Ian McEwan's Works

Chapter 3. Self-Reflexivity in Fiction and Film: the Narrator as Writer and Protagonist

Ian McEwan's *Atonement* is, perhaps, most notable for its metafictional framework, since, above all, it explores the nature of writing, the power and importance of imagination, the quest for redemption through literature and the god-like position an author has in relation to his/her creation. We deal with multiple framed narratives presumably written by Briony Tallis, the protagonist, introduced as a writer from the very beginning. The novel brings to the fore Briony's struggle and inner turmoil of atoning for her "crime" by means of writing; the result is a novel within a novel, but the boundary between the two is so fragile that, by the end of the book, we can no longer tell the difference between what is "real" and what is fictitious in Briony's account. The reader is now able to understand how easily perceptions can be misconstrued and manipulated. The cinematic adaptation of the novel follows quite faithfully the plotline of the book, foregrounding metafictional elements to a similar extent.

Likewise, Paul Auster's *The Book of Illusions* also questions the boundaries between fiction and actuality, but it does so by resorting to different strategies. The protagonist of the novel, a professor of comparative literature, self-proclaimed "author" of the story we are reading, goes to great lengths so as to prove that his writing enterprise is based on thorough research and documentation, that is to say, on "facts". Whenever in doubt of the validity of certain pieces of information that are being disclosed, his language becomes tentative and, this way, it enhances the veracity effect of the entire novel. The novel is not only metafictional, but also metacinematic. In fact, crossing the borderline between media in a self-referential fictional attempt is Auster's major innovation in terms of metatextuality. The transmedial metareference helps the reader/viewer identify some of the major common points between fiction and cinema and also lay bare the means of creating aesthetic illusion specific to each medium.

Displaying the same kind of metafictional concerns, "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story" brings to the fore a writer that is also the 1st person narrator and the protagonist; what is more, the writer's name is Paul and he has been commissioned to write the exact story that we are reading. Paul Auster makes use of several strategies to enhance the veracity of the text; apart from offering numerous warrantees of authenticity, the text is also a brilliant example of myse-en-abyme. Both the framing and the framed narrative seem to pinpoint the importance of reception when it comes to art in general and storytelling in particular. Whereas the story the recipient listens to/reads is true or not matters less than the pleasures involved in the actual listening/reading. Necessarily based on expansion, *Smoke* also lays bare the virtues of storytelling, seemingly giving prominence to the written word, which is paradoxical for cinema. Both the short story and its adaptation try to maintain the illusion of truth, while at the same time disclosing the illusory nature of the narrative.

The current chapter will focus on investigating the metafictional/metacinematic strategies employed in the fictional texts described above, and then compare those strategies with the ones that the directors make use of in the films. It will be very interesting to see the techniques involved in rendering fictional self-reflexivity on screen, as apparently this is an "untranslatable" trait. The director's creative stance can, nonetheless, manage to successfully address the seeming incongruity, as we are going to prove in what follows.

3.1. Self-Conscious Fiction: Ian McEwan's *Atonement* and Its Cinematic Adaptation

3.1.1. By Way of Introduction

Published in 2001, Ian McEwan's *Atonement* is widely regarded as one of the author's best achievements, if not "McEwan's best novel so far, his masterpiece" (*Evening Standard*), "his most powerful novel to date" (*Sunday Times*), "utterly satisfying, complete" (*Scotsman*). A family saga, a war novel, a novel of initiation into adulthood, a metafictional novel, *Atonement* brilliantly presents the reader with a narrative that is "art of the highest kind" (*Scotland on Sunday*), so intricately crafted that it demands attention from the opening sentences and remains a page-turner until the very end. It was a finalist for the prestigious Man Booker Prize and,

among others, won the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. In 2007, the book was adapted into an Academy Award nominated film with the same title, starring James McAvoy and Keira Knightley, and directed by Joe Wright.

In what follows, we are going to investigate the metafictional strategies employed by both the book and the film, to see how the two media construct and at the same time blur the line between factuality and fictionality within the fictional universe itself. In doing so, we will rely on what is specific to each medium in the attempt to lay bare the dangers of literal interpretation. Our analysis will also focus on the filmmaker's decisions of rendering metafictionality in film, since this is not easily done in the cinema; more often than not, cinematic devices that are normally employed in movies need to be sacrificed in favor of techniques that privilege the written word (as opposed to the image).

3.1.2. A Book on (Writing) Books: *Atonement* (2001)

3.1.2.1. "Crime", Guilt and Atonement: Unfolding of the Plot

The novel is divided into four sections: while the first – and the longest - part details the events that led to Briony's "crime", Part Two, Part Three and the "epilogue" present the reader with both the long-term effects of that crime and, highly significantly, with the protagonist's lifelong plight for atonement. Part One tells the story of one day and night in the summer of 1935 at the Tallis family estate north of London. The protagonist is thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis who aspires to become a writer and whose imagination is so rich that, as we are going to see, she often misinterprets – almost willingly – what she sees. Her plan for the evening is to put on *The Trials of Arabella*, a play she herself has written for the homecoming of her brother, Leon. In order to do this, she needs her three cousins, who are living with the Tallises for the summer because of their parents' divorce. Although "the novel opens on a situation of great expectations" (Ascari, 2011: 84), there are enough impediments that act against the realisation of Briony's plan and, needless to say, the play is never staged, at least not at this point in the narrative. The irony is that a great deal of what happens in the fictitious, imaginary universe of the play will take place in the "reality" of the novel, with the play thus foreshadowing the events that will later come to pass. One of the occurrences that will offset Briony's plans for the afternoon and

evening is a scene that she witnesses between her elder sister Cecilia and the son of the family charwoman, Robbie Turner. Her limited view of what actually happens at the fountain feeds her imagination, a highly fertile ground for her misreading of the event. While immediately thinking about the prospect of turning what she has just seen into a story, Briony rhetorically questions herself: "Wasn't writing a kind of soaring, an achievable form of flight, of fancy, of the imagination?" (McEwan, 2001: 41) Tragically for everyone involved, this will lead to Briony's crime and will ultimately change the lives of the protagonists forever.

A few hours after the fountain scene, in a great Freudian slip, Robbie hands Briony his letter for Cecilia, without realizing that it is one of his drafts he did not intend anybody to see and in which he allowed himself to write his innermost thoughts and feelings. Briony's curiosity and "passion for secrets" (McEwan, 2001: 6) determine her to read the letter, whose content naturally shocks her and sets her out to protect her sister from this "maniac", as Lola, her cousin, so manipulatively puts it. What is more, Briony further witnesses Robbie and Cecilia in the library and again mistakes what she sees, deepening her assumption that Robbie intends to harm Cecilia. At this point, it is very clear in her mind that she has to save her sister from the "imminent danger" she is exposed to (Ascari, 2011: 88). At dinnertime, in an attempt to draw attention upon themselves, her twin cousins run away and everybody goes out to search for them in the dark. While searching alone, Briony is once again the observer of something she is almost eager to misconstrue: the alleged rape of her cousin, Lola. Briony convinces everyone, including the authorities, that she has seen the attacker and is, therefore, sure of his identity, accusing Robbie of assailing Lola. At times, she doubts what she has seen and thoughts of changing her statement cross her mind, but she decides not to act upon them:

> "She was like a bride-to-be who begins to feel her sickening qualms as the day approaches, and dares not speak her mind because so many preparations have been made on her behalf the happiness and convenience of so many good people would be put at risk." (McEwan, 2001: 169)

Of course, the effects of her "not speaking her mind" are minimalized here, as Briony does not yet understand the nature and extent of her crime. She even manages to convince herself that "certain events have indeed taken place before her eyes, when in fact only bits and pieces are true and the blanks in-between have been filled with a fictional reality she has created herself"

(Dahlback, 2009). For highly imaginative Briony, "[e]verything connected. It was her discovery. It was her story, the one that was writing itself around her" (McEwan, 2001: 166). Finally, Part One ends as Robbie is taken to face the charges, not before saying goodbye to Cecilia who, much to Briony's surprise, believes in Robbie's innocence.

Set five years later, Part Two centers on Robbie's retreat to Dunkirk as a war soldier, after having served three years in prison for his supposed crime. We are presented with Robbie's first-hand experience of the atrocities of war as he marches through the countryside with two other corporals. Although the three men manage to finally get to Dunkirk, evacuation needs to be postponed as the place is in complete chaos and there are no boats to take the soldiers to the other side of the Channel. The end of Part Two does not render Robbie's evacuation as certain: although his determination to go back to Cecilia is great, he is badly wounded and has fever-induced hallucinations in what only seems to be his last night in Dunkirk. Nonetheless, "[t]he prospect was of rebirth", of "a triumphant return" (McEwan, 2001: 227) that could be carried out by means of Briony's public acknowledgement of her crime.

In Part Three, eighteen-year-old Briony who now works as a nurse in London, has finally understood the extent of her crime. Away from her family and only scarcely keeping in touch with them, she is now conscious of her guilt and tries to make amends for the past. Unsurprisingly, she has kept writing and has even submitted a story to a London journal; even though the story is rejected, its high potential is readily acknowledged and Briony is encouraged to develop its plot. As a nurse, she is able to experience the horrors of war first-hand, as she takes care of the wounded soldiers that have returned from France. During one of her days off, towards the end of Part Three, she attends Lola's wedding with Paul Marshall, of whom she now knows he was the actual "rapist". Nonetheless, she keeps silent and does nothing to stop their marriage. In an attempt to reconcile with her sister, she then goes to visit Cecilia and discovers that Robbie is still alive. She has to face the fact that forgiveness is not possible, but there are a few things she can do to clear Robbie's name and repair part of the damage, and she agrees to each and every one of them.

The seemingly realistic narrative the reader has dealt with so far is completely questioned by the final section of the novel, a letter written by Briony, the "author", to the reader. We learn now that both Robbie and Cecilia died in the war and that they never got together again. In addition, she never visited her sister on Lola and Marshall's wedding day either; although the

signs had always been there, we were skillfully tricked into believing that the narrative had taken the turn Briony would present later on:

> "She left the cafe, and as she walked along the Common she felt the distance widen between her and another self, no less real, who was walking back toward the hospital. Perhaps the Briony who was walking in the direction of Balham was the imagined or ghostly persona." (McEwan, 2001: 329)

In her final attempt at atonement, she had made up her visit to Cecilia and Robbie in London, so as to allow their love to last forever in the pages of her book. Moreover, she was able to write about the war by resorting to letters from the museum of archives and using the information she gets from one of the corporals with whom Robbie marched. A seventy-seven-year-old successful writer, Briony attends a birthday party thrown in her honor by the remaining members of her family at her old home and, ironically, *The Trials of Arabella* is finally staged as a surprise for her. Briony has finally finished the final draft of what should have been her first but is actually her last novel, *Atonement*. Suffering from a condition that gradually determines her loss of memory and, eventually, her death, she admits that her lifelong struggle for atonement was never successful, but "the attempt was all":

> How can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her. In her imagination she has set the limits and the terms. (…) It was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all (*ibid*.: 371).

It is actually her last novel, in which the two lovers live happily ever after, that constitutes Briony's attempt at redemption, but this realisation makes the reader uncertain about everything s/he has read so in the novel. The answer Briony herself provides for the question "[b]ut what *really* happened?", namely, "the lovers survive and flourish", further increases our doubts. Her justification is not of much help, either: "I like to think that it [her novel, together with its fictitious events] isn't weakness or evasion, but a final act of kindness, a stand against oblivion and despair" (*ibid*.: 371-372) We no longer know what is trustworthy in her account, how much of it is fact and to what extent she has made up the narrative so far.

3.1.2.2. *Atonement* and Its "Narcissistic Narrative": Metafictional Strategies

3.1.2.2.1. The Novel's "Retrospective Composition"

At the end of our reading experience, we realize that the novel "turns out to be written through [a] fictional creation" who also appears "to be one of the characters" and, thus, it "masquerades as a realist narration" (Swan, quoted in Dahlback, 2009: 3). The timing of the narrative, however, is "masterfully controlled so that the ending is not evident too soon (…), nor comes as too much of a surprise, lest the reader/viewer feel overmastered by the narrative's too clever withholding of the truth" (Ingersoll, 2007: 158). It becomes clear at the end that McEwan's novel is not mainly a novel about redemption, as we might be tempted to think. In fact, it is a novel about literature and the power of imagination, a novel that "insists on making references to its own fictional status" (Ellam, 2009: 41). At this point, we are forced to reconsider everything we have read so far and can't help but think of the possibility of being drawn into a trap from the very beginning. The warning was there all along, but, as Briony predicted, we wouldn't give it much attention:

> "In a story you only had to wish, you only had to write it down and you could have the world...It seemed so obvious now that it was too late. A story was a form of telepathy. By means of inking symbols onto a page, she was able to send thoughts and feelings from her mind to her reader's. It was a magical process, so commonplace that no one stopped to wonder at it." (McEwan, 2001: 37)

A sentence we didn't give much thought to at the beginning resurfaces in our minds: "But of course, it had all been her – by her and about her", and we realize that we might have been tricked into believing a story which had all the attributes of realism carefully woven inside it. Had we read with a clearer insight Briony's following words, we might not have been so easily deceived: "But this first clumsy attempt showed her that the imagination itself was a source of secrets: once she had begun a story, no one could be told. Pretending in words was too tentative, too vulnerable, too embarrassing to let anyone know." She does let us know, however, but only at the very end, when her deceit is complete. Although "Briony began to understand the chasm that lay between an idea and its execution" and she imparted her understanding with us quite early in the story, this realisation comes a bit too late for us and is quite bitter, as it was for

Briony in Part One: "The cost of oblivious daydreaming was always this moment of return, the realignment with what had been before and now seemed a little worse."

It was when she was a child that Briony became aware of her powers as a writer; what she has actually been doing is put her awareness into practice:

> [W]riting stories not only involved secrecy, it also gave her all the pleasures of miniaturization. A world could be made in five pages....The childhood of a spoiled prince could be framed within half a page, a moonlit dash through sleepy villages was one rhythmically empathic sentence, falling in love would be achieved in a single word - a glance. (McEwan, 2001: 7)

Like God, she had the ability to create a world in which anything and everything was possible and it seems that she eventually manages to do so since, as it is revealed at the end of the novel, the artful narrative is nothing but the result of her imaginative powers brilliantly at work in the realistic rendering of fictitious events. Seen in retrospective, after the epiphanic reading of the epilogue, *Atonement* is nothing more than "a novel within a novel, supposedly written by its protagonist, Briony Tallis" (Hunter, 2011: 67), and it is by means of this understanding that we see the manipulative power of the narrative and the dangers of our "suspension of disbelief". This suspension of disbelief, however, is not done as willingly as we might think: we are cleverly drawn into it because of the authorial masterful use of fictional and metafictional strategies that obliterate our view of "reality" and actually make us think that what we read is true in the fictional universe of the novel. In Laura Marcus' terms, "[t]he shock of this knowledge, when it comes, exposes the extent of our investment as readers in 'the illusion of fiction'" (Marcus, in Groes, 2009: 92). Nevertheless, although "the blunt 'postmodern' ending" might seem "a betrayal of the novel's earlier subtleties", it is necessary in order to "preserve the balance McEwan seeks between the self-reflective fiction and the illusion of reality" (*ibid*., 94). The novel thus "ends with a short circuit between facts and fiction", making the reader aware of "the performative power of words, which are capable of making things happen in the real world" (Ascari, 2011: 92-94).

Therefore, one of the strategies that McEwan employs in order to explore the nature of fiction and the fictive has to do with "the realist framework in which the reader becomes fully engaged in the immediacies of the depicted events which are [only] retrospectively revealed to

be fictional". In other words, it is the temporal distance between experience and representation that leads to the overlapping of reality and fiction and, ultimately, to the "fictive self-reflexivity of the novel" (Marcus, in Groes, 2009: 84). Thus, in Marcus' terms, *Atonement'*s "retrospective composition" is responsible for "the intense jolt to the first-time reader", who realizes "at a late stage in the novel" that what s/he has been reading is nothing else than the final draft of a novel (*ibid*., 87). It is only now that the reader understands the deceitfulness of Briony's narrative, who has made the choice of extending Cecilia's and Robbie's lives in spite of the fact that they have not survived. In effect, it is "the insistent use of the prospect and retrospect" that enhances the power of the narrative and, paradoxically, both conceals and reveals this knowledge. The "present" is imagined "from the perspectives of a future which neither Cecilia, nor Robbie, the characters who are represented most fully in this mode of anticipated retrospect will in fact live out" (*ibid*.). It is "the unavailable future" (McEwan, 2001: 311), as Briony herself puts it in the third part of the novel.

3.1.2.2.2. The Multiplicity of Narrative Perspectives

The use of multiple perspectives is yet another means of achieving the realistic effect needed to trick the reader into believing. As Charles E. Scott summarizes it, "[i]n Atonement, McEwan tells a story, a direct and simple one in its primary outline, that is complicated by chance events, multiple perspectives and misperceptions" (Scott, 2007: 75). In Part One, for instance, both the apparently insignificant and the highly important events are presented from the – limited – perspectives of four different characters: Briony, Cecilia, their mother Emily and Robbie Turner. Although the telling of events seems to be objective due to the apparent third-person narrative that enters, in turn, their consciousnesses, we learn at the end that it was in fact Briony, the writer, presenting the others' thoughts and feelings from her own point of view. And yet, she chooses not to reveal everything she "knows" from her god-like, privileged position as a writer, and recounts everything that happens using the limited knowledge each character possesses according to his/her age and status in the story. What we deal with is "a new kind of narrative that hinges on the unexpected disclosure of a homodiegetic narrator towards the end of an apparently heterodiegetic text" (Palmer, 2007: 138).

Thus, Part One presents us with an innocent Briony, who really believes Robbie is a maniac. It is actually Lola that first characterizes Robbie by using this "hasty word that seals his

fate" (Ascari, 2011: 88), thus turning younger, naïve Briony against him. She "is trapped by the invasive vitality of her childish imagination, together with the mesmerizing word 'maniac'" (*ibid*., 94). As a result, she feels a compelling necessity to save her sister at any cost, even though Cecilia does not give any "outward acknowledgment of her deliverance" (McEwan, 2001: 157). Thirteen-year-old Briony is indeed sure that "[i]t was not about thanks, (…) it was not about rewards. In matters of selfless love, nothing needed to be said, and she would protect her sister, even if Cecilia failed to acknowledge her debt" (*ibid*.: 157-158). Later on, in Part Three, eighteen-year-old Briony has changed and fully grasps the extent to which she has affected Robbie's and Cecilia's lives. It is now that she understands her misjudgment of Robbie and that the need she had felt to save her sister only came from her complete – and tragic – misinterpretation of events. As opposed to her younger self who could not find the courage to speak out her doubts in order not to ruin their happiness (we have to remember her completely misplaced comparison of herself with a bride-to-be), she is ready now to tell "the truth", aware of the fact that it was her very silence that actually destroyed the two lovers' lives. And yet, seventy-seven-year-old Briony decides to make use of her creative powers as a writer in order to make *her* lovers live happily ever after in and by means of her novel.

We can't stop but wonder, though, if the crime Briony has attempted to atone for really took place in the actuality of the novel's fictional universe. Let's remember that, when her story, *Two Figures by a Fountain*, is turned down, she is encouraged to develop its plot which, predictably, merely consists of the fountain scene she witnessed when she was a child. Here are some of the suggestions she receives:

> The child at the window whose account we read first – her fundamental lack of grasp of the situation is nicely caught (…). For all the fine rhythms and nice observations, nothing much happens after a beginning that has such a promise. A young man and a woman by a fountain, who clearly have a great deal of unresolved feeling between them, tussle over a Ming vase and break it (…). The woman goes fully dressed into the fountain to retrieve the pieces. *Wouldn't it help if you, the watching girl, did not actually realize that the vase had broken?* (…) If this girl has so fully misunderstood or been so wholly baffled by the strange little scene that has unfolded before her, *how might it affect the lives of the two adults? Might she come between them in some disastrous fashion?* (McEwan, 2001: 312-313, our emphasis)

But this is, in fact, what actually happens in the narrative of Briony's last novel. It is as if she has taken into account all the editor's recommendations and has further developed the plot of *Two Figures by a Fountain* into the novel whose final draft we have been reading. To put it differently, the scene that took place by the fountain might have only been a pretext for the plot of her novel, merely the starting point of Briony's fantasizing about what *could have happened*, but not necessarily did (emphasis added). What if, in her attempt to get her story published, she follows the editor's suggestions and what we read is simply the figment of her imagination? Moreover, what if the fountain scene itself, which represents the focus of *Two Figures by a Fountain*, never happened either? It is, after all, presented as underlying the plot of a young writer's story, and it might as well be entirely fictitious. The reader, who has, by now, become cautious, is led to question the veracity of all "facts" and ultimately wonders whether there is something Briony needs to atone for. Odds are in favor of the negative answer since, as Worthington points out, the novel might only be the result of Briony's being "urged to exercise fictional authority, to *imagine* a transgression ('crime') necessary to provide the static narrative with 'backbone'". To put it differently, it is very likely that Briony has created a "truth", that she has created "the sin or guilt that the act of confession requires" (Brooks, quoted in Worthington, in Holler; Klepper, 2013: 159).

What we discover towards the end of the novel is that the multiple perspectives we have been offered by means of a masterful third person narrative might have only been Briony's exercise into writing as an aspiring novelist, her attempt at entering consciousnesses and rendering thoughts and feelings. Although almost every scene is presented through more than just one pair of eyes, it is actually Briony who "sees" the key events unfold, who is the privileged eye-witness of what happens. *Atonement* is, indeed, "a multi-perspectively narrated text" (Mauter, 2008: 4), but the focalizer is represented by Briony. Cecilia's and Robbie's perspectives are the result of their (or Briony's) imagination and Emily only appears to know everything, but her migraine-induced isolation prevents her from actually seeing what is happening. And yet, Briony's vision has a twofold meaning: due to her wild imagination, she often misconstrues what is in front of her eyes, being "explicitly presented as the fabulist, the maker-up" who has begun "to understand something of the complexity of the role of fiction in representing multiple and conflicting points of view" (Marcus, in Groes, 2009: 88). Highly relevant in this respect is the thought that crosses her mind when, as a child, she sees Cecilia and Robbie from her window:

"She sensed she could write a scene like the one by the fountain and she could include a hidden observer". Is it possible that *Atonement* is actually the result of her doing so? The highly ambiguous ending of the novel does not provide the reader with a definite answer.

In a nutshell, *Atonement* offers a wide range of perspectives, of which Briony's is prevalent. There are enough textual clues that make us aware of the change in perspective, since the point of view is quite different depending on age, sex and even social status. "Naïvely moralistic" (MacKay, in Caserio, 2009: 160) thirteen-year-old Briony, for instance, is genuinely shocked when reading Robbie's letter to Cecilia and she cannot or will not utter the indecent, immoral, even "c" word she finds there; even when she discusses the content of the letter with her cousin she spells the "brutal, perhaps even criminal word backwards". Moreover,

> [S]he tried to prevent it sounding in her thoughts, and yet it danced through them obscenely, a typographical demon, juggling vague (…). Naturally, she had never heard the word spoken, or seen it in print, or come across it in asterisks. No one in her presence had referred to the word's existence. (McEwan, 2001: 114)

Briony knew that "it was wrong to open people's letters", but "the shock of the message vindicated her completely" (*ibid*.: 113). "Something male … threatened the order of their household" and she was certain that "unless she helped her sister, they would all suffer" (*ibid*.: 114); this certainty, together with "[t]he very complexity of her feelings confirmed Briony that she was entering an arena of adult emotion and dissembling from which her writing was bound to benefit" (*ibid*.). And indeed, although these are 13-year-old's Briony's thoughts and feelings we are confronted with, there is a sort of distance and detachment in rendering them, as if they were presented – retrospectively – by a writer who has already benefitted from that initiation into adult emotion. Actually, by the end of the novel we understand that it might have been old Briony Tallis' perspective in disguise all throughout the novel, looking back at what happened, changing "facts" in her attempt at atonement. It is only when Briony grows up that she is able to grasp the effects of her previous deeds and realize that, for an adult, the letter might not have seemed so promiscuous, automatically turning Robbie into a fearful criminal. She now comprehends why her sister was not happy when she "saved" her from Robbie.

Perspective, thus, changes with age and sex, but it also changes according to the social status of the narrator/focalizer. For Emily Tallis, Robbie is nothing but the charwoman's son and

she can't understand why Jack has been helping him so much by putting him through college and planning to finance his medical training, as well: "[s]omething had been established which Emily took to be a criticism of herself. She had opposed Jack when he proposed paying for the boy's education, which smacked of meddling to her, and unfair on Leon and the girls" (*ibid*.: 151). Perhaps that is why Emily and the other adults are so eager to believe Briony's account of what happened to Lola; they all know it was dark and Briony could have misapprehended what she saw, but nobody (except for Cecilia and Robbie's mother, who are emotionally involved, everybody readily assumes that the family intruder is the one to have committed the crime) questions her statement. She herself has moments of doubt, but nobody else seems to:

> As early as the week that followed, the glazed surface of conviction was not without its blemishes and hairline cracks. Whenever she was conscious of them, which was not often, she was driven back, with a little swooping sensation in her stomach, to the understanding that what she knew was not literally, or not only, based on the visible. It was not simply her eyes that told her the truth. It was too dark for that. (…) her eyes confirmed the sum of all she knew and had recently experienced. *The truth was in the symmetry, which was to say, it was founded in common sense. The truth instructed her eyes* (*ibid*.: 168-169, our emphasis).

In other words, it is Robbie's letter that makes Briony conclude he is a rapist. In a way, 13-year-old Briony's was "the collective perspective", her standpoint corresponded to the ideas and norms of almost the entire social group she was part of. "The extent of" her "authority" is quite large, since her opinion "is authorized and accepted inside the fictional world", despite her age and the circumstances in which she witnessed the incident. This strikes the reader as strange since, for us, Briony, the focalizer, is not reliable; as recipients, we know her judgment is not credible, and, although we don't have all the "facts", we are "lead to build our opinion on the judgments of the more reliable figures", such as Cecilia and Robbie (Mauter, 2008: 8). In fact, "the individual perspective" belongs to Robbie and Cecilia who, although coming from socially different worlds, trust each other on the basis of their love; a love that had been verbalized in the library, in "the three simple words" like "signatures on an unseen contract" (McEwan, 2001: 137) whose terms one could not disobey or betray. Consequently, Cecilia will soon break away with her family, but she will never cease to wait for Robbie, as she promises him when he is taken away by the policemen; *"I'll wait for you. Come back"* will

reverberate all throughout Part II of the novel as the one thing still keeping Robbie alive, fighting for his survival.

3.1.2.2.3. Metatextuality by Means of Intertextuality

Another metafictional strategy employed in the novel consists of the intertextual references that are made all throughout the text. In other words, "[a]s a literary novel that relishes the pleasure in being self-aware about its fictionality, *Atonement* also reveals its many influences" (Ellam, 2009: 16). That is to say, "McEwan rediscovers intertextuality as a means to achieve metatextuality, that is to say, to meditate on writing intended as an ethical art and to stress the relation between imagination, reality and responsibility" (Ascari, 2011: 83). One of the explicit references is to Virginia Woolf, as the young aspiring writer's greatest authorial model; after emphasizing the positive aspects of Briony's narrative in *Two Figures by a Fountain*, the editor adds: "[h]owever, we wondered whether it owed a little too much to the techniques of Mrs. Woolf" (McEwan, 2001: 312). Indeed, it is *To the Lighthouse* that is most strongly echoed in *Atonement*, even in terms of the latter's structure: we first deal with the events taking place at the family's country estate, presented slowly and at length in Part One, then the novel deploys a middle section in which time passes and we witness the atrocities of the war, and, finally, we return to the house, where attempts are being made to complete whatever was left unfinished. *The Trials of Arabella*, which was written 64 years before, is staged at last and Briony has managed to finish the final draft of *Atonement*. Much like Lily Briscoe who, by the end of the novel, succeeds in creating a beautiful and lasting piece of art, Briony achieves immortality for her lovers in the pages of her book. In spite of the fact that she is suffering from vascular dementia, an illness that will ultimately throw her into oblivion, by means of her art she has achieved something that will last forever; she will eventually die, like everybody else, but her writing will endure the passage of time.

Yet again, one of the most pervasive intertextual references all throughout the novel is to E. A. Poe's *The Purloined Letter*. Indeed, Briony's wrongful reading of Robbie's letter to Cecilia functions as a key plot device, ultimately leading to her crime. In his "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'", Jacques Lacan considers "the letter's circulation as a concrete event with tangible consequences and as a signifier of unconscious desire"; In other words, he "differentiates between its literal message and its unconscious impact on the intended and/or accidental

recipient" (Pyrhonen, 2012). By reading a letter addressed to someone else, Briony determines a series of events that will tragically affect the lives of Robbie and Cecilia. When she hands in the letter to Cecilia, she decides to do it in her mother's presence, deliberately creating tension when her elder sister reads the inappropriate content. According to Lacan, the tension resulted from the reading of the letter depends on the knowledge each of the three participants possesses: "the interpersonal field is structured as a triangle: at its apex is a person who is ignorant of the tensions shaping the situation" - the mother; "on the triangle's right-hand side is a person who is partly cognizant and partly ignorant of these tensions" - Cecilia; "and on the left-hand side is a person who not only knows the causes of these tensions, but also perceives what the other persons know about the situation" - Briony (*ibid*.).

Although Briony thinks that having read the letter places her in a position of power, as Lacan shows, "custody of the missive" does not give her any real advantage: "she cannot control the letter's meaning, nor its effects" (*ibid*.). Her need for atonement will come precisely from the fact that she understands this when it is too late. Her position had only been one of partial knowledge and, therefore, she mistook Robbie's letter for a false clue to his guilt. If we take into account the private level of communication between Robbie and its intended recipient, Cecilia, "the letter is effective": Cecilia is freed "from restraint" and the two end up declaring their love to each other. But "the letter's effect on its accidental recipient, Briony, is shattering", and, what is more, her reaction is mirrored by the adults' response. As Heta Pyrhonen notices, "the letter's public significance is altogether different from its private meaning", since "the upper-class community finds it distasteful and difficult" to overtly express one's sexual passion (*ibid*.).

Nevertheless, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Purloined Letter* are only two of the writings that are intertextually alluded to in *Atonement*; "a book on books"; indeed, McEwan's novel under discussion shows us "how the way of telling stories, of representing the world and the human, changed in the course of the 20th century. The intertextual game is here pervasive" (Ascari, 2011: 92). This way, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, James's *What Maisie Knew* (1897) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), and L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* (1953) are also echoed in the pages of *Atonement*. It is by means of the strong intertextual and metatextual allusions that we are drawn towards the understanding of the difference between *Homo Sapiens* and *Homo Fictus*: as opposed to fiction, reality does not allow us to enter another person's consciousness. Hence, fiction writing becomes the solution for this inability, as Briony herself writes:

> It wasn't wickedness and scheming that made people unhappy, it was confusion and misunderstanding; above all, it was the failure to grasp the simple truth that other people are as real as you. *And only in a story could you enter these equal minds and show how they had an equal value* (McEwan, 2001: 40, our emphasis).

After all, fiction is not supposed to right wrongs, although it can present the reader with ethical dilemmas. Its great power consists of the ability to create worlds in which everything and anything is possible.

Briony's writing of the novel does not revoke her legal statement concerning Robbie and his alleged crime, which only "functions as a mask for a more genuine crime". In other words, "[e]ven though Briony's bearing of false witness appears innocent, it is a 'crime', because she could not have identified Robbie in the dark" (Ingersoll, 2007: 150). In the epilogue to her final draft of the novel she admits that "the crime" was hers and "Lola's and Marshall's" (McEwan, 2001: 371), but she actually does nothing to clear Robbie's name. Perhaps atonement is only a pretext for her irresistible urge to write fiction, an urge she has felt ever since she was a child. At the end, "Briony as dramatist or stage manager has come on stage from the wings to reveal herself as the crafting and crafty narrator/author" (*ibid*., 160). With its self-reflexive ending, the novel seems to mock the very idea of atonement, or the possibility of achieving it: "it was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point." Nevertheless, her God-like powers as a writer are rendered not only possible, but also certain, as, in her fiction, she can change the outcome of events according to her and her readers' interests: "[W]ho would want to believe that they [Cecilia and Robbie] never met again, never fulfilled their love? Who would want to believe that, except in the service of the bleakest realism?" (*ibid*.: 371).

For Briony, atonement, "the ostensible purpose behind writing the novel and the reason for the title" (Ellam, 2009: 9), is not possible because, "with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God. (…) There is nothing outside her… No atonement for God, or novelists" (*ibid*.). In fact, her supposed wrongdoing as a child (of which we are never sure, since she presents herself as the writer of the entire framed narrative) is never called a sin, but a crime, although one usually atones for the sins one has committed. Moreover, she never actually confesses it to anyone, except to the reader, who will only find out everything after her death, when her novel will finally be published. But it will not matter any longer; in Briony's own words, "[n]o one will care what events and which individuals were misrepresented to make a

novel" (*ibid*.). This way, "Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* resembles a whodunit, or at least a psychological thriller" (Ingersoll, 2007: 148) only up to a certain point, when Briony, the writer, decides to add the first-person narrative epilogue in which she explains the reader how she deliberately changed the outcome of the events. Kim Worthington argues that what McEwan actually emphasizes here is "the impossibility of attaining either truth or self-forgiveness via acts of (confessional) self-writing" (Worthington, in Holler; Klepper, 2013: 147). Briony ultimately recognizes her inability of writing the forgiveness she so strongly desires: "I gave them happiness, but I was not so self-serving as to let them forgive me" (McEwan, 2001: 372). It is "the [writing] self who tells and hears its own confession", but the self cannot forgive itself; the possibility of redemption can only come from the reader, who partakes in the confessional act and who, therefore, is expected to have an empathetic attitude.

3.1.2.2.4. *Mise-en-Abyme* and Foreshadowing: the Novel's Post-/Modernism

Ingersoll writes that, in *Atonement*, the "organization of time and narrative is critical to the working out of the plot"; he claims that the sense of impending evil pervasive all throughout Part One is the result of the "unsettling, rather inchoate narrative" of this opening section, which leaves "the impression that the story is being told by a narrator without a grip on the direction of the plot" (Ingersoll, 2007: 148). Robert McFarlane (2001: 23) argues along the same lines, suggesting that "the air of imminent calamity", "the idea of impending catastrophe", "so recognizably McEwan's", is maintained by the long opening first section. In other words:

> Occasionally seeming to surprise itself as it surprises readers with its bizarre twists and turns, the plot opens more doors to possible directions, endings and therefore meanings than it can ever develop. Because the point of view is limited third-person, readers expect a clearer sense of direction but are left with only an impression of impending calamity. Horror will happen here; it is less clear when or to which characters. (Ingersoll, 2007*:* 149)

Nevertheless, the plot is only seemingly without a focus; it is the deliberate working of a writer trying to lure her readership into trusting the veracity of events that are actually fictitious. The third-person narrative employed here is only a means to this end; it is merely one trick of Briony's, a critically acclaimed author who has just finished writing her last novel. What we

have been reading so far is nothing but the final draft of that novel, which makes us realize that all our assumptions regarding its plot might have been wrong. Thus, *Atonement* functions as "a mystery with the usual false leads and clues to which readers later discover they should have been paying more attention", and this is, indeed, an "astounding revelation" (*ibid*.: 151). Julie Ellam argues that the decision to remove the possibility of closure in the final section and "the way it is highlighted throughout that this is a work of fiction" are typical postmodernist strategies (Ellam, 2009: 18). Moreover, "[t]he reader suddenly begins to experience the giddy sense of vertigo in this *mise-en-abyme* of a narrative within a narrative"; what we actually deal with is modernist novel within a postmodernist framework:

> That is, Briony is a conventional modernist artist/narrator (it might be recalled that she was criticized for writing too much like her hero, Virginia Woolf), embodying the power of the artistic imagination to transform the raw materials of life into transcendent art. The framework, however, is postmodern, because this final revelation violates the contract into which the reader entered at the outset by suppressing its own provenance as authored by one of its characters. (Ingersoll, 2007: 158)

Brian Finney asserts that the narrative structure of the text actually supports Briony's final admission in the epilogue from the very beginning of the novel, when it is quite obvious that the protagonist's main interest is in writing fiction. In fact, every new page makes the reader "revise his or her understanding of what was revealed earlier, sowing seeds of doubt that make the text blossom into a set of irreconcilable uncertainties" (Matthews, 2006). In Finney's words, "[s]he [Briony] attempts to use fiction to correct the errors that fiction caused her to commit" and to warn the readers about the dangers of literally interpreting a work of fiction, irrespective of how realist it might seem. "*Atonement*, then, is concerned with the dangers of entering a fictional world and the compensations and limitations which that world can offer its readers and writers" (Finney, quoted in D'Angelo, 2009). D'Angelo argues that the implications of fiction go even further, since we must not forget that "Briony is herself a fictional construct" and the "reality" that she reveals at the end of the novel is not factual, either, it only exists "within the pages of the novel". Therefore, McEwan's revelation of Briony's "authorship" makes the readers aware of their relationship with the text. To put it differently, the novel does not only deal with the issue of writing fiction, but also with how this fiction is (supposed to be) read:

> Briony's crime has been widely read as one of literary imagination, but it is also one of poor reading comprehension. Nevertheless, the adult Briony has learned the value of reading, and she constructs a narrative that continually reminds the reader of this crucial role. (*ibid*.)

It is ultimately the reader who has the power of interpretation and judgment and the ability to decide whether atonement was achieved or not. Indeed, the novel presents us with the tragic consequences of "hasty judgment", but its self-reflexivity "turns this logic of shame onto the reader"; it is very likely that Briony committed a crime when she testified against Robbie, but, by the end of the novel, readers realize that, as witnesses, they have to testify about what actually happened and this seems increasingly impossible as they get to the last page: nothing is certain any longer.

The reader's being lured into the deceiving narrative resembles the way moths are drawn towards light; Emily Tallis wonders why these creatures are so vulnerable when she remembers the explanation given by a science professor: "it was the visual impression of an even deeper darkness beyond the light that drew them in". Their instinct is that of "seeking out the darkest place, on the far side of the light", although it is merely an illusion" (McEwan, 2001: 140). Readers, who are symbolically being drawn into the light of reason, are similar in this respect: even if fiction is "entirely illusory, the result of authorial fabrication, the reader is nonetheless drawn compulsively to know, to judge, and, above all, to moralize" (Matthews, 2006). This way, McEwan, and, for that matter, any writer of fiction, plays with the readers' presuppositions, tempting them to make erroneous assumptions. And yet, in *Atonement*, McEwan also warns his readers that "the objectivity of the narrative voice is deeply suspect" (*ibid*.); as it has been argued so far, he subtly but constantly does that from the very beginning of the novel.

McEwan's *Atonement* is also a historical novel in that it deals with the atrocities of World War II; the second part of the novel presents Robbie's retreat to Dunkirk, which is full of tragic episodes: as many innocent people die in horrible ways, Robbie struggles not to be psychologically affected by what happens around him, although his inner turmoil is incessant. He himself is wounded and will eventually die of septicemia, before being able to return to London and fulfill his love. The war scenes depicted in the novel are quite powerful and realistic and they account for the fact that *Atonement* is considered to be an example of "historiographic metafiction" (a term coined by Linda Hutcheon, 1988), "a quintessential postmodern genre".

James F. English argues that McEwan's novel under discussion is a striking case of contemporary British work which "tells stories about the past that point to multiple truths or the overturning of an old received Truth, (…) and adopts a parodic or irreverently playful attitude to history over an ostensibly normative mimesis" (English, 2008: 171). In the final section of the novel, Briony visits the Imperial War Museum reading room for the last time in order to check the final details of her research for her last novel. Likewise, she has the language of the manuscript verified by an elderly colonel and she has written to some of those who experienced Dunkirk with Robbie. Her research is meant to ensure the veracity of the events depicted in the book: "Like policemen in a search team, we go on hands and knees and crawl towards the truth"; nonetheless, her main interest is not in faithfully rendering historical facts, as she points out: "If I really cared so much about facts, I should have written a different kind of book" (McEwan, 2001: 360). Thus, in a nutshell, *Atonement* "provides an extraordinary moment of metafictional self-consciousness at the end which undermines historical novel writing in many ways by demonstrating the *authentic fallacy* of the realist novel" (de Groot, 2008: 221).

3.1.3. Self-Reflexive Fiction in Joe Wright's *Atonement* (2007)

It can be argued that *Atonement* represents a dual-success: both the novel and its cinematic adaptation have been highly regarded by critics and considered to be great achievements. Christopher Hampton's screenplay was nominated for an Academy Award, which does say a lot about the movie: the story it relies on is rich and intriguing, it deals with romance and war and the possibility of redemption, but more importantly, it focuses on fiction and the act of writing it. The film is very similar to the novel in this respect and this ensures part of its success: the task of foreground the literary medium in cinema is quite a difficult, not to mention the compromises of the filmmaker when it comes to the filmic devices and techniques that need to be employed in order to achieve this effect. And yet, as we are going to see in what follows, in *Atonement*, Joe Wright manages to foreground not only literature and fiction writing, but also cinema (and television). Indeed, he resorts to strategies that constantly remind the viewer of the fact that it is cinema s/he deals with, although the emphasis of the film is on meta-/fiction. Our investigation in what follows is meant to explore these strategies and to offer an explanation as to how their specificity enhances the movie's metafictionality.

The film begins by introducing its title, typed as if it were the title of a book. As we see the letters appear on screen, we also listen to the sound of the typewriter that is probably producing them; we therefore understand that this is diegetic sound, although the diegesis has not even begun. While the typing sound continues, it acts as a bridge towards the first shot of the movie: we now have in front of our eyes a doll's house that resembles the stage of a puppet show. Everything within the mise-en-scene is motivated, so we have to assume that this is not fortuitous, either: together with the sound of the typewriter, it makes us understand that what we are about to see is purely fictitious, the result of the imaginative powers of the God-like creator of the story. This first shot rapidly becomes an establishing shot, as the camera zooms out and pans towards the right to show us Briony's tidy room and Briony herself, typing at her desk.

Highly significant in the establishing shot is the fact that we can only see her back, so we have no access to what she is actually typing; in fact, we know nothing up to this point and the low-angle shot that introduces Briony places her in a position of knowledge and power. This will not last for a long time, though, since the camera quickly tilts and cuts to a close-up of Briony, this time using a straight-on angle that provides an impression of realism. Shortly afterwards, we finally get to see what she has been typing by means of an extreme close-up of her fingers and the page in front of her: "The End" of *The Trials of Arabella*, "by Briony Tallis". Seen in retrospective, the entire scene is meant to introduce Briony as a writer - one obsessed with order and control – who, like a puppeteer, will control the world that is in her power to create, manipulating characters and events to her own-liking. In a nutshell, "[t]he opening credits and the first scene inform the viewers immediately of the role the writer takes in this work" (Ellam, 2009: 71).

The pace of the actions soon accelerates as Briony is followed throughout the house in search of her mother; the tracking shot used in this respect is accompanied by increasingly louder non-diegetic music whose purpose is that of creating suspense. The typing sound is reintroduced when the scene reaches a climactic point: Briony is almost running through the house and we are able to follow her by means of a multitude of cuts. We witness many alternate medium shots, close-ups and long-shots and the intensity becomes almost unbearable, when the pace of the action finally slows down. Briony has a brief encounter with Robbie and then she finds her mom; surprisingly, she closes the door on the viewer, denying him/her access to what is about to happen. So far, we only have limited knowledge and it is ultimately Briony who controls the

amount of information we receive. As it fades out, the camera provides us with a limited point of view, similar to what we are able to find in Ian McEwan's novel. Nonetheless, the non-diegetic music continues, functioning as a sound bridge to the next scene: Emily Tallis, Briony's mother has read the playlet and is congratulating Briony as the music ends triumphantly.

Everything happens faster than in the novel; by means of ellipsis, all unnecessary action is omitted. Almost immediately, the film cuts to an establishing shot of the house seen from the outside and then the camera zooms out to an aerial shot meant to show us Briony and her sister, Cecilia. The effect of this shot is that the two appear to be very small; again, this sends us back to the novel, in which we find out about Briony's love of miniaturization and about her awareness of the writer's ability to create miniature worlds.

The film can achieve by means of only one image what the novelist needs to explain in many words: this is the filmmaker's way of pointing to the fact that his adaptation, although based on a book he reveres, is at least as good and powerful as the novel. Images can be symbolic as well, they show, but also tell, and they can be as subtle as words. The novelist's viewpoint, represented by Briony's words as she is speaking to Cecilia, seems to be quite the opposite though: a written story is preferable to a play (and for that matter, a film, as they are both performative arts), since words are sufficient in themselves, but the success of a performance depends on many people. By allowing both standpoints to be present in the movie and by constantly referring to the fiction-writing process, Joe Wright ensures the meta-fictionality of his adaptation, a film on (the writing of) books.

The sisters' discussion is interrupted by a cut to the rehearsal room; Briony faces Lola and the twins, but she is again sitting with her back towards the camera, on a higher chair than all

the other three. They – and the viewer – know less than she does and she means to assert her decision-making power and her capacity to control the entire situation. Although she is finally manipulated by Lola and the twins into accepting their conditions, she still wants to maintain her dominant position: "I'll be the director, thank you very much", she confidently states when her older cousin starts making suggestions. The rehearsal ends abruptly and Briony is left alone, when she hears a bee buzzing by the window; this inevitably draws her attention so she decides to go to the window, when she sees something happening outside, by the fountain. It is the same scene that will eventually lead her into committing her "crime". As Briony witnesses what is happening between Robbie and Cecilia, we see her reactions by means of shots-counter-shots. No word is being uttered and we therefore have to rely solely on Briony's mimic to get a glimpse of what she might think with respect to what she sees. Robbie and Cecilia are presented in a long shot, Cee with her face, Robbie with his back. This is highly suggestive of what Briony feels: on the one hand, she knows her sister, she trusts her and she could never accuse her of anything.

On the other hand, Robbie is only an intruder, the charlady's son there is still much to learn about. His intentions are hidden from her. However, it is Briony whose secretive nature is likely to represent some sort of danger for the others. The lighting used for this scene is relevant in this respect: there is brightness and openness outside (high-key lighting) and much less light inside (low-key lighting). Moreover, nobody can see Briony at the window, but she can see her sister with Robbie and this confers her plenty of power. She is also situated above the two and filmed by means of low-angle shots, which is meant to emphasize the same thing: the leverage belongs to her. The scene ends with her sister leaving and the buzzing suddenly reappears. It is this circularity that makes us wonder whether the incident Briony sees is not actually "Two Figures by a Fountain", the story she writes in the novel and sends to *Horizon*; the way the scene begins and ends is likely to be a means of cinematically emphasizing this, although in the film we are never shown (or told, by means of voice-over narration) what the story is about.

Something very similar to what happens in the novel takes place next: the scene is presented again, yet from a different, much more detailed perspective. We now understand how Briony's perception of things was extremely limited, allowing her to use her wild imagination so as to fill in the gaps. We have a jump-cut to Cecilia running: the camera tracks her in a full-shot, then cuts to a close-up of Briony. The pace of the action accelerates again due to the fact that there is almost no continuity editing; instead, the filmmaker decides to use parallel montage to present us with various shots of Cecilia and Briony, using only non-diegetic music as a sound-bridge. Again, Cee is surrounded by brightness, while her sister is in a less-lit environment: she knows less than her sister, but is particularly imaginative and fond of secrets. The shifting points of view are intended to emphasize this and represent one of the metafictional strategies used by both the film and the novel. Yet another means of achieving meta-fictionality is represented by the ever-present typewriter: "as the film progresses, it is writing that disrupts the conventions of the cinematic genre" (Cartmell, 2012: 28). After watching what happens by the fountain, Briony goes to the typewriter and, suggestively, watches it for a few seconds. We don't know what her thoughts are, but we can only imagine that she is probably thinking of writing about the scene she has just witnessed, of "fictionalizing" the event (as if it were real in the first place); after all, this is how she has been introduced to us from the very beginning: as a passionate and enthusiastic writer that is fully aware of her creative powers.

In spite of the adaptation's high fidelity to its source-text in terms of both plot and metafictional devices, it is cinema we deal with and Joe Wright has no intention of allowing the viewer to forget that. The film emphasizes the suggestive power of images and does not make use of too many words; on the contrary, not much is spoken – words are employed with scarcity,

only when absolutely necessary. As Deborah Cartmell (2012: 30) argues, "[t]he most powerful words are unspoken and appear as writing, typed on the page, and as cinema, in huge close-ups. Here the two media combine together to convey the power of the word". Highly illustrative in this respect is the scene in which Robbie writes his apology note to Cecilia. Parallel editing is again used to connect the two: both of them are silent and pensative, and the purpose of the montage is that of showing us that they are probably thinking about each other. In fact, the scene begins by means of a visual bridge: as Cecilia dives into the swimming pool, there is an immediate cut to Robbie coming out of the water in his bathtub. After a while, we see him typing at his desk, with the camera zooming in on him, but we do not know yet what he is actually typing. Nevertheless, what we hear is Briony's (silent – by means of voice-over narration, as if, for the first time, we had access to her thoughts) reading of "The Trials of Arabella". As the camera approaches Robbie, Briony's words are: "He was the most dangerous man in the world", which is, of course, not a random choice at all. It is only after this utterance that we listen to one of the first drafts of the apology note, as it will be quite difficult for Robbie to be able to write a satisfactory version. As the camera cuts to Cecilia preparing herself for dinner, no words are being uttered: there is only the diegetic music coming from Robbie's room and the sound of the typewriter. Then, we are finally offered a close-up of what Robbie is writing: the same words as in the novel, with the "c" word typed twice; it is now that the music reaches its climax, as if to suggest the yet unknown power of this word; it is a foreshadowing of the way in which it will shock Briony and affect her perception of Robbie, eventually contributing to her "crime". Obviously, Robbie is not aware of this, so his first impulse when seeing what he has written is that of laughing. As he does that, he looks over his shoulder and the camera cuts to Cecilia looking at herself in the mirror. Burger interprets this scene as follows: "It is as if the two lovers are sharing an intimate moment together"; moreover, "the film uses this romantic device, expressed through montage, to neuter one of the greatest taboos in the English language" (Burger, in Albrecht-Crane; Ray Cutchins, 2010: 157).

Robbie eventually manages to handwrite his note, as the voice-over narration proves: he is silently reading it, but we somehow have access to his thoughts. When he places the note in an envelope, we are not shown that it is the wrong one – we share Robbie's limited point of view. It is only later that we realize, together with Robbie, his huge mistake; as he watches Briony run away towards the house, we get an over-the-shoulder shot of Robbie in a rack focus, whereas the

13-year-old girl is in a soft focus: what matters is Robbie's reaction when he realizes what he has done, hence the focalization on him. By means of parallel editing, we are shown a close-up of the hand-written note that has remained on Robbie's desk; the non-diegetic music accompanying the scene is increasingly dramatic so as to suggest the gravity of the situation. When Briony gets to the house, she can't resist the temptation to open the letter and reads it; again, we hear the sound of a typewriter going at a very fast speed, but the moment Briony comes across the "c" word, the sound suddenly stops: she is, indeed, shocked by what she reads. She then runs into the room where Leon and Cee are talking and quickly hands in the note to Cecilia, as if she does not know what is inside and she does not care about it; apparently, all she cares about is hugging her brother, but the viewer knows this is a deceiving image. Like Briony, we have more knowledge than the other two characters in this scene. Soon enough, though, Cecilia is imparted this knowledge, too, as her mimic suggests; she is frightened and asks Briony if she has read the note. Her sister chooses to play with words and answers yes, but her answer is actually meant as a reply to a totally different question of Leon, asked almost simultaneously. We get a triple shot of the three that is highly revealing of the amount of information each character possesses: Leon is the complete ignorant, Briony is in a position of power, while this increases the tension for both the viewer and Cecilia.

The tensed atmosphere will be maintained at the beginning of the following scene, as Briony is nervously pacing back and forth in her room, completely absorbed by her thoughts, probably still shocked by the obscene word in Robbie's note. In a matter of seconds, the sound of someone knocking at the door will interrupt her train of thoughts and inevitably startle her. It's Lola, who starts crying, which determines Briony to tell her about the note. At a first sight, we might be tempted to think that this is empathetic, sensitive Briony trying to comfort her cousin; however, it is more likely that she is rather thinking of herself and trying to relieve some of the pressure of knowing such an awful "truth". Nonetheless, Briony's notion of the truth "is limited and impaired" and her conclusions "lack evidence" (Cartmell, 2012: 28). It is noteworthy that the girls' dialogue before Briony's sharing of her secret is presents by a series of shots-counter-shots, but as Lola finds out exactly what Robbie's words were, there is now a two-shot presenting the girls: no need for reverse shots any longer, they have become accomplices in accusing Robbie of being a "maniac".

The next scene that deeply impresses Briony and, thus, further drives her into committing her crime is triggered by an object as insignificant as a hair pin; it belongs to Cecilia, but it is now lying on the floor by the library door. Briony's passion for secrets and her desire to know and control everything are enough to make her enter the library and the next shot is a close-up on her trembling as she decides to go in. It's total darkness inside and we see less and less of Briony as she goes further inside, as if she herself is being engulfed by that darkness. Her reaction to what she sees is typical of her age and innocence: she begins to cry, which makes the viewer more empathetic than the reader. To a greater extent than the novelist, the filmmaker is bent on offering a solid justification for Briony's future crime; moreover, the word "crime" is never uttered in the movie, although it is repeated many times in the novel, both before the actual testimony that accuses Robbie - as a means of prolepsis - and after it – emphasizing the idea that atonement is really necessary. In what follows, we are offered a different point of view of what happens in the library, more detailed this time. The scene begins with Robbie waiting outside the house for someone to come and open the door for him. It is Cecilia that answers, presented by means of a low-angle shot: as opposed to Robbie, who is highly insecure, she feels confident, so she decides to take Robbie into the library, where they confess their love. The fact that Briony steps into darkness symbolizes her limited understanding of things, because of which she will ultimately trigger a series of events that are tragic not only for Robbie and Cecilia, but for the entire family as well.

Highly revealing of Briony's limited knowledge and of her predilection to misconstrue reality is the episode in which she is searching for the twins alone, holding a flashlight that only provides her with insufficient light. We realize that she is frightened when seeing her mimic and listening to her heavy breathing, but we do not have access to her thoughts; as opposed to the novel, in a typically cinematic way, images are prevalent: we only see her reactions to different stimuli and are tempted to draw conclusions that are probably false. This is, in fact, what the reader does, too, when interpreting the words of the novel; both the reader and the viewer tend to forget that what we are told or shown is not enough for a full glimpse of "reality". In this respect, the book and the movie are highly self-reflexive in their attempt to make the receiver aware of the danger of literal interpretation. Briony was definitely not aware of it, as she so quickly jumps to conclusions. Although the information she provides is not accurate, she confidently testifies to the police: "I saw him, I saw him with my own eyes". And yet, the filmmaker warns us again, for

the sound of the typewriter is reintroduced; as Julie Ellam (2009: 73) puts it, "[t]he clue remains that this is her story". Furthermore, Cecilia's testimony includes: "I wouldn't necessarily believe everything Briony tells you; she is rather fanciful"; then, as a sort of confirmation to her statement, the typewriter is heard again. It is important to mention that the novel offers sufficient insight into Briony's thoughts for us to know that she has doubts in what concerns Robbie's guilt. Conversely, the film is less generous in this respect, although there is a scene in which we get a glimpse of what she actually knows. They are all in front of the house waiting for Robbie who is returning with the twins and Briony is asked to go to bed; as she leaves the yard and enters the house, she is the only one surrounded by light, all the others are still in darkness. Robbie is soon taken away by the police and Briony watches the scene from upstairs; the sound of the typewriter is reintroduced to show the fact that this is the effect of Briony's fictionalizing of what she saw. Moreover, the predominant colors all throughout the scene are red and black, which is meant to suggest the idea that a crime is being committed at this very moment. As Briony looks out of the window, we see a religious icon on the wall in the same frame with her – it is there to symbolize sin and the need for atonement. The extreme close-up of Briony and the sound of the typewriter that immediately follow this shot hint to the fact that the only way for Briony to achieve atonement is by means of writing the novel *Atonement* itself.

In Andrew Ford's words, "[t]he typewriter in the film is an instrument of creativity, deconstruction, and ultimately a form of atonement" (Ford, 2010: 195).

What follows is actually the equivalent of the second section of the novel: the camera jump cuts to the war. Letters play a very important part all throughout the war scenes; Cecilia's words comfort Robbie and motivate him to fight for his life. Moreover, when Robbie finds out that Briony plans to confess the truth, he writes back to Cecilia: "the *story* can resume" (our emphasis). The choice of words is considerably important here: what we deal with is only part of a story, it is not real. By means of condensation, the film solely presents the war scenes that are most dramatic. The emphasis is on Robbie's injury; by the end of this rather short section, he feels increasingly bad, but, as it happens in the book, the fact that he does not survive and is not evacuated to London is not revealed yet. The section ends with a cut to Briony in the hospital where she is a trainee nurse, a shot that is again accompanied by the sound of the typewriter: we must not forget that Briony is a writer, perhaps *the* writer and creator of the story we have in front of our eyes.

The ending of the film is epiphanic for the viewer: in an interview Briony gives on television on the occasion of her latest – and last – novel being published, she confesses that *Atonement* is the result of her decision "to write the absolute truth", "no rhymes, no embellishments, no adjectives". In fact, it is Robbie who asked her to do this (during their – imaginary – meeting), "and then leave us be". Briony's answer is: "I will, I promise", which makes us wonder if this is not exactly what she has done in her novel, as a means of justifying her lack of honesty. "Leave us be" might mean "allow us to live happily ever after"; furthermore, the 77-year-old novelist rhetorically asks: "But what purpose could be served by honesty… or reality?" Our revelation is that the characters of her novel "are little more than figments of her imagination" (de Groot, 2009: 214). The movie then suggestively ends with Robbie and Cecilia

finally together, but the cinematic devices employed make us realize this never happened: the entire scene is filmed by using a color filter and the lovers' voices sound as if (too) distant. But the couple is at a cottage by the sea, with water taking up a lot of the screen space, which is probably not accidental, as "water washes away the sins" (Ellam, 2009: 73). Perhaps this is the filmmaker's way of suggesting that atonement was eventually possible. McEwan's novel proves to what extent fiction can be deceptive by means of words; Wright's film successfully uses images to the same effect. After all, the latter is ultimately a movie "concerned with the way a writer manipulates narratives" (*ibid*., 71). Moreover, *Atonement* (2007) is "an adaptation which draws attention to its status as an adaptation" (Cartmell, 2012: 33). It constantly alerts us "to the complex layerings of storytelling, authorship and temporality that make up the novel" (Buchanan, 2013: 43).

Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, together with its cinematic adaptation, is situated on the "borderline between fantasy and fact that is indeed the territory of fiction" (Kermode: 2001). The main focus of our investigation has been that of bringing to the fore the main metafictional strategies employed in both the book and the film, so as to pinpoint what is specific to each medium and what they have in common. The starting point of our analysis has been Linda Hutcheon's definition of metafiction, namely "narcissistic narrative", "narrative that is self-aware", "fiction about fiction" or "fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity" (Hutcheon, 1980: 1). Similarly, Patricia Waugh (1984: 2) argues that metafiction is "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". As our analysis tried to prove so far, the paramount purpose of both McEwan's novel and Wright's adaptation is that of laying bare their own status as fictional worlds.

3.2. Aesthetic Illusion and Transmedial Metareference in Fiction and Film: Paul Auster's *The Book of Illusions* (2002)

Considered to be a pioneer of postmodern metafiction, Paul Auster is one of those storytellers that have constantly been breaking the Brechtian fourth wall, carefully crafting works of fiction that incessantly draw the reader's attention to their own artifice. Self-referentiality plays a very important role in most Austerian novels, whose characters are either writers or "end up writing in order to tell the extraordinary story they have just lived through" (Thévenon, 2009). *The Book of Illusions*, Auster's tenth novel, is no exception; on the contrary, in a process of self-clarification, it doubles back on itself and – deceptively, indeed, as the title reveals - exposes the very process of writing. Since it "focuses on the telling of the story rather on the story told", it belongs to the literary mode of metafiction; in other words, "the telling of the story *is* the story" (Slocombe, 2010: 227). Moreover, "Auster's life-work is full of writers writing about other writers" and his texts themselves become each other's doubles" (Trofimova, 2014).The author himself considers the writing of fiction "as a secret place for thought and self-examination" and admits to having always been drawn to metafictional books, offering a compelling explanation: "They posit the work as an illusion – which more traditional forms of narrative don't - and once you accept the 'unreality' of the enterprise, it paradoxically enhances the truth of the stories" (Auster, in Hutchisson, 2013: xviii).

Auster consistently blurs fact and fiction within his narratives, and quite often his fictional protagonists seem to be versions of himself. From this standpoint, "Auster constructs postmodern autobiographies, and his characters share Auster's experiences" (Martin, 2008: ix). In other words, "it is precisely the boundary between fiction and actuality" that the novel is bent upon questioning (Birkerts, 1994). While this characterizes Auster's fiction in general, what is particularly interesting about *The Book of Illusions* is the fact that it resorts to a type of writing which is normally taken for granted in terms of verisimilitude and accuracy, namely academic writing. And yet, there is a danger inherent in all self—reflexive fictions, namely "they obey the law of diminishing returns: unable to suspend his disbelief, the reader starts to find all revelations merely academic" (*ibid*.). But although factual events and fictional anecdotes are so artfully interwoven, "Auster removes the mantle of authorial control and encourages his readership to question the concept of conventional truth" (Martin, 2008: 11).

Not only is *The Book of Illusions* metafictional, however, but it is also metacinematic, in the sense that it openly refers to and comments upon the cinema industry, it discusses the "shortcomings" of cinema in relation to the literary medium and provides a methodical, "inside" analysis of (fictitious) movies, including their filmmaking process and minute shot-by-shot hermeneutical descriptions. Which is why the current chapter sets out to explore this very type of transmedial metareference, with the main purpose of identifying the means of creating aesthetic illusion that are specific to each medium, of pinpointing what it is that brings fiction and cinema together and, perhaps most importantly, of laying bare the metafictional and metacinematic devices that are used to reveal all this. Nonetheless, since the novel is self-referential all-throughout and it displays the typically Austerian subtlety in concealing metafictionality while seemingly ostentatiously revealing it, it is essential that our approach should begin synoptically. Thus, the ensuing presentation of the plot is meant to facilitate the singling out of self-referential strategies and devices used to break the aesthetic illusion in the novel under discussion.

3.2.1. Solitude, Grief, Penance and Rehabilitation: the Story/-ies of *The Book of Illusions*

Set in the 1980s, the novel is written from the perspective of David Zimmer, a professor of comparative literature at Hampton College in Vermont, who, after losing his wife and two sons in a plane crash, becomes so utterly depressed that his life hangs by a single thread. He stays almost exclusively inside his house, forced into "inward retreat" (Poputa, 2016). As a response to his tragedy, he withdraws into complete solitude and experiences an alcoholically-induced state of oblivion that almost turns him into a living-dead. Alcohol deprives him "of any sense of the future, and when a man has nothing to look forward to, he might as well be dead" (Auster, 2002: 9). Six months after the accident, still a reclusive alcoholic, Zimmer comes across a clip from one of the silent comedies of Hector Mann, an actor missing from the 1920s, presumably dead. From this moment on, the narrative "traces the efforts of a narrator who both doubles and reverses the traumatic story of the missing person who is his subject" (Shostak, 2009). Watching that silent performance literally saves his life, as the narrator realizes that all is not lost for him: he unexpectedly laughs, so he is "forced to conclude that there was something

inside me I had not previously imagined, something other than just pure death" (Auster, 2002: 9). Since he lacks any other purpose, Zimmer decides to watch all of Mann's old films, but in order to do that, he has to travel long distances, sometimes as far as Paris or London. The absence of Hector Mann becomes "central" to the novel and, thus, "shadows and directs it": *The Book of Illusions* will follow "a narrative pattern of quest or detection in which the questing figure (the narrator) seeks the missing person", both literally and "in the figurative terrain of "knowledge and understanding" (Shostak, 2009). The novel turns into "a pastiche of the detective genre" (employing both standard elements and features pertaining to the Hollywood film noir), which is, of course, "a postmodernist trait" (Martin, 2008: ix).

The irony of Zimmer's "absurd and miserable life" is that he can now afford the luxury of all that travelling involved in writing the book: "the moment Helena and the boys were killed", he became "a rich man", paradoxically having to enjoy "the compensation jackpot, the giant booby prize for random death and unforeseen acts of God" (16). Although every penny of David's "sickening excess of wealth" had been "procured with blood", and in spite of the fact that, up to that point, money had been "nothing but a torment" for him, being able to afford anything represents freedom and "a cure, a balm to ward off a terminal collapse of the spirit" (17). At this point, however, according to the narrator's confession, the last thing he "would have predicted" was that he "would wind up writing a book about Hector Mann" (13). But he will indeed do so, writing the definitive book on the comedian's silent films: the documentation process is described in great detail, research is always done thoroughly and each and every movie is comprehensively analyzed from multiple perspectives.

His next project, nonetheless, will be quite different from the first: at the request of an old friend, he undertakes the translation of Chateaubriand's *Memoires d'autres tombes*, which is supposed to keep him busy for at least two or three years. Again, he works in total isolation, since, "for Auster's characters, the discovery and creation of the self is attained either through physical or mental confinement" (Poputa, 2016). But this isolation does not equal solitude, in Auster's opinion - translation, as opposed to any other type of writing, makes it possible to be both "alone and not alone at the same moment". An excerpt from "The Book of Memory" states exactly this:

> A. sits down in his own room to translate another man's book, and it is though he were entering that man's solitude and making it his own.

> But surely that is impossible. For once a solitude has been breached, once a solitude has been taken on by another, it is no longer solitude, but a kind of companionship. Even though there is only one man in the room, there are two. (Martin, 2008: 119)

As Zimmer, this time an *alter ego* of Auster the translator, settles into a comfortable, satisfying routine, his life is, once more, about to undergo a sea of change: according to a letter he receives one morning, it appears that Hector Mann is alive and has kept on making movies all along. The reader is offered a word-for-word transcription of the letter: "*Dear Professor Zimmer. Hector has read your book and would like to meet you. Are you interested in paying us a visit? Yours sincerely, Frieda Spelling (Mrs. Hector Mann)*" (original italics). Unsurprisingly, Zimmer is reluctant to take the truthfulness of the note for granted and, after reading it "six or seven times", he becomes "filled with doubts". But despite those legitimate doubts, he cannot help but reply to Frieda; in his own words, "a letter like that can't be ignored", nor can it be totally "dismissed as a prank", so, as he begins "to doubt those doubts" (4), he finds himself writing back. Nevertheless, his reply is cautious, on the safe side, so that he might not "be taken as a fool by the person who had masterminded the prank". His response is tactful and judicious, yet forthright: "Of course I would like to meet Hector Mann. But how can I be sure he's alive? To the best of my knowledge, he hasn't been seen in more than half a century. Please provide details" (5). As Frieda fails to send back those details, Zimmer concludes that the letter was nothing more than a practical joke: " I managed to persuade myself that it was a hoax" (77); therefore, he goes back to translating Chateaubriand and gets so immersed in the translation that he quickly forgets all about Mann.

Nine days later, Frieda's reply comes again as a surprise, but her approach is not very different from that of her first letter: her strategy is to renew the invitation as a warranty of her accuracy. She does admit that his doubts and reluctance are "perfectly understandable", but she claims that "the only way to learn the truth is to accept the invitation" to "Tierra del Sueño"; as expected, Zimmer's trust cannot be earned that easily, which means that he needs "proof" her statements are credible and that Hector Mann is indeed alive" (78). While both waiting and hoping for evidence, the narrator gets back to his old research material on Mann, which basically amounts to a few newspaper articles from the period he disappeared. In an attempt to convince himself that Frieda's assertion is true, he carefully re-reads every piece of information and realizes that most of it is "unreliable" (79), mere "imaginary possibilities". Almost everything "is

subject to change from one article to the other"; that is to say, as the narrator puts it, "put these contradictions together and you wind up with nothing" (83). Zimmer's disappointment is further enhanced by the fact that he does not receive any reply from Frieda: "after fourteen days of silence, I stopped giving her the benefit of the doubt. My skepticism returned (…). Hector was dead again" (93). Hence, he further isolates himself and continues working on Chateaubriand.

What happens next will turn the professor's world upside down, as one night he receives the totally unexpected visit of Alma Grund, Frieda and Hector's surrogate daughter, who comes to – forcefully, if necessary – take him to Tierra del Sueño; her motivation is simple and straightforward: Mann is dying and all the silent films that he has made after his disappearance are to be destroyed by Frieda within 24 hours of his death. As Alma has been writing Hector's biography for years now, she needs Zimmer to act as a witness and vouch for the veracity of the biographical data included in her book. Furthermore, as she argues, he is *the* expert on the actor's silent films because he wrote the definitive work on Mann's comedies, so no one is more suited than him to watch the films that were made after his mysterious disappearance. Unsurprisingly, Zimmer initially refuses, as he wants to avoid the investment of "too much hope" that could eventually lead to "too much disappointment" (101). Events, however, take a totally unforeseen turn: in a desperate attempt to convince Zimmer to join her, Alma threatens him with a gun. What she couldn't have known beforehand is that David is not afraid of dying; on the contrary, "an immense and horrifying beauty" opens up before him: suddenly, he has the tempting opportunity to be free of himself, of his life and death, free of everything that belongs to him (108-109). That is why when he realizes Alma's threat is empty, he gets hold of the gun and, certain that it is not loaded, pulls the trigger himself. The gun is actually loaded, however, and it is the fact that the safety catch is on that saves Zimmer's life. All in all, the highly charged suicide attempt makes him change his mind: he finally agrees to fly the next morning to Tierra del Sueño and check the validity of Alma's and Frieda's statements. Therefore, "like Hector's, Zimmer's life is altered by the contingency represented by a gun, but to opposite effect" (Shostak, 2009).

The night ahead brings about even more change for the two, as they begin a love affair and become close friends; it is in fact this love affair that offers David the possibility of a miraculous resurrection for the world of the dead he had been previously inhabiting. The flight to Hector's ranch is a great opportunity for Alma to share all the details of the actor's life, both

prior to his disappearance and following it. Everything starts to make sense for Zimmer, who is finally able to put all the pieces of the puzzle together and discern the factual from the counterfactual in all the articles he had read on Mann. It is worthwhile mentioning the fact that Mann's personal history contains multiples references to American culture:

> A Polish Jewish immigrant first to Argentina and thence to New York, Hector becomes a silent film actor whose career is threatened with the coming of the talkies because of his strong Spanish accent. In effect his position as an immigrant allows him to be successful only insofar as he remains silent or assimilates his speech to American English. Otherwise, he must erase his historical identity to succeed in Hollywood, the emblem of American visibility. (Shostak, 2009)

As it turns out, the reason for Hector's disappearance is quite similar to that of Zimmer's isolation and it has to do with death and guilt. Following the murder of one of Hector's lovers – pregnant with his child – by another one of his mistresses, he decides to vanish from the world and forever live in hiding. Thus, "he retreats into the silence signified and in a sense preordained by his film career" (*ibid*.). In a gothic tale of crime and guilt, characterized by a series of melodramatic turns, Hector takes on a number of false identities, until he ends up with Frieda. The woman recognizes him, but, part as gratitude for him saving her life, part due to her falling in love with him, she decides to marry him and support him unconditionally. Further on, what makes Hector want to become a movie director who, as a form of self-punishment, will make movies that no one will ever see, is the fact his (and Frieda's) two-year-old son dies after being stung by a bee in the orchard Hector himself had planted at the ranch. Against this background, as Frieda understands his suffering and empathizes with him, their agreement that she would destroy all his films immediately after his death comes as naturally as possible.

Once they get to Tierra del Sueño (that is, *Dreamland*), the professor discovers that Hector is indeed alive: "What astonished me most, I think, was the simple fact that he had a body. He had been inside my head for so long it seemed doubtful that he could exist anywhere else" (222). Thus, "at the very end of Hector's life, he and Zimmer meet, allowing their narratives to overlap and creating the conditions for their stories to be told" (Brown, 2007: 123). Mann's encounter with David, though, is limited to only a few minutes: it is Frieda that cuts it short, arguing that a longer conversation could severely affect Hector's poor health and hasten his death. However aware might the professor be of Frieda's hostility, as a guest in her house, he

has to accept her terms, on the condition that he and Mann would continue their discussion the next morning.

Mann dies that very night and Frieda becomes obsessed with keeping her lifelong promise to her husband: she has to destroy every movie that was filmed at the ranch, so that there is no evidence of Mann's work after his disappearance. Being "on the warpath" (233), she rushes everything: "She made this promise fifty years ago and today's the day she has to carry it out", if she wanted to eliminate the risk of having second thoughts. In other words, "if she stopped to think, she wouldn't be able to go ahead with it" (234). Consequently, the only movie that Zimmer gets to watch is *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, thoroughly described by the narrator. The fact that he is able to provide such a vivid description of the film is due to his thorough note taking during the screening, to which hypnosis will be added later as a means to remember every single detail. "The novel here stands as a testament to the power of the word in comparison with that of moving images" (Brown, 2007: 118).

Unwanted at the ranch, Zimmer goes back to Vermont and starts preparing his house for Alma's coming, as their plan is to start a new life together. But Frieda's obsession has yet another unpredicted upshot: she decides to destroy any proof that Hector lived and made films there. Indeed, "the limits of the destruction had been changed, pushed back to accommodate a broader interpretation of Hector's will". Therefore, after burning "screenplays, storyboard folios, costume sketches, set design blueprints, lighting diagrams, notes for actors" (302) and Hector's journals, without any notice, she turns to Alma's manuscript of Hector's biography. As Alma discovers Frieda burning the pages of her book, she accidentally kills her in a fit of rage, then kills herself because she realizes that there is no future left for David and her. Before committing suicide, however, she explains everything to David in a long faxed letter, which is actually one of the few remaining pieces of "evidence" that can support the veracity of the entire *Book of Illusions.* But the professor is willing to bet Alma had not left everything to chance and, according to her not overreacting – as expected – when Frieda destroyed Hector's films, it is very likely that she had made copies of the actor's late films. "The only theory that makes sense" to him is that "they're only missing, and sooner or later a person will come along who accidentally opens the door of the room where Alma hid them, and the story will start all over again" (321).

Even though the novel displays "a failure of resolution" and "a layering of ambiguities" (Brown, 2007: 51), it ends on a highly optimistic note, evidence of the narrator's rekindled hope that the verisimilitude of his story will eventually be proven. There is a major distinction between the narrator and his subject, namely the way "each responds to trauma": "Hector Mann gives himself over to the melancholic nihilism of survivor's guilt; his biographer, Zimmer, however, works through loss toward a surprising stability" (Shostak, 2009). This seems to stand, willingly and wittingly, in opposition with the postmodern collective mindset, "in which all universal certainties are replaced by perpetual doubt and anxiety", "lack of connection" and "collective annihilation" (Hassan, in Martin, 2008: 5). But the novel presents the story of the narrator's salvation, i.e. the story of how he comes to write *The Silent World of Hector Mann*, and the story of *The Book of Illusions* itself. At the same time, it brilliantly foregrounds Mann's "cinematic atonement" (Bewes, 2007), focusing on the virtues of cinema.

All the subplots of *The Book of Illusions* "abound with doubles" - "characters double other characters" and reflect back on themselves (Trofimova, 2014). While a very basic plot summary is possible, it hardly seems to do the narrative justice. The book's layers and layers of narration lead to a complex symbolism that revolves around metafictionality, turning the book into a thought-provoking work. Every detail is presented with utmost credibility and every doubt with seeming honesty, as if professor David Zimmer, the academic, were trying to obviate any possible suspicion or objection on the part of the reader. Like the detective figure represented by the narrator, "the reader is forced to search for clues in the text. The layering of authorship, the undermining of genre conventions and the deferral of resolution constantly move the ground beneath the reader's feet" (Brown, 2007: 51). By that, we mean both the reader that can be found within the enclosed fictional space of *The Book of Illusions* (the amateur or scholarly readership of *The Silent World of Hector Mann*) and the one the novel itself openly addresses by means of metafictional devices. Therefore, the purpose of our ensuing analysis is that of laying bare those metafictional devices by revealing the various multi-faceted story threads and their potential symbolic meaning. As it has been previously pointed out, not only will our analysis take into account the strategies used to flaunt the novel's metafictionality, but it will also detail the metacinematic means that are so often referred to in a book about the making of films.

3.2.1.1. Literature versus Academic Writing

The Book of Illusions is a first-person narrative whose story/-ies is/are revealed through a lens that is by no means ordinary. On the contrary, the narrator is a writer himself, namely the writer of the stories that make up Auster's novel under scrutiny. However, he is not just any kind of writer, although he does try his hand at different types of *écriture*: he is an academic writer. Thus, he belongs to a scientific community and is highly aware of his peers' expectations when it comes to disseminating results of his scholarly work. That is why, time and again, he ensures the reader that his account is as truthful as possible (and not necessarily that all the stories he writes about are true). It is perhaps his awareness of the expectations of his readership concerning his work that turns him into a scholar almost obsessed with being objective: for him, following a certain work ethic and constantly looking for pieces of evidence – be they merely textual – to validate his research are, undeniably, compelling. Consequently, his entire writing is hedged, he minutely describes his research methodology and always refers to and acknowledges the sources of his findings. Our ensuing analysis discuses each of these strategies in detail.

3.2.1.1.1. Hedging

Since academic writing needs to be mainly factual, to distinguish between facts and mere suppositions, one's statements need to be cautious. This feature, now widely acknowledged as characterizing scientific writing and called "hedging", involves the use of certain linguistic devices that enable the writer to show either hesitation (i.e. uncertainty) or indirectness. The main purposes for using hedging include: minimizing the possibility of one's claims being opposed by another academic, being more precise when reporting findings that are not entirely true, and acknowledging that one's claims are not flawless. There are many different ways in which language can be hedged; these include the use of modal verbs, nouns, adjectives or adverbs or the use of certain lexical verbs or expressions that denote caution or vagueness. Indisputably different from fiction writing, academic writing, which equals scientific research, is meant to probe for the "truth"; thus, the writer, a researcher, is in constant search of solid, unquestionable pieces of evidence to support his findings, and, whenever possible, relies on facts rather than presumptions. But, whenever in doubt, the researcher resorts to cautious vocabulary,

varying the strength of the claims he is making. Which is to say that, when bringing to the fore points that are not so definitive or results that are debatable, the – academic – writer needs to be careful and make claims that are proportionate to the evidence that supports his findings. In a nutshell, hedged language must always reflect the strength of the supporting data.

Thus, one of the most pervasive metafictional strategies employed in *The Book of Illusions* is the tentative language used by David Zimmer, the narrator, in order to legitimize his writing and to ultimately lend veracity to the novel itself - presumably a reliable account of what he had experienced. Like any other professor and academic writer, in his attempt to provide credibility to his work, Zimmer constantly describes the documentation process undergone for his writings and always acknowledges the sources he uses. Moreover, due to the nature of those sources (mostly newspaper articles and interviews), he is never gullible and, so as to provide solid arguments for everything he writes, it is necessary for him to doubt those sources first. Interrogation and deduction become the primary tools of his research – in a detective-like fashion, he uses all the clues he can find to solve the puzzle of Hector Mann's life. Each and every undeniable breakthrough makes him "proud of [his] little discovery" (86). His skepticism never abandons him, as he incessantly comments on the veracity of the information he is able to locate. His unwillingness to take things for granted, without checking their validity first, is manifest in the way he uses certain grammatical tools to either confirm their factuality or raise doubt over it.

Thus, for a better understanding of hedging as one of the primary metafictional strategies employed in *The Book of Illusions*, it becomes essential to discuss those grammatical tools which, from a linguistic point of view, enter the category of epistemic modality. *Grosso modo*, epistemic modality represents the way in which language users communicate their doubts, certainties and guesses, evaluating and classifying statements as true or false, possible or impossible. There is no denying the connection between hedging and modality, as both refer to the use of mitigating words or phrases that are meant to either lessen the impact of an utterance or increase it. Simply referring to these tools as words or phrases is not enough, however: it becomes necessary to operate a classification that is first and foremost based on the grammatical/non-grammatical distinction. Thus, there are several means of expressing modality in English and all of them are recurrent in *The Book of Illusions*: modal verbs and the conditional mood are probably the most frequent grammatical tools in rendering counter-/factuality, whereas

certain lexical verbs, nouns, adverbs and adjectives with a modal meaning are equally endemic to the narrator's language, but they are less grammaticalized. Let us take them in turn.

There are numerous instances in which the narrator's distrust is pointed out by means of modal, auxiliary verbs that indicate im-/possibility, probability or certainty. Indeed, when it comes to judging the degree of likelihood for a logical proposition to be true, Professor Zimmer makes wide use of modal verbs such as: *might* – "I might have smiled when I saw those words but I can't remember now" (4), *should* - "The laws of physics dictate that the ball should be there, but it isn't" (46), *could* – "It could be dirt; it could be ashes; it could be gun powder" (47), "That could have meant that her crying fit was over" (113), *must* – "Jacob must have been around ten at that time" (60), "I must have stayed upstairs for close to half an hour" (102), *would* – "It [Alma's work] would come into being only at the moment of its annihilation" (280). The narrator stresses his utter disbelief by resorting to the negative *couldn't* or *can't,* forms that *par excellence* show impossibility (or rather the speaker's perception of something as being impossible): "She [Frieda] couldn't have known that…those names couldn't have meant anything to her" (5); "You can't be saying that. It's not possible" (115). The same epistemic modal nuances are frequently expressed by means of conditional sentences, which reiterate doubt as the most pervasive feeling all throughout the book. When replying to Frieda's first letter, for instance, Zimmer is painstakingly careful to use the same cryptic style of the sender, arguing that: "I felt less exposed that way, less likely to be taken as a fool by the person who had masterminded the prank – *if* indeed it was a prank" (our emphasis, 4). Actually, the conjunction "if" – introducing conditional clauses - is one of the recurrent grammatical means of suggesting uncertainty: nothing is definite and everything needs to be taken with a pinch of salt.

More often than not, it is lexical verbs that highlight David Zimmer's caution when it comes to narrating events and describing state of affairs. The entire book displays a certain degree of forethought, rendered by verbs such as: *to look* – "It looked as if he had stepped out for a short walk and would be returning at any moment" (1), *to speculate* – "rather than speculate on what might or might not have happened" (3), *to assume* – "assuming that there was such a place, and assuming that the name of the town was real" (4), *to seem* – "it seemed to bring her back more vividly" (8) "he seems to live in a state of ironical bemusement", *to presume* - "were presumed to be lost" (12), *to predict* – "the last thing I would have predicted was that I would wind up writing a book about Hector Mann" (13), *to pretend* – "we no longer had to pretend that

we were looking at the real world" (15), *to probe* – "he was too intelligent not to want to probe, and little by little the truth came out" (22), *to believe* – "we believe what our eyes are telling us" (43), "I believe that decision was the beginning of the story I am trying to tell you now" (113), I had to repeat myself several times before she was willing to believe me" (115), *to suggest* – "the smile suggests more than" (52), *to feel* – "I felt as the book had been written by someone else", *to think* – "I don't remember what I said, but… I think that was it" (73), *to persuade* – "I managed to persuade myself that it was a hoax" (77), *to confirm* – "Columbia confirmed that they had been negotiating with Hector" (90), *to sense* – "I sensed she wasn't quite as weak or intimidated as I thought she was" (102), *to misread* – "I misread her comment" (105), *to misunderstand* – "I have misunderstood everything" (172), *to guarantee* – "there's no question about that… that's guaranteed" (208), *to make up* - "You're making this up!" (219) etc. The only certainty the novel can provide might be that everything is made up: Zimmer himself is a self-proclaimed inhabitant of a world of illusions.

Verbs are by no means the only morphological tool the narrator employs to lessen the impact of his utterances, as *The Book of Illusions* contains countless mitigating words and phrases that are part of Zimmer's tentative language. Nouns, for instance, are used time and again to show un-/certainty: "Various *stories* and *rumors* circulated about what had happened to him" (2), "it gave it an air of *credibility* (4), "the *evidence* becomes fairly compelling" (39), "his *hypothesis* is surely correct, but that doesn't mean more research isn't required (45), "the world was an *illusion* that had to be reinvented every day" (58), "my own *invention*" (74), "advocates of this *theory* acclaimed", "elaborate *conspiracy*" (88), "my *skepticism* returned" (93), "*the truth* was that most things made no sense" (198), "my *imagination* immediately started filling in the blanks" (303) etc. Adjectives and adverbs with a modal meaning are almost obsessively made use of in the novel: "that didn't make the letter *genuine*" (4), "I had made an *empirical* discovery, and it carried all the weight of *mathematical* proof" (10), "*apparently* mailed from somewhere in central Los Angeles" (12), "most of the information I had collected was *unreliable*" (79), "he has *obviously* put it there himself" (47), "*imaginative* possibilities" (80), "[it] doesn't mean that the story was any more *accurate* or *believable*" (81), "the one *certain* fact was that" (86), "the *only possible* conclusion" (93), "I *probably* would have been willing to talk to her" (100), "you have a right to know the *real* story" (101), "to be perfectly honest" (131), "he couldn't tell if the wind was *real* or *imagined*" (192), "that's *preposterous*… maybe so, but a lot

of people swallowed the story" (213), "perfectly *plausible* explanation" (214), "a *purely speculative* line of reasoning" (277). In addition, there are plenty other similar constructions that intentionally bespeak the narrator's conviction, suspicion, or utter disbelief: "there's no question that" (44), "Was it a coincidence? *Of course* it was, but…" (69), "some sources *went so far as to suggest*" (88), "*expect the unexpected*" (98), "she knew *beyond any shadow of a doubt*" (198) and so on. In a nutshell, the novel contains countless examples of such words or phrases, foregrounding, on the one hand, the plot's lack of verisimilitude and, on the other hand, the narrator's awareness of that.

The inference of this kind of language has to be that, as far as the fictional universe of the novel is concerned, nothing is to be taken for granted, although appearances are the only clue to the "truth". Perhaps that is why *doubt* is the one lexeme whose meaning permeates the entire narrative. Everything is questioned, everything is put to the tests of reason, logic and deduction. It seems that the narrator's biggest concern is that of not being "taken as a fool" (4), and whenever he no longer doubts the verisimilitude of something, he is still vigilant enough to overtly state the reason for his trust: "we are led to believe" (46). Nonetheless, as it has already been pointed out, Zimmer is generally "not sure of anything" (4). Highly illustrative in this respect is his reaction when receiving Frieda's first note, letting him know that Hector is alive:

> I read it six or seven times. When it picked up the letter again, I wasn't sure if the words would still be there. Or if they were there, if they would still be the same words. I was filled with doubts, and the next moment after that I began to doubt those doubts. To think one thought meant thinking the opposite thought, and no sooner did that thought destroy the first thought than a third thought rose up to destroy the second. (4)

As a rule, the pieces of information he is able to locate for his research are so misleading and unreliable, that the professor is left with nothing but doubt; relying on presumptions is simply not an option for him, so that the only possible conclusion, the only conclusion that makes sense is: "Put these contradictions together, and you wind up with nothing" (83). The novel is almost entirely built on such contradictions and the narrator displays an acute awareness of the danger of misinterpreting information and investing in the illusion of truth. In reality, when there is "too much hope", there is also the risk of "too much disappointment" (101), as expectations can easily be overthrown. It is the constant blurring between fact and fiction that contributes towards

thorough skepticism and the lack of any definitive sense of coherent certainty (Martin, 2008: ix). Consequently, Zimmer denies himself the right to wishful thinking and prefers skepticism instead. Therefore, what we deal with is "metaphysical detective fiction, which creates more mystery than it solves" (Brown, 2007: 50).

3.2.1.1.2. Research Methodology and Referencing

There are layers upon layers of narration in *The Book of Illusions* – the novel brings to the fore multiple story threads that are so artfully interwoven that the borderline between fictional truth and deceit becomes almost impossible to identify. There seem to be countless stories within stories, each of them playing a fundamental role in creating the overall impression of verisimilitude. In other words, each of them is meant to either enhance the semblance of truth of the previous one/-s, or overthrow it, debunking its/their illusory, misleading claims. There is "an emphasis on ambiguity and the question of what, if anything, constitutes a verifiable truth" (Martin, 2008: 14). Some of the most prominent narratives in the novel – that is, that they occupy most textual space - are the story of how *The Silent World of Hector Mann* came to be published, Mann's biography and the story of how Alma Grund came to write it and, of course, the framing narrative that encompasses them all, i.e., Zimmer's account of how everything happened – arguably *The Book of Illusions* itself. As it has been previously mentioned, the fact that the narrator is a scholar deeply affects the narrative in the sense that he always feels compelled to follow a certain work ethic and, thus, substantiate his writings, often presented as research, sometimes as mere life occurrences, sometimes as – unbelievable, almost fictitious – coincidences but never as fiction or fictional.

The Silent World of Hector Mann plays a significant role in the diegesis: on the one hand, its writing is prompted by Zimmer's state of grief and need for self-redemption and literally saves his life. On the other hand, it also triggers an unbelievable chain of events that add depth and complexity to the framing narrative. Each and every step in the writing of the monograph of Mann is described in detail, including the documentation process, fit for an academic of Zimmer's stature. After long journeys, thorough research of Mann's biography and multiple viewings of each film, followed by methodical, painstaking note-taking, Zimmer is able to write *The Silent World of Hector Mann*. Indeed, the professor is the only living person to have watched

all of the actor's silent movies and, once the book is published, it is widely acknowledged as *the* book on Mann, enjoying the befitting scholarly authority. The professor makes a point of emphasizing over and over again that his book is the result of serious academic research and that it solely relies on facts. The process of writing includes the search for information about Mann's life, but since it is scarce and mainly unreliable, Zimmer sticks to close "readings" of Mann's movies so that his academic endeavor be credible and carry scientific weight; thus, ostentatiously, the truthfulness of his account is reinforced time and again. His declared purpose is "to study and master the films of Hector Mann" and, in order to achieve it, he becomes so "thorough and conscientious" that his "single-mindedness" verges "on obsession" (27).

In Zimmer's own words, the entire process of writing *The Silent World* "was the life of a monomaniac, but it was the only way I could live now without crumbling to pieces" (*ibid*.). In other words, the object of his narration allows him to stop reenacting the trauma of his own past, and, thus, manage to "shift from melancholia to mourning". The only way to "make the past past" is to "accept the contingency of experience and engage in the working-through that permits him to gain distance on his own trauma" (Shostak, 2009). This clearly reinforces the therapeutic value of the narration. What the entire book renders in term of plot, after all, is the psychoanalytic process of working through trauma, which happens by way of the written word. The book displays "philosophical depth" and most of it represents "the uncompromising portrayal of the isolation of the modern man" (Gerald, 1994). The inner quest necessarily takes place in isolation because, as Auster himself argues, "It's simply a fact, one of the conditions of being human, and even if we're surrounded by others, we essentially live our lives alone: real life takes place inside us" (Auster, in Martin, 2008: 71).

Like any responsible academic would do, David Zimmer always provides the reader with valid sources or references for his research: *"According to the Los Angeles Herald Express of January 18, 1929"* (1); *"according to the police autopsy report"* (142). He readily acknowledges, however, that the data concerning Mann's life is fairly insufficient and unreliable: "whatever *small facts* I threw in came from standard sources" (3, my emphasis). The literary critic turned film scholar constantly supports the authenticity and truthfulness of his account by presenting us with exact dates, for instance: *"It began on March first, and that was the day I began writing my book"* (28). Since details about Mann's biography seem to be inconclusive and slippery, the author of *The Silent World* relies almost exclusively on the analysis of Hector 12

silent films. Moreover, since he "wasn't attracted to mysteries or enigmas", Zimmer is only interested in biographical facts only insofar as they shed some light upon the movies themselves. His main focus is that of thoroughly analyzing them: *"I didn't only watch Hector's films, I studied them".* The narrator's academic research ethics and etiquette surfaces all across the novel: he always uses evidence to support claims and findings, and his documentation is nothing but methodical and exhaustive. He singles out each and every detail of the movies that he watches many times over, until he knows them by heart, shot by shot, and uses extensive note-taking.

Although his book does not pertain to the field of literary criticism, his approach is typical of a man of letters, extracting symbolism everywhere. Take for instance, the way in which the scholar presents the hermeneutics of the moustache, being able to write pages and pages of criticism solely based on a few images. For instance, by using both literary and cinematic terminology, Zimmer is able to decode and describe *"the code of images"* represented by the moustache. Depicted in motion by means of extreme close-ups, the silent comedian's trademark becomes *"an instrument of communication, even though it speaks a language without words"*. Thus, the moustache constitutes *"a link to his [Hector's] inner self, a metonym of urges, cogitations and mental storms"* and, as Zimmer argues, *"the intimacy of the talking moustache is a creation of the lens"* (29). Mann's white suit fulfills about the same purpose in the silent films released before his disappearance. The actor's continuous attempts to keep it spotless always end up in failure, which leads to a comic effect comparable to that produced by the moustache in motion. Zimmer's (and Auster's) great feat here is his "trans-lation of film into literature, instead of the customary reverse" (Donovan, 2005: 149).

Zimmer's minute description of Hector and his charm on screen is similar to the analysis of a character in a novel; likewise, the contrastive analysis of Hector and other silent comedy actors is typical of literary analysis. The author of *The Silent World* is, thus, bent on finding symbolism in the moving images that are the object of his scholarly pursuit. As such, he argues that names of characters in the movies - and even the various names that Hector himself presumably takes up on the course of his life – bear particular meanings. Such meanings, deliberate as it might seem, become easily discernable at a closer look/ "reading": Mr. Nobody, an eponymous character in one of Hector's most famous films, becomes invisible after drinking some sort of potion. Zimmer considers this instance as a means of foreshadowing Mann's actual

disappearance, a sort of doppelganger, as the latter also vanishes without any plausible explanation whatsoever. After hiding, he becomes practically invisible to everyone, as his real identity remains concealed. Prior to becoming Hector Spelling (taking Frieda's surname), he assumes the identity of Hermann Loesser, which refers both his former name and to his failure to succeed in life and, thus, being a loser. What *Mr. Nobody* in particular and *The Book of Illusions* in general bring to the fore is one of the greatest achievements of Auster's fiction: "to combine an American obsession with gaining an identity with the European ability to ask how, and under what conditions, identity is stolen or lost" (Baxter, 1994).

In recounting and analyzing the silent films, Zimmer uses short sentences, mainly in the present tense simple, and a rhythm that is highly alert with the purpose of drawing the reader's attention, as if competing with the films. But the book also

> [r]eveals a previously unexplored lexicon for Zimmer. His earlier academic work explored 'books, language, the written word'. Now he has become an expert on silent film and cinema as a visual language (Brown, 2007: 121).

He uses plenty of film terminology, as a film scholar would do, yet the terms that he chooses are not overwhelming or undecipherable for the amateur readership: *"The camera follows her down to the floor, and then the image of her inert, recumbent body dissolves into a wide shot of Hector"* (44). His analyses are highly descriptive and lead to visualization, resembling, therefore, a film script. The minute details account for the veracity of what we read; the illusion of reality is further enhanced by the editorial / inclusive use of the personal pronoun *we*: *"we laugh at this"; "we believe what our eyes are telling us"* (43). As a matter of fact, the personal pronoun *we* is heavily employed by the narrator as a means of substantiating the results of his research on Mann's films and biography. Not only does this pronoun result in a heightened identification of the author/narrator with the reader/addressee, but it also performs the function of placing David within the scientific community – as a part of it, the researcher needs peer approval, so he takes great care in introducing his findings accordingly.

The narrator's "scholarly pursuit of the vanished film star" is meant to "erase an absence and "stands for his confrontation with trauma" (Shostak, 2009). "Born out of a great sorrow", Zimmer's scholarly project on silent films "had been no more than a pretext, an odd form of medicine that I had swallowed every day for over a year on the off chance that it would dull the

pain inside me" (5). This accounts for the obsession and mania that he invests in writing the book on Mann – what started as mere chance now becomes a deliberate, opportunistic act. The narrator engages in a sort of "therapeutic process" that enables him to accept "loss, contingency and thwarted desire" (Shostak, 2009). The history he (re)constructs acts as a provisional release, which is why he puts so much time and effort into the writing process, minutely described in the novel:

> I wrote the book in less than nine months. The manuscript came to more than three hundred typed pages, and every one of those pages was a struggle for me. If I managed to finish, it was only because I did nothing else. (55)

Generally speaking, Auster's novels are "inventions out of solitude" (Rudman, 1994), and *The Book of Illusions* is no exception. The author, viewed as a solitary individual without a life of his own (Martin, 2008: ix), works in total seclusion, although he chooses New York, specifically Brooklyn, for the writing of his book. "I wasn't really in Brooklyn. I was in the book, and the book was in my head, and as long as I stayed inside my head, I could go in writing the book". It is worthwhile mentioning that the publication of *The Silent World of Hector Mann* does not come easily: "unlike *other* books, scholarly books are not accepted" (58, our emphasis) immediately, so Zimmer sends the manuscript to several publishing houses and there is quite some time until he gets a positive answer. Meanwhile, he goes on living in seclusion and continues to consider work as the only possible cure for his grief, taking up the challenge of translating Chateubriand's *Memoirs d'autre tombe*. As Mark Ford (in Varvogli, 2001: 3) states, Auster is "obsessively concerned with the powers of solitude to convert socially induced anxieties of self-division into the creative forces of self-awareness". The spaces Auster foregrounds in his writing, be they large or small, are "always mysterious, incomprehensible and, at times, hostile towards the characters"; such spaces are very intimate, such as "one's room or one's mind" (Poputa, 2016), and Auster's protagonists are always "self-exiled" (Sarmento, 2017:123).

3.2.2. Metafiction and Metacinema in *The Book of Illusions* and Its Cinematic Adaptation

3.2.2.1. Intermedial Metareference in the Novel

In the novel under discussion, "the most consistent counterpart to the novel is cinema", although the attitude toward it is "deeply ambivalent" (Bewes, 2007). Filmmaking, "one of the first media to push the novel towards the margins, now dominates the discussion" (Donovan, 2005: 149). Zimmer warns the reader that he isn't "a film person" (13), and yet most of his narration is based on films. Silent films appeal to him in a distinct way, since *"they had invented a syntax of the eye", "a grammar of pure kinesis"*. One of the biggest advantages of watching such movies is, in Zimmer's words, the fact that *"we no longer had to pretend that we were looking at the real world"*. Silent comedies were *"like poems, like the renderings of dreams, like some intricate choreography of the spirit"* and they presented the viewers with images that were relieved of *"the burden of representation"* (15). Although watching the movies that would become the focus of his research is, according to the man of letters, merely a pretext, the ensuing analysis is so thorough and laborious that Zimmer could easily be identified with a film scholar. All in all, not only does the book lay bare the illusion of fiction, but, to the same extent, it also brings to the fore the illusion of cinema. As Peacock (2006) puts it, "uniquely, this book of illusions chooses to foreground a particular medium of representation and framing – cinema". Auster is, beyond any shadow of a doubt, "a fiction writer with a filmmaker's sensibility" (Golden, 2004).

During his discussion with Alex about his book on Mann, Zimmer acknowledges that it is almost impossible to write about films without employing the same type of means a film scholar (or even a director/screenwriter) would: *"I had to present them in purely visual terms"* (64). When analyzing the shots that make up the movies, the professor of comparative literature is compelled to admit that images possess immense telling power, the same as speech: *"her face tells us everything" (51)*. Nevertheless, we are also reminded that appearances can be deceiving: *"movies could trick us into believing any kind of nonsense"* (272), to the same extent as metafiction. The need for veracity applies both to Hector's life (as it is recounted by Zimmer)

and to movies Hector makes after his disappearance, but due to the bleak circumstances immediately following Hector's death, the narrator is only able to see one short film: *The Inner Life of Martin Frost.* Born in secrecy and supposed to vanish in secrecy as well, all the other films, together with all the pieces of evidence that they had ever been made, were readily destroyed by Frieda much sooner than expected.

Zimmer, who "was supposed to have been the witness of the witness [Alma], the independent observer brought in to confirm the accuracy of the witness's statement", was denied any chance of watching any other film but *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*. The only justification for choosing this film instead of another one is the fact that it is the shortest – there was little time left until Frieda would destroy all the films. The novel allots multiple pages to the minute description of *Martin Frost*, both in terms of content and in terms of cinematography. The fourth film Hector had made at the ranch, shot in black-and-white, was unveiled at a private screening on August twelfth 1946. Since the film featured comic elements, it was "the only one of his late works with any connection with the slapstick two-reelers of the twenties" (241). The running time was forty-one minutes and, as the credits at the end revealed, *Martin Frost* was written and directed by Hector Spelling, the cast members were Norbert Steinhaus and Faye Morrison (Alma's mother), and the cameraman – C. P. Grund (Alma's father). Frieda had designed the sets and the costumes. It is worthwhile mentioning the fact that Zimmer is able to present the film in such great detail because prior to the screening Alma provides him with a notebook and a pen:

> I scarcely looked down at the page as I wrote – scribbling in the mad telegraphic shorthand I developed as a student – and if much of my writing bordered on the illegible, I eventually managed to decipher about ninety or ninety-five percent of it. It took weeks of painstaking effort to make the transcription, but once I had a fair copy of the dialogue and had broken down the story into numbered scenes, it became possible to reestablish contact with the film. (271)

The film is a love comedy and, at least in part, it sticks to *"the time-worn conventions of the genre"*, but it takes Zimmer a while to settle into the film and figure out what is going on. One of the impediments is represented by the immediacy of the film's setting: Tierra del Sueño and the grounds of the Blue Stone Ranch. Since the action is filmed with "*deadpan realism"* and there is "scrupulous attention to the particulars of everyday life", the professor fails to perceive *"the magic embedded in the heart of the story"* (242). The setting became an element of the fictional world and, according to Zimmer, his *"mind was slow to make the adjustment. Again*

and again, I saw them as they were, not as they were meant to be" (243). Finally, he manages to understand that the real setting is "the inside of a man's head" and that Claire, the woman walking into that head, is merely ephemeral, a figment of the man's imagination. Zimmer's reflexive comments allude to the idea posited by both Bazin and Lukacs, according to which cinema disintegrates "the distinction between original and reproduction, possibility and actuality, art and life"; in other words, cinema "challenges ontology itself" (Bewes, 2007).

The narrator presents the unfolding of the action in utmost detail, to the point that we feel we are reading the very script of the film: shots, camera movement, sound, lighting, voice-over narration, actor lines, and so on; we have unimpeded access to each and every one of them, and we are also offered a scholarly commentary on their use in the film: "the film begins with a slow, methodical tracking shot through the interior of the house" (244); "a long shot is followed by a close shot"; "the camera pans from a close-up of Martin's face to a wide-shot of the trees"; "we hear the wind rush through the trees"; "we listen to the clatter of the keys, watch him work on the story from a variety of angles and distances" (246); "the picture fades to black" (247) etc. the editing, the succession of angles, the varied tempos, the visual surprises, all of them are incorporated into the description of the film. Zimmer recounts the plot elements at such a lively pace and with such vivid imagery that it becomes almost impossible for us to stop reading until we find out the story of Martin Frost; more often than not, we feel that we can actually visualize the film as well. It seems that Auster's novel is "defined by a wish that the novel might achieve the 'immediacy' that the other, supposedly more sensuous form, enjoys so effortlessly" (Bewes, 2007). Undoubtedly, the success of this storytelling technique is rooted in Auster's own abilities as a scriptwriter and filmmaker. What Bökös (www.theroundtable.partium.ro) contends is that:

> In the novel, descriptions similar to scripts function as sites of medial interactions and overlappings, linking the cinematic and the literary media. The scripts introduced into the literary text have the potential of exposing a rupture in the 'texture' of the classical literary narrative, thus creating a hysteroscopic space, in which Hector Mann's fictitious films are connected to a specific identity development.

The Inner Life of Martin Frost is an account of what happens to the eponymous central character, who is a novelist, like Auster himself. The protagonist is one of the many author figures/surrogates that "proliferate in Auster's works" (Bewes, 2007). Tired after spending three years working on a novel, Martin accepts the Spellings' invitation to spend the summer alone at

Tierra del Sueño and, thus, get the rest he needs. Soon enough after his arrival, he decides that he would write a short-story, but all of a sudden, to his and the viewer's/reader's surprise, a woman appears both as a distraction and as a source of inspiration. Claire *Martin* (the author's emphasis), a student preparing for a philosophy exam, pretends to be an acquaintance of the Spellings. Allegedly, she had been given the key of the ranch without knowing that Martin would be there, too. Although his first reaction is that of showing disgust, he understands that Hector and Frieda *"are perfectly capable of getting their signals crossed"* and starts accepting Claire, on the condition that she allows him to continue working. At the beginning, they work in separate rooms, but gradually become more and more intimate: Claire *"seduces Martin, but she goes about it in such a clever, lighthearted way that it never occurs to us to question her motives"* (253).

Erotic moments are overtly presented in the film, although in 1946, the conventions of moviemaking would not have allowed for that. But since Hector was out of the commercial loop, *"he could let the camera go on rolling for as long as he liked."* The bare flesh seen in the love-making scenes is not shocking for Zimmer, on the contrary; he finds them *"rather subdued, almost poignant in the banality of its intentions"* (254). As the story progresses, Martin experiences growing love for Claire: we see them together in a number of places around the house, but we are also provided with abstract details that apparently have no connection to the story whatsoever: a pot of boiling water, a puff of cigarette smoke, a pair of white curtains fluttering in a half-open window. In other words, we deal with a *"procession of dreamlike images"* of steam, smoke and wind, insubstantial things that continue *"to march across the screen"*; in Zimmer's words, the camera *"is telling us not to trust in the surfaces of things, to doubt the evidence of our own eyes"* (255). What the reader/viewer is warned about is that Claire is merely a muse, "she is insubstantial, a figment and a metaphor" inhabiting the land of dream (Tierra del Sueño) which is, of course, Martin's art (Shostak, 2009). In addition, by confirming that "the mise-en-scene" of the film is nothing but "the inside of a man's head" (243), "Auster dissolves the indiscernibility of actual and virtual in cinema into a merely subjective ambiguity". (Bewes, 2007)

Martin and Claire's romance continues despite the fact that he finds out the Spellings had not sent her there; moreover, they did not even know her. Martin loved her, although he was unsure of how one could love someone they did not trust. He argues, with an irrefutable logic:

> She was stronger than everyone else, wilder than everyone else, smarter than everyone else. I had been waiting to meet her all my life, and yet now that we were together, I was scared. What was she hiding from me? What terrible secret was she refusing to tell? A part of me though I should get out of there – just pack up my things and leave before it was too late. And another part of me thought: she's testing me. If I fail the test, I'll lose her. (258)

When Martin finally decides he is not going to ask any more questions, but rather "make a leap of faith" (262), Claire gets sick. A series of shots and reverse shots reveal Martin sitting at his desk, looking out the window at the woman, about to lose her conscience; the scene culminates in the camera zooming in from the window, "bringing Claire's inert body into the foreground" (262). The next morning, although she wakes up with a high fever, she seems to be in good spirits, so she urges Martin to keep on writing the story. A moment later, there is a cut to Martin at his desk again, accompanied by a particularly intense sound: "keys clattering at a furious rhythm, great staccato bursts of activity" (263). As Zimmer notes, the following scenes are formed of a succession of detailed close-ups showing Claire's sickbed, then a wide shot of her room showing Claire in which things seem to be returning to normal. But the next day, when Martin goes to check in on Claire, she looks weak again, barely conscious, burning with fever, bundled up under a pile of blankets because of the cold in the room. He makes a fire in the fireplace and then shares with her the summary of the short story he is writing.

"Propelled by the force of her command", Martin immediately goes and types the last pages of the story. This initiates a series of crosscuts (parallel montage) between the two characters and, in the space of twenty shots, as Zimmer describes, we and Martin finally understand what is happening. The – fictional – film uses montage in a relatively conventional way: "cinematographic shots of the writer banging away on a typewriter … are juxtaposed with actions which may or may not be anything more than a scenario being played out in the writer's head and on his page" (Bewes, 2007). Zimmer actually numbers the shots and presents them sequentially: "4. A close-up of Martin's fingers, typing"; "A close-up of Claire's face… weaker than before"; "8. A medium shot of Martin. He types the last word of his story." "9. A medium shot of Claire. She shudders slightly – and then appears to die" (266). In what follows, close-ups of the fireplace show us the dying embers; Martin reacts insanely, looking possessed, "out of his mind with fear" (267). He crumples up the pages of his story and feeds it to the fire, as the only

possible solution. Yet another sequence of shots and countershots gradually reveal Claire being brought back from the dead.

What Martin has done is "buying her back": "Thirsty-seven pages for your life, Claire. It's the best bargain I've ever made. (….) Thirty-seven pages and it's only words" (268). The scene finally shifts to the outside and after only a few seconds, the film ends abruptly:

> It ends with "images of time stopped: the wind doesn't blow, leaves are still, and the screen goes black. It is the no-time of traumatic repetition, Martin Frost's commitment to being frozen in the irretrievable past. Martin's bargain echoes Hector's; he can only delude himself that he has recovered the lost object of desire by retreating into silence, effectively emptying himself of desire. (Shostak, 2009)

In the series of reverse shots presented by Zimmer, Claire's fever is worsening "correlatively with the progress Martin makes on his work" (Bewes, 2007). Furthermore, Claire's miraculous revival is only possible if Martin burns the pages of his story. This could be interpreted as an allusion to Hector's plan that his film be destroyed after his death; likewise, it could be referred to Chateubriand's desire that the publication of his Memoires should take place posthumously. Timothy Bewes (2007) argues that "the valency of the posthumous gesture consists in an indifference to posterity and a commitment to the event, life – the intimacy between art and life – rather than to the documentation of the event, or art as such".

In the sequence that presents *The Inner Life of Martin* Frost, Auster "narrates Zimmer narrating Mann narrating Frost narrating his story" (Max, 2002). It is, beyond any shadow of a doubt, "the work of an author who specializes in literary gamesmanship" (Martin, 2008: 14). The detailed analysis and description of this particular fictional film, together with the interspersed comments on Hector Mann's other silent films, prove the novel is metacinematic to the same extent as it is metafictional. Literature and cinema, brought together by Zimmer's scholarly pursuit, are so intertwined in the book that, although half of it about movies, the very core of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* is fiction writing itself. In other words, *The Book of Illusions* foregrounds both fiction and film and manages to provide the reader with invaluable insight into and metacommentary upon the two different forms of artistic expression. Silent films are described as poetical and the protagonist – a professor of comparative literature – writes a scholarly book on them. In fact, he also writes Hector's biography for Alma and part of his own

autobiography. The writing is suffused with instances of myse-en-abyme, layers upon layers of narration as part of both the plot of the novel and the plots of the films presented in it. Timothy Bewes points out that:

> The preoccupations that drive Auster's fiction "are those of the novel as such; and yet those preoccupations are themselves formed, in part, by the appearance of cinema (…). Even when dealing directly with cinema, as in The Book of Illusions, Auster does so as a novelist, looking to cinema with envy, as to a promise of redemption that will achieve the immanence of the epic.

In other words, "Auster's fiction seems determined to play out the demise of fiction itself; yet this determination has its contrary structurally embedded in it" (Bewes, 2007). It is the book's "intense literariness", "its intellectual rigor and elegance of literary design" that represents one of Auster's most acknowledged trademarks (Gerald, 1994).

Characters seem to be aware of their fictional status in both media presented in the novel and narrators of both are visibly engaged in the act of composition (Stonehill, 1988: 30-31). The novel contains textual self-reference all throughout, which is to say that the reader is constantly reminded that the book is a book. There are "overt references to the act and nature of writing" and the novel is full of "self-conscious subversions of traditional notions of storytelling" (Varvogli, 2001: 2). The thematic concern with the relation between fiction and reality characterizes both the novel and the films that are part of its fictional universe. Literary and film criticism are frequently included in the text, as metafictional and metacinematic devices. Thus, what *The Book of Illusions* does is

> [l]ook longingly toward cinema as a symbol of everything that writing is unable to achieve. Cinema, in other words, is inserted into *The Book of Illusions* as a potential solution to the ethical-aesthetic incommensurability that defines the novel as such. However, this conception of cinematic possibility is so novelistic, so deeply implicated in an economy … of expiation and redemption, that (…) in fact, cinema in Auster functions to bind his work even more firmly to the novel. (Bewes, 2007)

3.2.2.2. Transmedial Metareference in *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* (2007)

Released in 2007, written and directed by Paul Auster himself, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* features David Thewlis as Martin, Irene Jacob as Claire, Michael Imperioli as Jim Fortunado and Sophie Auster as Anna James. It can easily be categorized as belonging to the genres of comedy, drama and fantasy. The film was generally not well received by the critics, as "the movie's style is aggressively literary, with plummy third-person narration (read by Mr. Auster) that over-interrogates every development" (Zoller Seitz, 2007). In addition, the film's ambiguity, the confusion it leads to in the sense that it offers no easy answers, contributes to its unsatisfying reception it gets from its audience. As it appears, indeed, the film is nowhere near as captivating as *Smoke* or *The Music of Chance*, critically acclaimed, yet not directed by Auster himself. With a running time of 1h 34m, it is based on the expansion of the original story, which is faithfully rendered. The first 35 minutes of the film are, thus, no surprise to the viewer who has also read *The Book of Illusions*, whether we speak of plot elements or cinematographic achievement.

As Hollywood reporter Richard James Havis (2007) puts it, "Auster tells a middlebrow tale of bourgeois angst". Martin Frost, a successful New York-based novelist who has just finished writing a novel that took three years of his life, moves into his friends' house in rural Portugal with the intention of getting the rest he so much needs. As the narrator lets us know, he wants to do nothing but "live the life of a stone" (perhaps an allusion to the Blue Stone Ranch of *The Book of Illusions*). Soon enough, though, he finds inspiration to write a short story and decides not to leave the house until he finishes it. "His literary solitude is interrupted by the arrival of the effortlessly seductive Claire", who claims to be a relative of the owners. As it turns out, she is actually is Frost's muse, "whom he has written into existence" (*ibid*.). The ensuing plot stays very close to the source text, up to the point where Martin has to destroy his manuscript in order to have Claire live. What the film adds to the plotline of the book is a heavy-handed, somewhat clumsy attempt to answer Claire's question when realizing the manuscript is gone: "Tell me, Martin, what on earth are we going to do?" who must return to her mystical netherworld when he has finished his novel. Whereas, at this point, the fictitious film included in *The Book of Illusions* ends abruptly, this scene represents the departing point for expansion in the real movie.

The subsequent story, thus, is based on Martin's efforts to keep Claire with him and vice-versa. He decides to start writing everything he can remember about her. This time he only uses pen and paper. While writing, he appears to be haunted by flashbacks of Claire, presented in slow-motion, black and white, devoid of diegetic sound, although Claire is laughing or talking in them. Then, the viewer is presented with a series of dream-like scenes which reveals close encounters between the two, although each of them ends with Martin waking up and realizing Claire is not actually there beside him. One of the representative scenes in this respect is one in which Martin dreams of talking to Claire through a locked door. It is in this particular shot that Claire explains the reason for her disappearance: "They called me back. I didn't have any choice". Although they cannot see each other, the audience can see both of them at the same time. What is intriguing is that there are no walls whatsoever and the characters talking through the door are actually surrounded by complete darkness. As we are going to find pretty soon, the entire scene is part of Martin's dreams. Yet, such episodes are surrounded by ambiguity: As Martin puts it at the end of the film: "Those aren't dreams. They're real".

James Fortunado (Michael Imperioli) enters the plot of the movie as a welcomed addition, as he seems to be there to brighten up the mood and too offer a solution to Martin's problem. A plumber with a writer's ambitions, Fortunado first comes to fix the boiler in the house, then, after finding out that Martin is actually a novelist "with published books", decides to

ask for his feedback. A – poor - writer of all kinds of stories, science fictions, horrors, whodunits, political thrillers, and so on, James looks up to Martin and asks for his opinion on three representative samples of his work. He is the one who notices that the novelist looks depressed, as he has no one to talk to in that big old house. Therefore, since the latter needs "a little diversion, he offers to teach Martin "screwdriver darts", a captivating outside game that he and Jack (the owner of the house) had invented. Whoever loses the game has to give the other 50 $, as "if there's no risk, there's no enjoyment". Martin loses 10 consecutive rounds and he offers to write James a 500 $ check. But he cannot take the money without offering some sort of compensation, so he decides to bring his niece, Anna, to cook and clean up the house for Martin.

As it turns out, although James is not aware of it, Anna is his literary muse, "a spirit, a phantom being", but sending her to him was a mistake, since she is totally unprepared for it. In Martin's words, "she looks half dead". But "she has the voice of an angel" and she perform impressively, as she would prove Martin. It is worthwhile mentioning the fact that Anna (James – the same last name as Fortunado's first name) is played by Sophie Auster, model, singer and actress, the writer and director's own daughter. As Martin sends Anna to have a bath and change into women's clothes, she meets Claire down the hallway, who explains everything to her. When Anna comes back into the living room, she makes Martin a proposal he cannot refuse: he has to blindfold himself with a scarf in order to be able to talk to Claire. He is not allowed to see her yet, but he is allowed to touch her. The three decide to leave for New York where, for another year, Martin will not be able to see Claire. To break the spell completely, he also needs to take care of Anna, who lacks the education of how to behave "like a person". The movie ends on the note that there is room for a happy resolution after all.

The entire movie is filmed and edited using basic camera movement and a limited number of techniques. The director seems to prefer that all major episodes, including the incipit, are introduced by a panning camera, which almost always follows a rightward movement. Cut to the outdoor environment are very frequent, with the camera following the same pattern, only that it also moves upwardly, revealing tree branches against the sky. The same type of non-diegetic music accompanies most scenes, acting as a sound bridge that connects everything together. It is very rarely that we deal with diegetic sound other than the characters' dialogues: birds chirping or crickets singing outside, or fingers typing inside. In addition, neither the music nor the sound change their rhythm significantly to create suspense or show change of mood. From the

establishing shot, at the beginning of the film, to the end shot, the viewer is presented with images that are rather dimly lit, especially those that are part of the indoor shots. It is almost as if a color filter were applied to the camera, perhaps with the purpose of revealing that what we are looking at is merely part of man's imagination, of his dreams. Very often, the figures of the characters appear in semi-darkness and there is obvious interplay between shadow and light. The ambient light, usually soft, placing the pro-filmic space out of focus, is employed time and again.

There is an homage paid to photography at the very beginning of the film, when the camera pans to show the viewer in close-up some family photographs. Color filter is applied to all of them, which probably signifies both the passage of time and the fact that we are being introduced to a dreamland. If we pay close attention to the establishing shot, we see Paul Auster himself, as a cameo appearance, in one of those photographs. He is the one that will constantly comment on the diegesis as the voice-over narrator. This is, in fact, one of the critics' complaints about the film: there is too much voice-over narration, and too little action. We are always told what the characters are thinking, but it is seldom that we are allowed to watch them voice their own thoughts. There is little action taking place in the movie, despite its length, and dialogue is scarce for a medium that, generally speaking, heavily relies on it. Almost everything that we know about the characters and the action comes from the voice-over narration. The pace of the movie is quite slow and it is quite often that the viewer feels the camera lingering a bit too long at the end of the scenes. It is almost as if the movie violated the Hollywood's continuity system: the action does not always unfold as a smooth and continuous flow across shots. Instead of remaining unobtrusive, the camera draws attention to its mediating presence. Stillness, lack of motion and, ultimately, lack of action re reinforced time and again.

Most likely, the implication of the director's choices is that everything unfolds in the writer's head. In other words, what we see on screen is the product of his imaginative, artistic endeavor and, seemingly real, nonetheless purely fictitious. The setting, thus, denotes meaning beyond the literal, gaining expressive force, otherwise difficult to pinpoint. The viewer is offered multiple clues so that s/he can "read" the images in his key. There is a lot of emphasis placed on books all throughout the film; a single instance out of many is the very establishing shot – half of it focuses on the large bookcase in Jack and Diane Rastall's house. Moreover, we often see the eponymous character typing, handwriting, or reading. The first part of the film, which is very faithful to the source text, brings Claire and Martin together partly because of the interest both of

them share in books. James Fortunado himself states that his greatest passion is reading, which is why he admires Frost so much. Thus, much of the imagery present in the film has to do with writing or reading. A significant number of close-ups reveal Auster typing. The typewriter, which stands as a symbol of (meta-)fiction, is even allotted one unusually long shot: filmed against a black background, surrounded by nothing, as if it were the key to the understanding of the entire movie.

One of the few differences between the source text and the cinematic adaptation is the fact that the latter follows the rules the regulations brought about by Hollywood. Erotic scenes are conventional in the sense that intercourse is implied rather than shown and nudity is scarce. Of course, this is because Hector Mann's movies are not made for any audience at all, so he can afford to break the norm. Unlike Auster, who overtly brings about movie industry financial issues in *The Book of Illusions*, Mann is out Hollywood's commercial loop. Another turn in the adaptation is represented by Claire's obvious French accent, of which there is not mention whatsoever in *The Book of Illusions*. Irene Jacob, who has a dazzling performance, is a Swiss actress that reminds us of or at least hints to "l'écrivain Americain", as Auster was so often called by the critics. In terms of cinematography, however, one feels compelled to acknowledge that the film is quite underwhelming, overly thought of. The editing is somewhat forced, the action of the movie does not flow as natural as one would expect. This is probably why most

critics argue that *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* (2007) is too "literary" to work in cinema. Auster's background might be the culprit: he is, indeed, an author rather than an auteur.

3.2.3. Illusion as a Leitmotif of the Novel

The very title of Auster's novel communicates instantly to the reader and is at the same time intriguing and alluring. Its keyword, "illusions", hooks the reader and successfully foreshadows the quintessence of the book whose universe s/he is about to enter. Marked by uncertainty all throughout, *The Book of Illusions* is full of references to the illusory nature of truth. Although it is supposed to be a true or at least truthful account of the way in which the book was written, the reader is warned not to suspend his/her disbelief. "It becomes difficult "to ascertain where fact ends and fiction begins" (Martin, 2008: 23). After all, fiction has nothing to do with reality, no matter how realistic it might seem. The (feigned) verisimilitude of Auster's book is reinforced time and again, but there are also countless ways in which the narrative undermines it, pointing to the work's fictionality and, thus, questioning its realism. There is an overwhelming concern with the relation between fiction and reality and there are hints everywhere that what we are reading is not supposed to be true, despite the ostentatious efforts that the narrator makes to prove otherwise. While it posits "the recurring postmodern question of definitive truth" (Martin, 2008: 10), the novel is mostly about creating the *illusion* of veracity, as the title suggests.

What is more, by its metacinematic strategies, the novel sets forth a similar warning when it comes to films. Indeed, one of the manifold meanings of the title is connected to the – illusory – practice of filmmaking. Films manage to provide "a refuge from the emotional and corporeal reality (….), by bringing the imaginary content of life to the fore" (Brown, 2007: 154). What *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* demonstrates is that both film and fiction can present the inside of a man's head, the space of dream and illusion. What is more, film can be used to suspend the realty of loss, as it happens in Hector's and Zimmer's case, respectively: "In dreams and under the conditions of illusion, the points of reference upon which self can be built remain stable and constant in a world that is typified by change and uncertainty" (*ibid.*: 158). In other words, *The Book of Illusions* investigates "to what extent 'illusions' obscure an underlying reality, or serve only to mask the fundamental lack of any reality" whatsoever (Peacock, 2006).

The novel is interspersed with lexemes belonging to the semantic field of illusion, which could be meant to warn the reader not to suspend his/her disbelief, that is, to follow *"the gags with a kind of measured detachment"* (10). Words such as "dream and perfume", "phantom lives", "hypothesis", "mystery", "enigma", are frequently used as part of the hedging repertoire of devices and as a comment upon the (un)truthfulness of the story. The need for tangible proof and concrete evidence is perhaps most obvious in *Mr. Nobody*, one of the films presented in great detail in the book. "*Essentially a film about the anguish of selfhood*" (53), as the novel, too, is openly so, Mr. Nobody presents us with Hector confronting his own annihilation. At the end of the film, in fairytale fashion, the spell is broken and he becomes visible again. As one might expect, he recoils in confusion and the only way to convince himself of that is by looking in the mirror: "*The proof is in the mirror, and if he is able to see his reflection, he will know that the nightmare is over"* (52). The mirror as a symbol of truth is ostentatiously used here to debunk the illusion that had meticulously been built up to this point. Seeing is believing, the scene highlights, and yet, there are many facets to reality, some of them inaccessible to us (Husserl's phenomenological cube), as Zimmer contends later in the novel: *"no doubt there was much I missed as well"* (221).

It is not haphazardous that the very silent film that would change the narrator's life forever is titled *The Teller's Tale*, as a metafictional allusion and metaphorical reference to the novel itself. There are several hints that the reader might not be paying attention to each and every clue proving the story's counterfactuality: "*A narrator spoke over the action, but I was too immersed in the scene to catch everything he said.*" Moreover, the analogy between Mann, Zimmer and Auster and, consequently between film and literature, becomes apparent while taking into account the narrator's description of Mann's silent films: *"He wins the audience over to his side"* and once he "*has achieved that, he can get away with anything"* (32). Presenting fiction as truth and, within the boundaries of the diegesis, truth as fiction becomes the major concern of the novel. Zimmer's authorial credo could be summed up in a nutshell: *"With so many imaginative possibilities to choose from, why be hemmed in by the facts?"* (80).

Isolation, a recurring theme in Auster's writings, as an act of disconnecting oneself from the social world, helps probe "the relationship between writer and writing". The writer both isolates himself from the world and tries to write about it, in an attempt "to reconcile the contradictions of observation, experience and transcription"; writing is inherently an act of

memory (Brown, 2007: 21). Hence, in order to substantiate his writing, not only does Zimmer leave "the room", but he also leaves the city and the country, "entering a wholly alien environment" (*ibid*.: 119). This way, the narrator becomes lost "in the nowhereness of everywhere" (*ibid*.: 36), anonymous, alienated, completely disconnected, not at all a flâneur, yet necessarily out of his room. It is not just Zimmer who isolates himself from the world; Hector does the same thing in his search for inner peace, which he ultimately finds in "a space of imagination and illusion". Tierra del Sueno, seemingly "a place beyond the rational capacity of cartography", although locatable and mappable, is a utopian, almost unearthly space (Brown, 2007: 129). Blue Stone Ranch is nothing more but a reference to an illusion. What is more, according to Baudrillard (quoted in Peacock, 2006), it would be impossible to know where the real world begins, precisely because "there is no real world".

3.3. Storytelling in Fiction and Film: "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story" versus *Smoke*

Motto: *"As long as there's one person to believe it, there's no story that can't be true"*. (Auster, in Harrison, 2005: 583)

Storytelling, the act of recounting an event or a series of events which can be either real or fictitious, is considered to be a literary device. It is, in other words, what Gerard Genette calls "narrating". He distinguishes between story ("the totality of the narrated events"), narrative ("the discourse, oral or written, that narrates them"), and narrating (Genette, 1990: 13). Therefore, story is not the same thing as narrative. To what extent, then, can we speak of storytelling when it comes to film? Words have their "telling" power, whereas images have the capacity of "showing". However, as Marina Grishakova and Marie-Laure Ryan argue, the concept of narrative "expands its language-based, book-supported literary fiction to other disciplines (discourse analysis, history), to other semiotic modes (visual, kinetic, aural) and to other technologies (painting, photography, TV, film)". This is what the two authors call "intermedial storytelling*"* (Grishakova; Ryan, 2010: 1). As the two authors acknowledge:

> The study of storytelling abilities of different media has not awaited the technological explosion of the 20th century, nor indeed the development of a scholarly concept of medium. Plato's distinction between mimetic and diegetic modes of storytelling and Lessing's reflections on the expressive power of temporal and spatial art forms can be regarded as foundational for the study of narrative mediality (*ibid*).

There are many voices who claim that, essentially, there is no common ground between literature and the cinematic genre. J. Hillis Miller, for instance, contends that: *"The picture means itself. The sentence means itself. The two can never meet"* (quoted in Elliott, 2003: 64). Similarly, Giorgio Bassani states that cinema and literature are *"two fundamentally different media"* (quoted in Della Coletta, 2012: 4). However, Marina Grishakova and Marie-Laure Ryan have an opposing viewpoint; they argue that the concept of fiction has definitely been extended *"beyond its literary homeland"* (Grishakova; Ryan, 2010: 1). As a testimony that verbal and visual representation can co-exist, Claude Gandelman has entitled his book: *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts* (1991). In both verbal and visual narratives, there is tension between the iconic and symbolic components of the medium, between the "performative" (telling), and "cognitive" (showing) aspects of narration.

Nonetheless, George Wilson states that one should be very cautious when extending key concepts of narratology to the storytelling medium of fiction films. In his own words:

> The basic concepts of narratology have been purported to apply univocally to different instances of particular narratives, including narratives represented in different media. This involves the assumption of structural isomorphism; fiction and film are not structurally isomorphic, however; the idea of cross-media isomorphism is extremely dubious (Wilson, 2011: 20).

While it is true that the verbal and the visual can coexist, telling, namely, recounting is different from showing, that is imitation, representation. Even though "every film involves a visual telling of its story", "it is not obvious that this mode of visual telling constitutes a true analogue to narration in literary fiction". Nonetheless, movies are the result of editing: previously filmed shots are put together in a "chain", and this "gives film an additional discursive character, a character that potentially suffices to establish a dimension of fictive pictorial narration" (ibid, 21).

As “panglobal facts of culture”, narratives respond to the enduring need to “humanize time” and make sense of our temporal experience by structuring it into a comprehensible form. In this sense, both fiction and film are “arts of narrative action”, storytelling arts defined by their intrinsic narrativity, that is their ability to shape a mere succession of events into a coherent and meaningful whole (White, quoted in Della Coletta, 2012: 14). In Narrative Discourse Revisited, Genette asserts that a story can be either told or “transmitted by an extra-narrative medium”. Moreover, he argues, “there is room for two narratologies”, a “thematic” one, meant to analyse the story or the narrative content, and a “formal” one, which is to analyse the narrative “as a mode of ‘representation’ of stories”. “The sole specificity of narrative lies in its mode, not in its content, which can equally well accommodate itself to a ‘representation’ that is dramatic, graphic or other”, he explains (Genette, 1990: 16).

Films come from many sources; they can either be the result of original ideas or they can be based on a historical event. Literature is one of the most common points of departure for the cinematic genre. More often than not, it is plays that are adapted into films because they represent a performance genre and, as such, they actually require very little adaptation. Novels are a fairly common source as well, although the text has to be reduced and dialogue created. Short stories, that also make it into films, require the greatest creative effort of adaptation, since they have to be somehow expanded. Nonetheless, it is precisely their conciseness and the use of the implicit that favor the possibility of expansion. Short stories become particularly attractive because they presuppose expanding rather than contracting. This was also the case with Paul Auster’s “Auggie Wren’s Christmas Story”, first published in 1990, that, no later than 1995, would become *Smoke*, the result of the collaborative creative endeavor of Paul Auster and Wayne Wang.

“Auggie Wren’s Christmas Story”, written in the first person singular, begins by clearly stating the fact that the story does not belong to the narrator; he only retells it, and in doing this he claims he is as faithful to the original story as possible: *“I heard this story from Auggie Wren. (...) The whole business about the lost wallet and the blind woman and the Christmas dinner is just as he told it to me*” (Auster, in Harrison, 2005: 578). This is meant to create the impression of authenticity, to state that what we are about to read is not fiction, but actual experience. It is by means of these warranties of authenticity that the author creates the illusion of truth and manages to engage the reader’s active participation. Early on in the story, the reader learns about

how Paul and Auggie became friends. The narrator is most likely Paul Auster, which means that the story is, to a certain extent, autobiographic. Like the author of the short story himself (whose first name he shares), the narrator is a successful writer; he often goes to the cigar store where Auggie works behind the counter. By confirming his status as a book writer, the narrator maintains the illusion of truth.

Auggie considers himself an artist as well, as Paul concedes: he has been *"photographing time"* for many years, both *"natural time and human time"* (*ibid*., 579), by taking a color photo of the exact same view every morning at seven o'clock, irrespective of the season or weather. Although Paul's impression of Auggie's work was that it represented *"the oddest, most bewildering thing"* he had ever seen, *"a numbing onslaught of repetition, the same street and the same buildings over and over again, an unrelenting delirium of redundant images"* (*ibid*.), he finally has the revelation, the epiphany that it is art, and understands the symbolic value of the photographs. This is, in a nutshell, how the two become friends.

As the story goes on, we find out that the narrator has been commissioned to write a short story that would appear in the *New York Times* on Christmas morning. Nevertheless, he finds it very difficult to write such a story, since, he argues, *"Christmas stories were no more than wish-fulfillment dreams, fairy tales for adults"*; what he really wants is to write *"an unsentimental Christmas story"*, but that is *"a contradiction in terms, an impossibility"* (*ibid*, 580). It is Auggie Wren, however, that saves the day for him and delivers him the story he needs. The same story that Paul Auster will publish as "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story" and that will be the source of expansion in *Smoke*. The fact that we are reading the story referred to in the text is meant to be a proof of its veracity.

The story goes as follows: *"one day, in the summer of seventy-two"*, a young man that *"must have been about nineteen or twenty"* came in Auggie's cigar store and started stealing, taking advantage of the fact that the store was quite crowded. It was not much until Auggie noticed *"what he was up to"* (ibid, 580-581) and immediately ran after him, without being able to catch him. However, the boy had dropped his wallet along the way and this would trigger an unbelievable chain of events. Feeling rather sorry for the boy, Auggie decided not to call the police and have him arrested; he decided to keep the wallet instead. Months passed by and, at Christmas time, Auggie was alone, *"stuck with nothing to do"* (ibid, 581). This is when he decided to go and return the wallet. The address he finds in the wallet turns out to be Granny

Ethel's, who is Robert Godwin's (the young man's) grandmother. She is blind and seems to mistake Auggie for Robert: *"I knew you'd come, Robert. I knew you wouldn't forget your Granny Ethel on Christmas"* (ibid). Auggie decides not to tell her the truth and the two spend a wonderful day together. They willingly suspend their disbelief and decide to play a game that will turn out to be a source of happiness, especially for Ethel. In Auggie's words:

> I wasn't trying to trick her, though. It was like a game we'd both decided to play – without having to discuss the rules. I mean, that woman *knew* I wasn't her grandson Robert. She was old and dotted, but she wasn't so far gone that she couldn't tell the difference between a stranger and her own flesh and blood. But it made her happy to pretend, and since I had nothing better to do anyway, I was happy to go along with her. (ibid, 582)

What happens afterwards is *"positively crazy"*, as Auggie himself admits. He goes to the bathroom and sees about seven new cameras there, probably *"the work of the real Robert"*. *"Just like that"* (ibid), he decides to take one for himself. Granny Ethel had fallen asleep in her chair, so he leaves the house without saying goodbye. The camera Auggie stole from Ethel house is the same camera that he uses every morning for his photographs. Auggie concludes by asking Paul: *"And now you've got your Christmas story, don't you?"* Although the latter agrees, it is the "wicked grin" spread across Auggie's face" that makes him doubt the veracity of the story: *"I couldn't be sure, but the look in his eyes at that moment was so mysterious, so fraught with the glow of some inner delight, that it suddenly occurred to me that he had made the whole thing up.(...) I had been tricked into believing him"* (ibid, 583).

The short story belongs to the category of metafiction; what we deal with is a commentary on the art of writing itself. Post-modernist, reflexive, "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story" is also an example of mise-en-abyme. We have a framing and framed narrative which are artfully interwoven in a final story that questions the very limit between truth and fiction. Like Paul, the reader is confused; s/he can no longer tell what is true and what is not. There are two epiphanic moments throughout the short story; both of them are reactions to aesthetic experiences, suggesting that the story is about receiving. Firstly, the narrator realizes that Auggie is actually photographing time, in other words, he perceives the symbolic value of his photographs. Secondly, after Auggie tells his story, there follows, once again, an aesthetic

revelation. Both Paul and the reader have been tricked into believing; for the reader, therefore, Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" has been violated.

The film adaptation, which brings storytelling into the limelight and aims at exposing the dangers of literal interpretation, is explicitly divided into five parts. The prologue and the epilogue are very similar to the short story; the explicit short story, however, is a minimal portion of the film. Harvey Keitel, who plays the role of Auggie Wren, brilliantly tells the story Auggie shares with Paul in the source text, *ad litteram*, with the same "wicked grin spread across his face" at the end. The following sentence in the short story: "I began to study them as if I would imagine stories for them" (Auster, in Harrison, 2005: 579) is the basis for the expansion in the film. The added characters have an ambiguous status: they are most likely a figment of Paul Benjamin's (also a character in the movie) imagination. It is noteworthy that Auster's full name is Paul Benjamin Auster. Therefore, the film resorts to the same artifice as the short story: they both maintain the illusion of truth by means of the protagonist's name. Moreover, they are both metafictional.

Whenever a new character is introduced in the movie, we see Paul typing; this is always preceded by a *fade in* and a *fade out*. Since he types in the diegesis of film, he is maybe typing the story of Rashid, Ruby, Cyrus. This is actually the way in which metatextuality is rendered in the film, an equivalent of the mise-en-abyme technique encountered in the short story. There is little camera movement; the film is not an action film, but a film for reflection. Long shots and sequence shots prevail and there is little use of editing. The way the money passes from one character to another in the film reminds us of the oral tradition in which short stories are passed from generation to generation.

The conclusion is metatextual as well. At the end of the film, we deal with subversion; conventions are reversed: the word seems to have greater power than the image, which is a paradox in cinema. The last sequence breaks every rule in movie-making. The visual retelling of the story (by means of the flashbacks) represents a warranty of authenticity. *Smoke*, the title of the movie, is a metaphor for the blurring of the borders between fact and fiction, good and evil, black and white. Art is like smoke, impalpable and intangible. As Stephanie Harrison (2005: 559) put it, *"In typically self-reflexive fashion, "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story" appears at the end of the film as a reverberating set piece, a story-within-a-story and a movie-within-a-movie"*. Nonetheless, Auster admits, *"I am always going to come down on the side of books. But that*

doesn't mean movies can't be wonderful. It's another way of telling stories, that's all, and I suppose it's important to remember what each medium can and can't do" (quoted in Harrison, 2005: 560).

The use of mise-en-scene is so skillfully done in *Smoke* that it keeps the montage to a minimum. Dialogue is brilliantly employed and the audience is allowed to listen, without the distraction of most of the technicalities available to cinematographers. One of the multi-layered symbols in the film is, as the title suggests, smoke itself. In Christine Jacobson's words, it represents "obscuring of the facts (as in the expression, smoke and mirrors), the fallibility of memory, their dissipation, the concealing of emotions and truths and the passing of time" (Jacobson, 2004). Thus, smoke is one of the subtle elements of the mise-en-scene that "works as a powerful metaphor and instrument of continuity in the film" (*ibid*.). When the metteur-en-scene includes smoke in a particular scene, the inference is that we deal with a pseudo-truth; conversely, when smoke is absent, what we deal with is factuality. When asked about how he came to write the short story under discussion, Paul Auster offered an explanation that further justifies the emphasis on smoke in both the source text and the adaptation:

> The fact was I had never written a short story, and I wasn't sure I'd be able to come up with an idea. (…) So a few days went by, and just when I was about to give up, I opened a tin of… the little cigars I like to smoke and started thinking about the man who sells them to me in Brooklyn. That led to some thoughts about the kinds of encounters you have in New York with people you see every day but don't really know. And little by little, the story began to take shape inside me. It literally came out of that tin of cigars. (Auster, 2003: 3)

Both the short story and the film are about storytelling: what they do is foreground the storytelling experience, together with the pleasures involved in either being the storyteller or the recipient of the story. Apart from being the "writer", Paul "is also, and perhaps foremost, a receiver (…), first as spectator as he views Auggie's photographs and then a listener as he listens to the story" (Collinge-Germain, 2013). Similarly, the reader's/viewer's participation is not required, but also indispensable to the world of fiction. The reception theory forged by Jauss and Iser could easily be applied to film audiences. Indeed, a film can also be seen as a "a dialectical process between sender and receiver" (ibid.). In this respect, both "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story" and *Smoke* enable the receiver to playfully test the boundaries of fiction. After all,

"[w]hat's stealing? What's giving? What's lying? What's telling the truth? All these questions are reshuffled in rather odd and unorthodox ways" in the story, as well as in its cinematic adaptation (Auster, 2003: 3-4). The fact that the director shared his viewpoint and emphasized "telling stories over technique", taking the time to allow characters "to unfold before our eyes, to exist as full-fledged human beings" (*ibid*: 7), turns the adaptation into a compelling one.

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Blue in the Face (1995), written and co-directed by Paul Auster and Wayne Wang, is not, according to the novelist, a sequel to *Smoke*, despite the fact that they share the setting and some of the characters and it stars the same Harvey Keitel. Filmed over a five-day period immediately after the shooting of *Smoke*, largely comprised of improvisations, *Blue* was made regardless of the fact that there was no complete screenplay and no fully-delineated plot; the notes prepared for the actors were written "in extreme haste", with the sole purpose of "roughing out the general contents of each scene" (Auster, 2003: 169). As a result, the actors' performances are distinctively unique and the film is good-humored, easygoing and playful. There seems to be no real sense of beginning, middle or end; as a matter of fact, the film apparently "got its title because the actors, it was said jokingly, were free to talk until they reached that point" (Maslin, 1995). Auster and Wang's intention was that *Blue* would develop the minor characters in *Smoke*, and their approach was "primitive in the extreme", as Auster himself explains:

> We would invent situations for these characters and have each one last the length of a roll film, approximately ten minutes. (…) We would present each skit as a chapter, continuous and uncut, and add musical interludes between the chapters for the sake of variety. (Auster, 2003: 169)

4. Eros and Thanatos: Innocence, Initiation, Experience

McEwan's *The Cement Garden* and Auster's *The Music of Chance*, although different in many levels of interpretation, can be analyzed as part of the same chapter due to their depiction of themes such as initiation and death. Whereas the former novel is the macabre story of how a family of four bereaved siblings manage to stay together after their parents' death, the latter presents the reader with the sinister workings of chance in life of a protagonist whose destiny is doomed from the very beginning. We use the same kind of lens for the exploration of both texts, since they lend themselves perfectly to psychoanalytic criticism. McEwan's protagonist displays all the signs of suffering from the Oedipus complex, whereas Auster's main character proves his inability to escape the thanatic drive. To a certain extent, both fictional works deal with twisted maturation of the protagonist, whose failure is inexorable. What is also striking about the two novels is the crucial role of the setting and the characters' confinement; it is only in solitude and alienation that the plot can unfold to the outcome presented in the denouements. Of course, in the case of *The Cement Garden*, the isolation is self-imposed, as a *sine qua non* condition for the children's act of concealing their mother's death and burying her body in the basement in a trunk of cement. Conversely, in the *Music of Chance*, Nashe and Pozzi are confined to a meadow where, in a Sisyphean effort, they are required to build a pointless wall. Only partly because of their own choices and mostly because of contingency events and fatalism, they are nothing more than prisoners controlled by some queer forces.

The cinematic adaptations of the two novels, both of them great cinematographic achievements, faithfully convey the thematic concerns of their source texts. Their mise-n-scene and mise-en-temps brilliantly depict the gloomy, sinister atmosphere and the characters' inner drives and motivations. Almost every sentence of *The Cement Garden* finds its way into Birkin's film. Likewise, most of the characters' dialogue in *The Music of Chance* becomes part of Haas' adaptation, which proves the novel script-like qualities. Thus, the current chapter focuses on the peculiarities of each novel and film, while at the same time stressing how their shared points – namely confinement, initiation/maturation and the consequences of gaining access to a new, dangerous world – are captured on screen.

4.1. Childhood, Adolescence and Psychosexual Development: Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* (1978)

4.1.1. McEwan's Early Work: Brief Incursion into the Fictional World of Ian "Macabre"

Due to the universal appeal of human growth and self-discovery, coming of age represents a prevalent literary theme, with all the implications of the passage from childhood and innocence to adulthood and experience. The utterly complicated age of adolescence, which brings with itself an intense inner struggle of self-discovery, represents a constant source of fascination and, thus, inspiration for writers. This is particularly true when it comes to Ian McEwan's early literary work, full of stories of adolescents in search of their identity. Characterized by darkness, unease, anxiety and turmoil, *First Love, Last Rites* (1975), *In Between the Sheets* (1978) and *The Cement Garden* (1978) bring to the fore the process of initiation into adulthood, with an emphasis on the search of one's sexual identity. McEwan's early writings are not conventional stories of initiation, though; on the contrary, they subvert "former clichés of traditionally positive images of both nature and childhood" and, consequently, develop "a somber counter-foil to earlier concepts of benign childhood and nature – as, for instance, promoted by Rousseau and Romanticism" (Volkmann, in Stierstorfer, 2003: 308). The author confesses that the reason for writing about adolescence is that "it does provide me with a fairly unique rhetorical standpoint", since adolescents "are an extraordinary, special case of people". To support his argument, McEwan states that teenagers are "close to childhood, and yet they are constantly baffled and irritated by the initiations into what's on the other side – the shadow line, as it were. They are perfect outsiders" (Ricks, in Roberts, 2010: 20), "full of adult desire and childish incapability" (Louvel, in Roberts, 2010: 67). In other words, "adolescence is a difficult transitional time, a rite of passage", characterized by "a heightened degree of self-consciousness"; teenagers themselves "make, in fictional terms, perfect narrators: they stand outside and yet they long to take part" (Gonzalez Casademont, in Roberts, 2010: 59).

Taking these aspects into account, our ensuing analysis will focus on the growth and psychosexual development undergone by the children and adolescent characters in McEwan's

The Cement Garden (1978). Together with the two collections of short stories he had previously published, McEwan's first novel ensures the writer's early success. But it is a type of success that "comes hand in hand with a lurid reputation: his books were said to be twisted and dark", containing many "painfully vivid, highly disturbing scenes, quite a few involving children" (Begley, in McEwan, 2002). Once considered "one of the *enfants terribles* of the British literary scene" (Wells, 2010: 11), his "reputation in the press" was that of "a writer of quality with a penchant for controversial or disturbing plots" (Roberts, 2010: ix). That is to say, the writer's first pieces of literature reveal a fascination with the dark side of the human psyche and the abominable, bringing him reputation for the macabre. Such writings are notorious for their dark themes and perverse, even Gothic, material. Dominic Head (2007, 21: 31) describes McEwan's early work as "literature of shock" or "shock-lit", but it is Kiernan Ryan that probably best describes the writer's style by calling it "the art of unease". McEwan himself admits that he does not feel compelled to write about "what is nice and easy and pleasant and somehow affirming", but about "what is bad and difficult and unsettling" (qtd. in Groes, 2009: 15). Moreover, in *The Paris Review* he describes his own approach in the first ten years of writing as "formally simple and linear short fiction, claustrophobic, desocialized, sexually strange, dark" (Remnick, in Roberts, 2010: 163). When interviewed by Adam Begley, the novelist offers an explanation for the choice of characters and subject matter in his early fiction: "A twenty-one-year-old writer is likely to be inhibited by a lack of usable experience. Childhood and adolescence were something I knew" (Begley, in McEwan, 2002). What is more, McEwan was fascinated with the idea of children trying to survive without any help from adults, which is basically what happens in *Lord of the Flies*. The novelist confesses he considered writing "an urban version of that story", although he had "no clear route in". His first novel is born out of this fascination, under the right circumstances:

> At the time I was living in Stockwell, south London. It was a desolate neighborhood of high-rises and weed-covered wasteland. One afternoon as I was at my desk, these four children, with their distinct identities, suddenly rose before my imagination. I didn't have to build them up – they appeared ready-made (*ibid*.).

The Cement Garden, a novel that "pivots on the ambiguous conjunction of Eros and Thanatos" (Baxter, in Groes, 2009: 23), is the story of four children – Julie (17), Jack (15), Sue

(13) and Tom (6) - that lead an almost impossible struggle to survive in the context of their parents' death. A "prominent interpretative signpost in the novel" alludes to the story tradition in which children "must fend for themselves" (Head, 2007: 47). Since the world they inhabit is devoid of any exterior influences, the breakdown of moral codes is inevitable. What is more, in their dysfunctional attempts to cope with their loss, they go through significant changes – both physical and mental – and make decisions that will profoundly affect their lives. As Jeannette Baxter contends, the demise of the emotionally sterile father" and "the death of the mother initiate a descent into a series of erotic transgressions" (Baxter, in Groes, 2009: 24). The unexpected death of their parents, the lack of any parental authority, and erotic love are crucial factors that will undoubtedly shape the four characters' identities. Since the novel "seems to explore an ambiguous area between the poles of social control and unfettered impulse" (Head, 2007: 47), this chapter focuses on the psychological changes undergone by the bereaved children and on how the tragedy they face interferes with their development. Permeated by alienation, child abuse and incest, and, at times, intensely grotesque, *The Cement Garden* seems to provide the perfect background for such an exploration.

The novel under scrutiny is short, yet extremely intense, revealing a narrative voice of perfect poise and certainty. An undoubtedly compelling piece of work, *The Cement Garden* is divided into two fairly equal parts, each of them comprised of five chapters. In a nutshell, *Part One* deals with the account of how four children lose both their parents in a rather short period of time, while *Part Two* presents the reader with the story of their survival as they find their own strange and troubling ways to look after themselves. Since family is often regarded as the basis for identity formation (sexual differentiation included), the four children become particularly vulnerable in front of the trauma they have to face. As the siblings try to cope with bereavement in an adult-free milieu, their inner turmoil and psychological conflicts are decidedly revealing of the tension between this dysfunctional world and the wider society. In order to investigate the way in which their maturation is affected by this trauma, the inner world of each child will be placed under close scrutiny by means of psychoanalytic criticism; it is this particular lens that will allow us to disclose the traumatic effects of parental loss and flawed family relationships upon the children's transition from childhood into adulthood. Thus, for the purpose of analyzing the tormented mental world of each of the underage characters, we will mainly resort to the Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex, while also taking into account Lacan's theory of the

Name of the Father. The novel stresses the importance of infantile sexuality and Oedipal impulses and, at the same time, undermines the concept of childhood innocence. Our analysis sets out to demonstrate the fact that *The Cement Garden* is not a conventional coming of age novel, but a perverted type of Buildungsroman in which characters transgress taboos and develop a fluctuating sexual identity. Before beginning the investigation *per se*, however, it is necessary to pinpoint those plot elements that are essential to the understanding of the characters' behavior, which is to be done in what follows.

4.1.2. *The Cement Garden*: a Synoptic Approach

The novel under analysis begins with a straightforward statement of the homodiegetic narrator, Jack and "catapults the reader directly" into his "tormented mental world" (Ambler, 2003): "I did not kill my father, but I sometimes felt I had helped him on his way" (9). The very incipit of the text brings into the limelight the theme of death, associated here with a feeling of reluctant guilt on Jack's part, but also with his "flirtation with parricide" (Baxter, in Groes, 2009: 23). This is deeply rooted in McEwan's own biographical experience, as the author asserts in an interview with Liliane Louvel: "I had very powerful and confused feelings about him [his father]. I loved him and feared him. (…) In *The Cement Garden* I killed him off early on" (Louvel, in Roberts, 2010: 75). Indeed, according to the narrator's account, his father's death seemed so "insignificant" that it wouldn't have been worth mentioning unless "it coincided with a landmark in my own physical growth". This way, the Oedipus complex is alluded to right from the opening lines. Apparently, from the narrator's viewpoint, his father was nothing but "a frail, irascible, obsessive man" (9) and Jack will provide supporting evidence with respect to the legitimacy of this claim in the first part of the novel.

As the father grows sicker by the day and feels he can no longer take care of the garden, he decides to buy some cement and cover it with concrete. In spite of their financial problems, because of which he has a huge fight with his wife who insists upon returning the cement, he has irrevocably made up his mind and it does not take much until he starts work in the garden. He asks for Jack's help, who only half-heartedly agrees and does all his best to ensure his father understands his lack of devotion. Although being well-aware of his father's health problems, Jack shows no empathy and makes no attempt to work more than him; in addition, he takes long

breaks for autoerotism and shows no remorse whatsoever when he finds his father dead, lying face down in the fresh concrete, most likely killed by an effort-induced heart-attack. As a matter of fact, the single most important moment in Jack's psychosexual development, his first real orgasm, takes place as his father is dying, which is highly symbolic in the context of the novel: it appears that the father's death is necessary so that Jack can become a man; in other words, "the death of his father literally coincides with Jack's sexual and corporeal awakening" (de Coning, 2011: 88). What is more, no other member of the family seems to display signs of grief or mourning after the father's deaths; such feelings are hardly expressed at all, being mostly replaced by textual silence and by a pervading sense of liberation. As a matter of fact, children secretly suspect that their parents "had hated each other" and that their mother too "was relieved when Father died" (33).

By and large, family life appears to go on undisturbed, but it is worth mentioning the fact that children become more independent and somewhat disobedient towards their mother: their affection for her is obvious, but that does not impede them from going against her will. Moreover, shortly after the father's death, the mother becomes increasingly ill, with only Julie, the elder sibling, knowing the truth about her condition. Her sickness gradually confines her to her bed and, soon enough, she will be so debilitated that she will have to struggle to stay awake even for a few minutes. This leads to her impossibility of taking care of the house and children having to divide the chores between themselves so that everything might still function normally. Essentially, Julie becomes the head of the family and, with her in charge, the four siblings manage to take care of the house and their mother; adjustment quickly settles in. In fact, as the narrator confesses, the children seem to be almost happy with this state of affairs, mostly because of their newly gained freedom. Their mother getting better becomes a distant future moment that has the potential to upset their ways and deprive them of a state of adulthood they have all been craving for. In Jack's own words, "'When Mother gets up' became a vague, unsought-for time in the near future, when the old patterns would be re-established" (42).

One day, however, the unexpected takes place: the mother dies and the children are left alone in the world, facing the possibility of being separated and institutionalized, since all of them are underage. This time their grief is obvious, with Tom being the most vocal of all children. This is not surprising, as Tom is still a little boy and, for him, the oedipal conflict is far from having a resolution. Naturally, when his mother was alive, he demanded her constant

attention and now, unwilling to accept her death, he hugs her dead body. As hours go by, Jack and Julie, the elder siblings, feel that it is their responsibility to take action and, driven by the necessity to preserve the family unity, decide not to tell anyone outside the family about the loss of their mother. What they would do instead, as the only possible alternative that makes sense for them now, is bury her body in the basement in concrete. Ironically, the same cement that had made a clear contribution to the father's death will now be used to bury their mother. The summer holidays settle in and the orphaned children carry on with their lives, with Julie managing the money their mother had left for them. The children "rather stick to a known, closed, frustrating but safe place, than dare to leave their isolated 'subjective reality'" (Mauter, 2006: 75). Meanwhile, what seems to be happening is that the artificial order that had previously surrounded the lives of the children disintegrates: with no one to impose even the slightest sense of order, they fall into some rather strange ways; likewise, both the house and the garden are in a state of decay, with the natural overriding the artificial. The four siblings become "frozen by a life of monotony and meaninglessness" (Slay, 1996: 40).

All in all, the much desired family unity is a sham and, with no initiative and leadership whatsoever, chaos is unavoidable. Indeed, "the intense isolation creates a situation in which the children can try on sexual and social roles provisionally without the pressure to conform to accepted behaviors" (Wells, 2010: 35). The world left behind after the parents' death is not much to speak of: no family, no friends, and a house standing, literally, in the middle of nothing. Lack of supervision means that there are no rules and the situation quickly becomes quite similar to that experienced by the children in *Lord of the Flies*. In other words, the children "slide into anarchy" and "escape from all authority and traditional moral and social standards" (Malcolm, 2002: 8). Apparently, this situation will not last for long: in a surprising act of will, Jack decides to finally clean up and is soon helped by everybody else. In addition, the girls cook supper and, in no time, the utterly dysfunctional family seems to turn into a normal family again. It is now that the narrator confesses his feeling of belonging: "For the first time in weeks I was happy. I felt safe, as if I belonged to a powerful secret army" (86). And yet, another twist and turn occurs when Julie breaks the tacit rule of bringing no one outside the family inside their house. As a matter of fact, it is her rich boyfriend Derek that will lead them to destruction after a series of visits in which he finds out the truth about their mother being buried in the basement. Strange, often ludicrous things happen in the meantime: encouraged by his sisters, Tom wants to become

a little girl and consequently dresses like one, irrespective of Jack's disproval. In a sense, Tom is being emasculated, like his elder brother, whose objection is pointless in front of the sisters' alliance. Later on in the story, the little brother goes through yet another transformation by acting like a baby-boy, symbolically regressing to his oral stage. In his turn, Jack experiences terrible nightmares and becomes obsessed with his body odor which gives him the sensation that he is rotting alive.

As Julie understands that allowing an intruder into their family means sharing family secrets that lead to dreadful consequences, she argues in a conversation with Jack: "He wants to be one of the family, you know, big smart daddy. He's getting on my nerves. (…) He keeps talking about moving in with us" (133-134). Therefore, she decides to estrange herself from her boyfriend: although he enters the children's universe "as a possible surrogate father", he remains "an intruder into the family cocoon" and will finally be "dislodged as an alien organism as the family draws together" (Volkmann, in Stierstorfer, 2003: 317). It is now that events reach a disturbing climax; in Derek's words: "It's sick, he's your brother" (136). To a certain extent, it can be argued that the closer Derek comes to the truth and the more things start to unravel, the stranger the relations between the children become. Half-angry with Julie for abandoning him and half-outraged by the incestuous relationship of his former girlfriend with her brother, Derek destroys the concrete in the basement he himself had helped make and informs the police about the outrageous family secret. The ending of the novel is somewhat predictable if we take into account the norms that society at large observes in order to function properly (from a cultural, conventional point of view): the children's seemingly appalling deed of burying their mother's corpse in cement as opposed to informing others about her death is discovered by Derek. It is worthwhile mentioning that the outsider alerts the authorities "not out of sympathy or moral concern, but out of jealousy, greed and conventional disgust" (Walkowitz, in Shaffer, 2008: 508). The closing scene shows the family finally united in front of the upcoming disaster. As the authorities arrive, Jack, Julie, Sue and Tom are all sitting on the bed, talking, for the first time, about their fond memories of Mother.

4.1.3. Childhood, Adolescence and Parental Authority in *The Cement Garden*: Maternal versus Paternal Influence

Ian McEwan's first novel introduces us to a family universe that is rather maladjusted, both to the outside world, and to its members. The family of six appears to live against a desolate landscape, isolated from civilization, but, interestingly enough, with a view of it, both literally and figuratively. "The urban desolation that surrounds the family home" has some "peculiar features": one cannot "pin down the setting" of the novel, which aims "for a generality of reference" in what concerns both space and time (Malcolm, 2002: 54). What is more, characters too seem to be "rather general"; one of the indicators of their "generic quality" consists of their naming: "The mother and father are never named; the reader never learns the family's surname" (*ibid*.: 56). With no relatives or family friends, the family is socially aloof and their only contact to the outside world is extremely limited. In addition, this enclosed world is permeated by communication breakdowns, quite obvious at all levels; for instance, decision-making only belongs to the father, whose almost tyrannical, yet disturbingly calm attitude rejects any right to interfere on the part of the mother. Consequently, "the parents' marriage is marked by (…) an underlying feeling of frustration and aggression. The domestic atmosphere is tense and one of isolation from the very beginning" (Volkmann, in Stierstorfer, 2003: 316). Similarly, children fail to connect to one another and to their parents, displaying a type of behavior that foreshadows the degree of alienation experienced after the parents' death. Laurenz Volkmann offers an explanation for the fact that the four siblings' maturation is a failure: "emancipation from the family ties cannot be achieved since the family itself never was an intact family which would have fulfilled its social role of offering values and norms" (*ibid*.).

Indeed, it is from the very beginning of the novel that the reader understands how "the repressive father" (Wells, 2010: 34) is perceived by Jack: what he does is "turn against this caricature of a father figure" (Volkmann, in Stierstorfer, 2003: 316). This type of narratorial stance acts as a prolepsis; indeed, the diegesis will further reveal the reasons behind this rather unexpected behavioral pattern. Nevertheless, it is not an atypical attitude for a novel by McEwan; on the contrary, his writings usually depict male-dominated hierarchical worlds in which male characters are often portrayed as authoritative, yet insecure. The writer himself confesses to have an antagonistic attitude towards his father, who was often a tyrant within the

family milieu. In other words, as Sebastian Groes (2009: 5-6) argues, "McEwan's turn to feminism was clearly a means of addressing family problems he grew up in". In "Mother Tongue" (2002: 41-42), McEwan explains that:

> The feminism of the 1970s spoke directly to a knot of problems at the heart of our family's life. I developed a romantic notion that if the spirit of women was liberated, the world would be healed. My female characters became the repository of all the goodness that men fell short of. In other words, pen in hand, I was going to set my mother free.

Moreover, David Malcolm notes, McEwan's writings present a rigid gender and sexual dichotomy: "Men will destroy the world; women will save it. Men are (…) exploiters of the natural world; women are the source of life and healing" (Malcolm, 2002: 186-187). Indeed, "the troubling elements of masculinity" (Head, 2007: 30) represent one of McEwan's major themes.

As the narration of *The Cement Garden* proceeds, we learn that, as a rule, the father acts as a tyrannical, despotic leader, both to his wife and to his children. Highly illustrative in this respect is the parents' argument when it comes to the cement the father buys without taking into account the family's financial problems. The description of this episode brings to the fore the anger of the mother, who is otherwise "a quiet sort of person" (10). In spite of all the arguments she offers in order to persuade him to send the cement back, the father remains relentless, firmly stating that sending the bags back is "out of the question". By brandishing his pipe, "he makes an effort to give significance to his utterings". Because of her increasing anger, the mother's voice chokes "with exasperation", but nothing can change her husband's mind. From Jack's point of view, his father's attitude is "self-important and foolish" (11); Tom is scared of him and Julie's contention is that father is "a semi-invalid who would have to compete with Tom for Mother's attention" (13). Undeniably, the father's "ritualized gesture" of waving the pipe is highly meaningful: "the pipe's symbolic function as a penis substitute clearly underscores the yearnings of the semi-invalid to attain authority" (Volkmann, in Stierstorfer, 2003: 316). In short, the father's attitude has all the characteristics of dictatorship, with everyone coerced into observing his rules, with no exception whatsoever. It seems, nonetheless, that this very stubbornness will lead to the father's death: his decision of not sending the cement back and of starting work in the garden will be the last one he ever makes.

To a certain degree obsessed with the garden, Jack's father "had constructed rather than cultivated" it: "There were narrow flagstone paths which made elaborate curves to visit flower beds that were only a few feet away". There were only few flowers, chosen "for their neatness and symmetry". No roses or ivy were ever planted there, since the head of the family "would have nothing that tangled"; consequently, his favorite flowers were tulips, which were planted well apart (15). The tile of the novel alerts us to an unconventional intimacy: "a garden made of cement" (Shaffer, 2008: 507); relying heavily on cement (as opposed to flowers and greenery) when taking care of a garden is undeniably be strange, even paradoxical, for gardens are usually a symbol of fertility, being typically associated with femininity and life. Nevertheless, in this family it is the father who takes care of the garden, almost depriving it of life, turning it into a barren, sterile territory. The father's garden "is anything but fertile and pastoral" (de Coning, 2011: 86). This way, the "ornamental garden, all insane neatness and symmetry" (Malcolm, 2002: 58) turns into an archetypal image of his soul, one that is slowly dying, incapable of fostering life; the – oxymoronic – cement garden "signifies an extreme manifestation of unyielding paternal law" (de Coning, 2011: 86). For Jack, the narrator, "mixing concrete and spreading it over a leveled garden was a fascinating violation". Furthermore, he admits that his father "was so convinced of the sanity of his ideas that through embarrassment, rather than fear, no one spoke against the plan" (17). Indeed, from the moment the cement is bought, it becomes a physical reality impossible to escape. In short, it seems that the wish the father had prior to his first heart-attack is fulfilled, although only at a metaphorical level: he undoubtedly manages "to build a high-wall round his special world" (CG: 15); indeed, in terms of feelings, he appears to be impenetrable, which renders him both "unloved and unlovable" (Malcolm, 2002: 45).

It is perhaps because of the father's incapacity to be open-minded and accept the impossibility of controlling everything that lead to his dysfunctional relationship with the other members of the family. As it has been previously pointed out, he is the only one to make decisions about spending the little money they have, irrespective of his wife's opinion; he frequently scolds his youngest son for no reason, he does not support Julie for her ambitions to become an athlete and always makes fun of Jack for his pimples. In a nutshell, the father "loses his temper frequently, cruelly taunts the narrator and his siblings and their mother, and has spent the family's little money on the cement scheme for his garden rather than on school clothes for his youngest son" (Shaffer, 2008: 507). This way, the children's feelings of disrespect, even

contempt towards him become somewhat justified, and so does the reader's sympathy with them when they do not grief over their father's death. However, it is worth mentioning that children seldom show signs of disrespect towards their father; he enjoys a high degree of authority inside the family, but it is a type of authority often combined with fear, even terror. One of the instances that is illustrative in this respect is when Julie and Jack spend an entire evening trying to come up with some clever jokes that would work against their father. Although he was the one who "initiated and maintained" the few "running jokes in the family", for which "the laughter was instant and ritual" (15), part of the children's growing up involved rebellion against the father's authority, especially because he did not seem to empathize with them or encourage them at all.

So that their jokes would be really effective, Jack and Julie knew they had to work hard, so, after coming up with a series of satisfactory gags, they selected their best, "polished it and practiced it". They knew "the real target", namely the garden, which often represented a source of (concealed) mockery on their part, although they did not dare provoke their father. Of course, timing was of the essence, so they waited for the perfect moment: it was suppertime and, as usual, Father made a joke against Jack for his pimples. In spite of his heart "beating so hard that it was difficult to sound casual, conversational, the way we had practiced it" (15), Jack finally finds the courage to state: "I saw something out in the garden today that gave me a shock". Julie's immediate reply, "What was that?" calls for Jack's: "A flower" (16), which, as the two had expected, should have led to a burst of laugher. However, quite surprisingly, the joke did not have the planned effect – on the contrary, it led to even more tension in the family. Jack's conclusion is revealing of the father's role and of how he was perceived by everyone else: "Jokes were not made against father because they were not funny" (16). After this incident, despite his desperate need "to feel elation", what Jack felt was guilt, so, when his father spoke to him again two days later, he was greatly relieved; moreover, he confesses that, unlike Julie, he just couldn't have apologized. It is this confession that provides convincing evidence with respect to his growing ego; in a sense, he wants to prove that he is at least as good as his father and he would not concede to a different opinion.

Nevertheless, it will not be long until the father's life tragically ends after a second heart-attack, and things take an unexpected turn: the authority of the father gives way to a newly-gained state of freedom. Jack's reaction after his father's dead body is taken away with an

ambulance is highly revealing in this respect, as he states: "I did not have a thought in my head as I picked up the plank and carefully smoothed away his impression in the soft, fresh concrete" (19). With no emotion whatsoever, the protagonist simply erases – at a symbolical level - the father's place in the family; by doing so, Jack also appropriates "the inscription of his patriarchal power" (Wells, 2010: 35). To a certain extent, "Jack's ability to 'smooth away' his father's impression signifies the beginning of the erosion of patriarchal law and the disintegration of the traditional family framework" (de Coning, 2011: 89). Immediately after the father's death, a state of anarchy quickly settles in: because of "her quiet way" (21), the mother fails to communicate properly with her children and eventually loses control over their actions. The pseudo-dictatorship that characterized family life when the father was alive is now replaced by a sort of anarchy, which will be further enhanced by the mother's illness. As expected from a maternal figure, the mother is kind and optimistic, performing the role of emotional leader of the family. Patient, gentle and caring, she seems to be the very opposite of the father, always understanding of her children. Even "when drained by another night without sleep", with "sunken eyes" that are "grey and watery" (CG: 22), she keeps her calm and does not raise her voice at her children, who are quite disobedient. For instance, one morning she decides to talk to Jack about the potential risks of his autoerotic habits and her attitude is highly affectionate and tactful. Her empathetic acknowledgement of his growing up is something his father would not have done too soon, although she states the opposite: "Don't think I don't know what's going on. You're growing into a young man now, and I'm very proud you are…these are things your father would have been telling you. (…) Growing up is difficult". Despite the fact that she is delivering "a difficult message", her voice is soft and her gestures are full of love: "she ruffled my hair"; "she kissed me lightly on the cheek" (29). By warning against masturbation, the mother reinforces the Law of the Father, unsuccessfully though: Jack will continue to do so until "he consummates his heterosexual masculinity by sleeping with his sister, and so (mis)appropriates his father's vacated position as alpha male" (Childs, 2006: 35).

Thus, the novel brings to the fore a loving and kind-hearted mother who is quite the opposite of the tyrannical father. And, despite their disobedience, it becomes clear that children love her, too; even Jack, for example, who always puts on a mask of indifference, feels remorse after leaving in the middle of a conversation with her and slamming the door. For the narrator, "the simple recognition" that "she was not a particular invention of mine, or of my sisters"

conveys “both sadness and menace” (26). At a subliminal level, the fear of losing Mother is quite strong, in spite of his realization that, eventually, everybody goes on. However, as Jack confesses, the loss of the father and the mother’s inability to impose herself lead to a highly desired state of affairs, since “I now felt proudly beyond her control” (21). As the mother becomes increasingly bedridden, she loses almost all authority, and it is Julie that assumes the power of controlling what happens with her siblings. This is often met with scorn by Jack, who craves for a sense of freedom that would enable him to be in charge, too. Three days before the mother dies, he makes her promise she would tell Julie they are both in charge of things. Kind-hearted, loved, yet disobeyed by her own children, the mother fades away, leaving behind four children that will succumb to chaos. The lack of balance when it comes to parental authority undoubtedly affects the children’s growing-up; having a despotic father and a mother with almost no authority at all leads to a completely distorted perception of freedom on the part of the children. As Volkmann puts it, “the lack of true role models which could offer guidance to the adolescents of the novel” turns their maturation “into a stagnant experiment without direction and without an end” (Volkmann, in Stierstorfer, 2003: 317). All in all, both the mother’s and the father’s behavioral patterns towards one another and their children prove to have a long-lasting effect upon the family relations; in turn, they are crucial to the way in which the four siblings grow up, as we are going to see further on.

4.1.4. Physical Growth and Psychosexual Development in *The Cement Garden*

As it has been previously pointed out, the protagonist of the novel and, at the same time, its first-person narrator, is fourteen-year old Jack, second-to youngest of the four children and the oldest boy, a teenager on the verge of becoming a man. From David Malcolm’s standpoint, “Jack is a mass of confused feelings – resentment towards his father, love of his mother that is coupled with a desire to be free of her, sexual fascination with his beautiful sister” (Malcolm, 2002: 14). While the introvert, alienated protagonist succumbs to autoerotism, he longs for acknowledgement and integration. Unsurprisingly, it is his father’s behavioral pattern that will most significantly mark his growth, although it is worth reiterating the fact that it is not respect and admiration that Jack feels for him; on the contrary, he often scorns him and, like everybody else in the family, is almost relieved at the news of his death. Nonetheless, there are a few

instances in which the narrator admits he finds his father's authority and superior knowledge desirable. To a certain extent, this means Jack is on the way to overcome his Oedipal drive; since the father can be seen as a competitor – superior in both size and strength - for the mother's attention and love and also as a source of the protagonist's castration anxiety, his natural response would be that of identification.

At the beginning of the novel, for example, the protagonist happens to be on the front step of the house reading a comic when a lorry carrying cement pulls up outside. Jack's first reaction is highly revealing of his insecurity and need for assertion: while the feelings he entertains for his father might be questionable, he knows that if he wants to be treated and respected like a man, he needs to behave like him: "I stood up and held the comic out of sight. I wish I had been reading the racing page of my father's paper" (10). Jack's insecurity is understandable if we take into account the fact that he is a teenager; thus, excluded from the children's world, he is not yet included into the adults'. In spite of the fact that his father is not a respectable figure for him, his subconscious still treats him like a model, the only one available, actually. Jack's intrinsic need for approval and belonging is confirmed later on during the cement transaction his father makes: "I did not know what the cement was for and I did not wish to be placed outside this intense community of work by showing ignorance" (10). From a psychological point of view, what the protagonist tries to do is emulate his father, namely to identify with him. In Freudian terms, the process of identification is particularly important in overcoming the Oedipus complex, since, as previously noted, it represents the start to the resolution of this conflict; Jack, however, never completes the process, as his father dies. Consequently, the boy is left in a vulnerable state: he cannot introject the paternal authority and, thus, his super-ego remains under-developed.

But the episode described above is not the only instance in which Jack proves he subconsciously wishes to have the same type of authority his father enjoys. Highly illustrative in this respect is the protagonist's reply at the end of a game he plays with Julie and Sue; the basic rule of the game is that Sue, supposedly a specimen from outer space, is to be examined by her elder siblings, who play the role of scientists. But the game is not in the least as innocent as it might appear, since it requires Sue to be naked and the examination, though seemingly playful, involves looking both "into her mouth and between her legs" (11), as if equally important. Still a little girl that lacks sexual awareness, Sue is all too eager to comply, but her brother, who is

already pubescent, refuses to play the game: in spite of Sue's plea, he cannot be persuaded; in his own words, uttered "through an imaginary pipe", it's "out of the question" (12). His reaction is identical to the one his father has when his mother asks him to return the cement. Again, this is highly revealing of the protagonist's need to identify with his father, to be like him.

Jack's feelings for his father are, thus, conflicted: he is at the same time contemptuous and admiring, although he manages to conceal this very well. His desperate need for revenge caused by his father's constant jokes about his pimples (otherwise quite normal for a teenager) makes him feel guilt instead of elation. Likewise, the possibility that he and Julie are "responsible for the disintegration" of some parts of the garden fills him "with horror and delight" (16). What is more, he resents the idea of admitting to his father that he is less knowledgeable or experienced; for example, the father's advice on how to mix the cement more efficiently is rejected at once with the false pretense that Jack already knows how to do it. It becomes obvious at this point that the protagonist's pride is increasing as he grows up. He does not want to be insignificant, so he feels the compulsion to keep himself from being dominated. As expected from a character that is still in search of an identity, his need for approval and assertion is getting higher and higher. To a certain extent, as he is struggling to become a man, his own father emasculates him by mocking his physical appearance, however normal it might be for a pubescent. In Freudian terms, this reinforces the Castration Complex Jack subconsciously has, as a natural part of his psychosexual development. This way, the ambivalent feelings he holds for his father can be considered normal as they are a reaction to what the paternal figure stands for: prohibition and threat, usually against sexual activity.

The Oedipal interpretation of the narrator's behavior might seem rather problematic since "Jack's is no formulaic Oedipal complex" (Malcolm, 2002: 60): his sexual desire is turned towards his sister, and not his mother. Nevertheless, the incestuous relationship between Jack and Julie is actually "the culmination of the book's Oedipal Theme, since Julie is identified by all as a surrogate mother" (Head, 2007: 48). It is highly noteworthy that the incest is foreshadowed early in the diegesis, even before the father's death, which means that it is not necessarily a result of parental loss. The sexual drive was there despite the Law of the Father, which should have acted as a censor for the unconscious mind. In other words, the abuse was there long before the removal of the parents from the family hierarchy, as the game (permeated by sexual undertones) in which Jack and Julie "examine" Sue clearly reveals. Freud argued that a

natural psychosexual progress involves the overcoming of the Oedipal drive by means of sexual repression; while in any normal family this is usually the task of the father, failure in doing so leads to psychosexual deviation. In *The Cement Garden*, it is obvious that Jack's father did not manage to successfully act as a censor, despite his often tyrannical attitude. In spite of the "overwhelming sense of oppression (Head, 2007: 48), the children transgress all sorts of sexual taboos long before his death, and, naturally, they will continue to do so afterwards, with disastrous results for the family.

After losing his father, the protagonist isolates himself even further and becomes almost rebellious - although, to a certain extent, he has always had an attitude problem. As he is increasingly "preoccupied with his body, particularly its new adolescent productions: acne and semen" (Childs, 2006: 35), Jack goes through frequent autoerotism episodes, becoming almost obsessed with masturbation. According to David Malcolm, this is not surprising as Jack's name itself seems to be "a kind of joke on the part of the implied narrator"; indeed, "'to jack off' is an informal synonym for 'to masturbate'" (Malcolm, 2002: 56). At the same time, the protagonist becomes rather lethargic, apathetic and unemotional, proving that he is totally unprepared for the grown-up role he avidly wishes for; the author himself states that, in spite of his "total freedom", the narrator becomes "completely paralyzed" (Ricks, in Roberts, 2010: 21); moreover, as Slay (1996: 40) puts it, his life turns into "an immense emptiness". He builds up an emotional barrier and never seems willing to take any action in order to change his often criticized behavior. In Freudian terms, his increased sexual drive turns into ego-libido (as opposed to object-libido) and he becomes extremely narcissistic, displaying a megalomaniac, neurotic attitude. There is hardly any effort on his part to deal with his sexual desires through repression or displacement. He becomes so self-centered that "not even his mother's death manages to break down his wall of egocentricity" (Williams, 1996: 221). It becomes clear why Jack will never make a natural progression into the genital phase, namely into what Freud theorized as "normal" heterosexuality, the goal of psychosexual development in Freudian psychology.

As McEwan puts it, after his parents' death, the narrator is "almost catatonic with freedom" (qtd. in Roberts, 2010: 21), and yet, his mindscape is mainly characterized by insecurity and loneliness. His recurrent nightmare is highly revealing in this respect:

> I was being followed by someone I could not see. In their hands they carried a box and they wanted me to look inside, but I carried on. (…)

> I knew there was a small creature inside, kept captive against its will and stinking horribly. I tried to call out, hoping to wake myself with the sound of my own voice. No sound left my throat, and I could not even move my lips. (27)

The reader cannot help but make a connection between the stinking captive animal inside the narrator's dream and the narrator himself. As Nick Ambler (2003) put it, "the animal reflects the sense of entrapment which dictates his life and dominates his mind. This dream sequence is the focal demonstration of the ennui and frustration that haunts his mental world." Jack's anxiety concerning his increasingly unpleasant body odor is repeatedly and ostensibly revealed outside the oneiric space, too; what is more, the powerful smell does not seem to go away when Jack starts washing himself again. There is nothing he can do about that, which gives him the idea that he might be rotting alive; his physical change appears to be out of his control, as if, in rather Kafkaesque manner, he were subjected to an inescapable form of therianthropy.

Against the background of his growing distress, confusion and frustration, Jack develops an increasing sexual attraction for Julie and finds himself jealous of the other emotional bonds in the family; what is more, a power struggle develops between the two, as Jack feels a compulsive need to assert himself and be in charge, too. For instance, when Julie handles everything as their mother is confined to bed, the narrator becomes jealous of her and confesses: "Julie appeared serious and efficient, but I suspected she was exploiting the position, that she enjoyed ordering me about" (42). Moreover, his reaction leaves no room for interpretation when, after their mother's death, Julie comments on her exceptional, almost exclusive bondage with the mother: "She's been dying for months. (…) She didn't want you lot to know". Naturally, Jack feels left out and admits to having "resented 'you lot' immediately" (52). Later on, when he realizes Julie is the only one in control of every decision, he feel so vulnerable that he bursts into tears: "I'm in charge, too', I said and began to cry because I felt cheated. My mother had gone without explaining to Julie what she had told me" (53). However reluctantly, though, Jack eventually accepts Julie's authority, "realizing that she is indeed the new stabilizing force in the family" (Slay, 1996: 46). In spite of their differences and mutual hostility, the two will have to become allies in order to conceal their mother's body and, then, to preserve the family unity.

Immediately after the parents' death, it becomes apparent that Julie will be the dominant figure; her "rise to power" enhances the "overwhelmingly female-oriented" family culture

(Roger, qtd. in Childs, 2006: 39). But she will not appropriate all of her mother's features, as expected and considered fitting from a social, conventional point of view; instead, it is her father's authoritative behavior that she begins to master, to Jack's - and sometimes the other siblings' – disappointment. As Sampson (qtd. in Childs, 2006:40) argues, after the parents' death, Julie becomes "both-surrogate father and surrogate-mother, and so he is the obscure object of Jack's desire and rivalry". The episode in which they make the concrete for the burial is revealing of his sense of envy and competition, as Jack points out: "Obscurely, I felt entitled to do the shoveling and mixing, but Julie had the shovel and had already made up a pile of sand" (61). Not even in matters of romantic love does Jack have a right to interfere with his sister's decisions, although he feels somewhat entitled to: "I had a confused notion that as Julie's brother I had a right to ask questions about her boyfriend. But there was nothing about Julie to support such an idea, and I felt more dejected than curious" (81). Julie's behavior gradually the most dysfunctional of all; she is secretive both towards her family and her boyfriend, she does not connect emotionally and, although, to a certain extent, she meets her siblings' desire expectations of her being a surrogate mother for them, she often behaves as controlling and manipulative as her father. Tom's fear (a feeling he held for his father, too) is illustrative of her repressive attitude:

> Tom did not like these evenings without his mother. Julie made him eat everything on his plate, and he was not permitted to crawl under the table or make funny noises. (…) He too was a little afraid of her. She was suddenly so remote from us, quiet, certain of her authority (32).

Jack Slay states that, far from being "the usual adolescent", Julie is "the anomaly in her family: she is daring and independent, confident and beautiful"; what is more, "her self-confidence is instinctive (Slay, 1996: 46). Consequently, towards the end of the novel, she becomes so sure of the legitimacy of her behavior and way of things that she gives in to her sexual desire for her brother; with no parental figure to tame their deviant sexual drives, the two siblings perform an incestuous act whose abnormality they are not even aware of. Moreover, it is Julie's contention that there is nothing to be afraid of, as she confesses only moments before engaging in the sexual act: "I can't really imagine anything changing. Everything seems still and fixed and it makes me feel that I'm not frightened of anything" (CG: 134). "Notably", though,

"the emphasis is not placed on the sexual act itself"; the narrative rather focuses "on the fact that brother and sister talk urgently and incessantly to one another prior to, during and after sex". While naked, Jack and Julie "share their memories and fears", which essentially means that they are communicating (Baxter, in Groes, 2009: 25). Jeanette Baxter (*ibid*.) argues that "incest is offered up as a disquieting antidote to the acute levels of physical, emotional and psychological isolation" that normally characterize *The Cement Garden.* Moreover, as Slay (qtd. in Head, 2007: 47) contends, "it is possible to perceive the experience of incest as a 'completely positive experience', since it is seen as 'sick' and unnatural only by Derek, an outsider". McEwan himself confesses that, when writing *The Cement Garden*, he "had an idea that in the nuclear family the kind of forces that are being suppressed – the oedipal, incestuous forces – are also paradoxically the very forces which keep the family together" (Hamilton, 1978: 19).

Nonetheless, it is not only the narrator and Julie who show signs of maladjustment and inadequate behavior. Likewise, seven year-old Tom has created his own world, one in which he can become a girl or a baby-boy again, provided that he wants it. First of all, as an apparent reaction to being bullied at school, he tells Sue he is "tired of being a boy" (46) and he would rather be a girl now; his justification is plain enough, but pragmatic: "you don't get hit when you're a girl". Jack's first reaction when hearing about this is fit for the uncanny: "I did not even smile. I was horrified and fascinated", but, even though he is obviously enthralled by the potential of the situation, he decides to make a stand and tell his sisters what he really thinks of Tom's idea: "He'd look bloody idiotic" (47). Jack's attitude shows that, as a rule, in a patriarchal society, "effeminate boys or, 'sissies', are discouraged or ridiculed, whereas masculine girls, or 'tomboys', are tolerated" (Archer and Lloyd, 2002: 80). Julie, however, meets his view with anger; what she infers from Jack's words is that:

> You think girls look idiotic, daft, stupid… You think it's humiliating to look like a girl, because you think it's humiliating to *be* a girl. (…) Girls can wear jeans and cut their hair short and wear shirts and boots because it's ok to be a boy, for girls it's like promotion. But for a boy to look like a girl is degrading, according to you, because secretly you believe that being a girl is degrading (CG: 47-48).

Julie's annoyance might be explained as penis envy, a stage that Sigmund Freud posited as natural in female psychosexual development. Thus, during the transition towards a mature

female sexuality and gender identity, it is normal for female adolescents to experience anxiety upon the realization that they do not have a penis. Freud's developmental theory, which is largely heteronormative, can be successfully applied in *The Cement Garden*, a novel in which heteronormative hegemony is often subverted and disrupted. Julie argues that the implication of Jack's assertion is one that generally characterizes the patriarchal mindset: "feminine behavior represents a loss of status for a boy, whereas masculine behavior represents an increase in status for a girl" (Archer and Lloyd, 2002: 81). On her way to shaping her identity as an adult woman, Julie is aware of the slanted view of a society that mainly derives its coherence from the phallus or paternal signifier; nevertheless, she rebels against this type of order and her implicit contention is that women are equally important. David Malcolm (2002: 59) argues that, perhaps, the incest "*is* a kind of maturing initiation for Jack.", since they "literally and metaphorically come together in a process stressing equality and balance, the uniting of seeming opposites" (the critic's emphasis). This is something that the narrator himself, against the context of a household largely controlled by his sister, will gradually understand and acknowledge. At the end of the novel, for instance, just before the incestuous sexual act, he notices that he is not that different from his sister:

> I took her hand and measured it against mine. It was exactly the same size…. We began a long investigation of each other's body…. We measured our arms, legs, necks and tongues but none of these looked so alike as our belly buttons (CG: 136).

Moreover, as Alexis de Coning points out, "Jack and Julie's sexual union is entirely consensual and non-coercive. There is no hierarchy of dominance and submission" (de Coning, 2011: 100).

But the very word *incest* "elicits horror, revulsion and extreme unease, and is associated with exploitation"; Alexis de Coning argues that this practice is "so repellent and surrounded by such strong prohibition" because, unlike psychopaths or murderers, "the perpetrators of incest inhabit the domestic sphere, and are, both literally and figuratively, 'too close to home'" (de Coning, 2011: 81). Moreover, Kristeva posits that aversion to incest stems from "the subject's fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother" (Kristeva, qtd. in de Coning, 2011: 82); in effect, "incest poses a symbolic threat to the patriarchal order" (de Coning, 2011: 82). Perhaps this is the reason why Julie is the one who initiates the incestuous act by luring the all-to-eager Jack into it: it is her unconscious desire to put an end to patriarchal hegemony. That

is why, when conceding to reciprocated sexuality, Jack and Julie show that, for them, incest is not repugnant. Consequently, they also reveal their needy to return to the safety of the womb and their incapacity to grow up. The embedded reference to the umbilical cord is highly revealing in this context: it represents a sort of regression to the period when the yet unborn baby is completely dependent upon the mother so as to be able to survive. To a certain extent, it also suggests anxiety, dependency and difficulty in moving towards independence; perhaps even the lack of ambition to do so, since the security and nourishment provided by the womb and early childhood may seem preferable to the harsh and dangerous adult world. But this subconscious, no matter how appealing, includes a trap: a world free of conflict is also free of progress, of development of evolution.

It is worthwhile mentioning the fact that Jack's argument with his elder sister regarding Tom's wish to become a girl, although described as a simple "theoretical discussion" (48), has an enormous symbolic power: it reveals McEwan's own feminist concerns. In Jack Slay's words (1996: 48), "Along with Tom's transformation and Jack's consequent repugnance, a subtle feminism begins to appear in McEwan's work". As David Malcolm argues, the novelist's "presentation of women" is a highly important issue that "any critic of McEwan's work must focus on"; *The Cement Garden* is no exception, in the sense that it shows complex developments of the women characters. The novel is, indeed, "partly organized around a complex polarization of male and female, with emphasis on male beastliness" (Malcolm, 2002: 12). Perhaps, then, Tom's refusal to keep being a boy signifies his contempt for the male-dominated world he inhabits and his repudiation of the fact that he might eventually become such a man. When his sisters indulge him and dress him up like a little girl, he has the chance "to become someone else", and this almost shocks the protagonist, as he himself confesses: "They are only clothes and a wig, I thought, it is Tom dressed up. But I was looking at another person, someone who could expect a life quite different from Tom's. I was excited and scared." (77) Again, the narrator's feelings are quite ambivalent: he both lured into and horrified by the sheer possibility of gender fluctuation, whose significance he cannot fully grasp and accept.

Tom's need for change does not stop here, though, since he is not able to find the much needed support and comfort in behaving like a little girl. Thus, the only remaining step for him to take is that of regressing to the narcissistic stage of infancy. Regression is nothing more than a defense mechanism and, by experiencing it, Tom allows himself to cope with his increasing

frustration. He becomes increasingly dependent on Julie, with a desire to monopolize her attention and to transform her into a mother surrogate. It seems strange that the same little boy who (prior to his father's death) used to turn toys over "contemptuously with his foot" and told Jack "they were for babies" (13) now wishes to become a baby and consequently acts like one:

> Tom was sitting on her lap with his thumb in his mouth and round his neck there was a napkin tied like a bib. He was staring across the room in a glazed kind of way and his head leaned against Julie's breasts. He did not seem to notice that I had come in and went on making small sucking noises with his thumb. (107)

His regression reveals the fact that the loss of his parents (especially of his mother) was too traumatic an event for him to be able to cope with. Therefore, not only does Tom not grow up, but he seems to willingly become irretrievably lost in the world of his early childhood, when his mother was still there to protect him.

Unlike Tom or, for that matter, Jack and Julie, Sue changes very little on the course of the narration, and her behavior is probably the least deviant according to the conventional social norms. Her psychosexual development is not problematic, on the contrary; it seems that, in her case, the super-ego acts as a powerful legislative and prohibitive force that, by means of shame, censors her id and makes her conduct socially acceptable. It is Jack himself who points this out when noting Sue's refusal to play the examination game whose subject she used to be:

> The games ceased no long after Father died, although it was not his death that brought them to an end. Sue became reluctant. Perhaps she had learned something at school and was ashamed of herself for letting us do things to her (29).

Although her presence throughout the novel is constant, Sue is basically a static character, with restricted speech and action pattern. A careful observer of what happens around her, she is at the same time withdrawn and introverted; moreover, by allowing her siblings to do whatever they want, she displays a fairly passive attitude. Jack frequently describes her "as an alien" (Slay, 1996: 47); in the sex game, for instance, she is 'the specimen from outer space' (11). Later on, the protagonist confirms: she "really did look like a girl from another planet" (25). Her solitary nature allows her to spend most of her time reading obsessively and writing diary entries that describe her grieving process, as she seems to be "the most affected by the mother's death"

(Wells, 2010: 36). Indeed, her voraciousness when it comes to reading represents an invaluable means of evasion, even liberation from the dreadful world she inhabits. As Lynn Wells put it, what she does is "retreat into a world of make-believe" (Wells, 2010: 36). While being the least featured character in *The Cement Garden*, she is undoubtedly the most responsible and moral one. "In many ways", since "she struggles to accept the loss of her mother and survive in her new life", Sue is "not the 'alien', but the most conventional, the most normal of the four children" (Slay, 1996: 47).

Undoubtedly, *The Cement Garden* is "a psychological study of adolescence" which "charts family relationships and tensions: between father and son, between mother and children, and among siblings" (Malcolm, 2002: 51). Despite being a psychological novel of development, however, McEwan's first novel is not exactly a *Buildungsroman*, since its neophyte characters are not properly initiated into adulthood on the course of the narration. As the children characters transgress taboos, they display various instances of deviant sexuality and fail to acquire social integration, which is essential in any successful coming of age story. In short, McEwan's first novel depicts "regression rather than maturity (Malcolm, 2002: 10) and, thus, subverts "traditional maturation narratives and childhood dystopias" (*ibid.*: 53). By frequently resorting to the uncanny, *The Cement Garden* belongs to the Gothic fiction and is undeniably a perverted type of Buildungsroman.

Much like *Lord of the Flies* (1954), it is also an "island novel" concerned with children isolated from adults. However, as Peter Childs points out, "whereas Golding's children run wild, fighting each other, McEwan's grow colder together"; furthermore, "the reader is reminded how the adult world provides checks not on their [the children's] natural aggression, but on their natural sexuality" (Childs, 2006: 34). The psychosexual development of the children characters is compromised long before the parents' death; with a dictatorial father figure and a somewhat "passive mother" (Wells, 2010: 35) whose voice is almost impossible to be heard and as a result of numerous communication breakdowns, the children's inner world becomes anguished, alienated and contained. Orphanage and bereavement further complicate things, leaving them in a particularly vulnerable state; hence, they make questionable decisions that will inexorably affect their lives and turn them into socially repugnant individuals. The novel "depicts a collapse of norms, rules and order", as "violation follows upon violation", but the siblings "scarcely feel that their actions are reprehensible" (Malcolm, 2002: 63-64).

Concealing the mother's death by burying her dead body in concrete is only the beginning of a series of queer, abnormal acts and behavioral patterns; Jack's retreat into an almost inescapable onanistic world, Tom's wish to become a girl and, then, his regression to the early stage of infancy, Sue's further estrangement and Julie's taking on most of his father's traits (despite being a mother surrogate for her younger siblings), they are all instances of unnatural psychosexual development. But the apical point of the diegesis, namely the incestuous act between Jack and Julie, is most revealing of the two characters perverted development and immaturity; their sexual union represents the climax of "the subversion and suspension of conventional family values" (de Coning, 2011: 101).

Nonetheless, as McEwan himself claims, "if you remove the controls, you have a ripe anarchy in which the oedipal and the incestuous are the definitive emotions"; in addition, since Julie acts as a mother surrogate to her younger siblings, we deal with "a situation in which the oedipal and the incestuous are identical" (Hamilton, in Roberts, 2010: 17). With no one or nothing to suppress the primitive and instinctive component of the characters' personality, i.e., their id, with no norms or rules to be followed, with no societal values and morals to act as guidance, the children's superego remains essentially underdeveloped. In other words, in spite of the deviant, socially inacceptable changes undergone by the characters, there are numerous mitigating circumstances for their behavior. In this respect, Dominic Head (2007: 48) argues that:

> Left to their own devices, the children's games result in the infantilizing and gender transformation of Tom, the promotion of Julie to the maternal role, and the eventual incest between Julie and Jack (…). The over-dependence on the family unit as a source of reassurance and repair is an extension, merely, of the parents' regime: by damaging the children emotionally, while simultaneously cutting the family unit off from outside contact, the parents have established a dysfunctional home in which emotional need and emotional damage have become inseparable.

At times, the reader cannot help but sympathize with them, since it becomes obvious that they are, to a great extent, pushed into making all the wrong decisions. Lack of real parental guidance and censorship (both before and after the parents' death), failure in becoming socially integrated and fear of the unknown offer some degree of justification for their conduct. "Julie's bossiness",

"Sue's isolation", Jack's alienation", "Tom's regression" and the incest, are, essentially, "defense mechanisms" that, to a certain extent, provide "a safe haven" (Slay, 1996: 48).

4.1.5. *The Cement Garden* (1993)

Written and directed by Andrew Birkin, the cinematic adaptation of *The Cement Garden* was released in 1993, is generally built along the same plotline as the novel on which it is based. It stars Andrew Robertson as Jack, Charlotte Gainsbourg (Birkin's niece) as Julie, Alice Coulthard as Sue and Ned Birkin (the director's son) as Tom and it has a running time of 105 minutes, which is quite a lot for a film based on a novella. The content of source text is rather faithfully rendered, in the sense that there is little contraction or expansion; the general tone of the book is brilliantly conveyed especially due to the actors' performance, but also due to the mise-en-scene and mise-en-temps, the camera positions and movement, and, lust but not least, the montage. It is perhaps the casting of Robertson and Gainsbourg, the older androgynous siblings, that makes the film so successful. Undeniably, there is much more to this piece of cinema than just following the four children as they are trying to cope with their parents' death. The character design, together with the surreal locations and the grotesque, sinister, at time abhorring happenings, turn the film into a truly unique cinematographic feat that brilliantly captures the quintessence of McEwan's novel.

The idea of offspring attempting to hold the family and house together following the parents' death or abandonment is, of course, not new, either we talk of fiction or the screen. Perhaps two of the most striking examples are William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), turned into a film by Harry Hook in 1990 and Julian Gloag's *Our Mother's House* (1963), adapted for the big screen by Jack Clayton in 1967. However, Birkin's adaptation of McEwan haunting, perverse novel represents a puzzling, hypnotic, unique exploration of how children forced to take care of themselves soon give into their forbidden obsessions and cravings. In the midst of the disarming changes that occur, the film is able to highlight the unusual bond that develops between Jack, who eschews all responsibility, and Julie, who consequently needs to handle everything so that they avoid complete chaos. Very much like in the book, their strange relationship is at risk when Julie invites her boyfriend, a complete stranger, the representative of the outside world, into their house. The household is marked by seclusion, bleakness and a state

of sluggishness, indolence and inertia: it is quite often that the film portrays the children doing or saying nothing. Inaction and lethargy, as opposed to vitality, is what characterizes them at almost all times. What is more, the mise-en-temps is deliberately ambiguous: there is nothing of the furniture or the costumes to give sufficient clues as to when the action is set. It's a disturbing, yet frank world, a microcosm in which the small family of children can actually live their lives surrounded by nothing except concrete and rubble.

Since the father represents the ultimate authority commanding his offspring to occupy their conventional place in the symbolic order of the family and, by extension, of society, his death, coupled with the lack of outside intervention, means that male and female roles become interchangeable. Hence, Julie invests herself with full authority and responsibility, a position that, traditionally, would be attributed to the man of the house. Similarly, Tom becomes obsessed with wearing girl's clothing and, during make-believe play, he pretends to be Julie, while his friend is assigned the role of being Jack. The heterosexual normative is, thus, subverted in multiple instances. Nonetheless, when looking beyond the some of the most shocking scenes, the incest included, we have to admit that the film's strength lies in the great value that the children place their family: despite breaking numerous social norms, preconceptions and taboos, it is their purpose that transcends everything. The controversial scenes do not really come as a surprise: after all, the film is based on a McEwan book. The otherwise outrageous love story between the two siblings becomes almost like a celebration, one that gives way to the ever-present sexual excitement and tension between them. It all resides in the actors' performance: the glances they exchange, their silences that are never awkward and their intimate gestures build up the final scene, which is neither necessarily predictable, nor totally unexpected.

Freed of the constraints of adult behaviour as a repository of social norms, the children begin acting without any restraint whatsoever. But their attitude does not entirely mean succumbing to chaos and rejecting societal conventions altogether: it can also be seen as the ultimate expression of solidarity between the remaining family members. One of the striking similarities between the novel and its adaptation is how well the latter manages to capture the confusion of gender identity pervasive in the source text. Gainsbourg and Robertson look astoundingly androgynous, both in terms of appearance, with her hair short and his long, and in terms of behaviour. The characters could have been easily names Julian and Jackie. Therefore, in line with the feminist concerns that characterized McEwan himself, both the film and the novel

portray women's power against fragmented, inefficient masculine dominance. It is worthwhile mentioning the fact that the appalling nature of how taboos are broken in the film is presented in such a gentle fashion that most of them seem almost natural, in spite of the daringly young age of the cast and the frequent instances of adolescence nudity. The developing intimacy between Julie and Jack is presented non-judgmentally, almost as a matter of fact. It does seem to fit naturally against the increasingly queer context. Consequently, the denouement manages to gently convey the incestuous act without shocking the audience. Indeed, the actors make of the best of the dialogue and the surreal situations that they have to perform.

The setting of the film is of utmost importance: what we deal with is a large, gloomy concrete house, surrounded by a desolate, morose, somber landscape, presumably on the outskirts of a town. As Birkin himself explains in the screenplay, the house is "nondescript", and "it could be almost any place, in any country, in any post 60s period" (1992). It seems that everything is grey or greyish, an allusion to the cement that will eventually lead to the family's drama. The striking gloominess of the color palette is an excellent means of highlighting the melancholy attached to the story. There is the same kind of fascination with decay and the macabre to be found in the book. This enables a gripping presentation of the darker side of human nature, very much a midsummer nightmare. The location is perfectly chosen as it conveys the idea of isolation, separating the family from the rest of the people and, thus, enabling the four children act without taking into account societal expectations. After the father's death, following the scene in which Jack smooths out his impression in the soft cement, we are offered a long shot of the house. For the first time, the viewer sees that the house does not have immediate neighbors.

The opening scene presents the father (Hanns Zischler) making the necessary arrangements to cement the little plant life that protrudes from the manufactured ground. The garden, as expected is "a veritable labyrinth of narrow little paths that make elaborate detours to visit flower beds only a few feet away" (Birkin, 1992). Evidently in poor-health, his authoritative nature comes through at the dinner table: things are to be done in his way and there are no acceptable deviations, not even when it comes to the smallest of details. As in the source text, the mother (Sinead Cusack) proposes that the cement should be sent back because of the family's financial problems. Although this would seem like a reasonable argument, negotiations are simply ineffective and the father's answer cuts them short: "It'll be much tidier from now on –

and there's an end to it". Camera positions and camera movement are quite conventional: there are no close-ups that would bring a specific character into focus; it is rather by means of medium and long shots that the whole family is presented, so that the audience can make an idea about the hierarchical relations and the father's domineering presence (despite his thin, incredibly frail appearance). The mother looks particularly frail as well, with an unobtrusive presence, but this comes naturally, given her family status.

One of the first instances when the use of editing becomes fairly compelling is the scene of the impending heart attack, presented as part of a series of crosscuts focusing on Jack's masturbatory climax. The shots and countershots simultaneously present the father in the back garden and Jack inside the bathroom, in dizzying succession, to the effect that the heart-attack and Jack's orgasm happen at the exact same moment. The camera zooms in on both of them and the overlapping sound is that of their struggle to breathe, for obviously very different reasons. The scene ends with close-ups of first the father, whose eyes contort in a death spasm, and then of Jack, whose reflection in the mirror similarly depicts a tight spasm. Immediately after the father's death, the camera movement is less dramatic, as the film continues to foreground the deterioration of everything – and everyone - inside the house and, then, outside the hosue, in the garden. The background against which the action unfolds, a "derelict wasteland", seems to be decomposing, as does the mother's dead body (Birkin, 1992). The sexual imagery of the film can be disturbing at times, and so can its brutal realism. The disintegration of the family takes place not only because of the parents' sudden death, but also because of the emotionally deprived older siblings. Hence, what Jack and Julie understand by their acceptance of the parental roles is the sexual counterpart, and not the responsibilities.

In a review published in The New York Times, Caryn James (1994) acknowledges that the actors' performances are "exquisitely delicate and difficult", but she goes on to argue that "Andrew Birkin's version of Ian McEwan's dark coming-of-age novel treats its subject with such earnest matter-of-factness that the most unsettling elements turn dull". Thus, from her standpoint, the movie is a flat one, regardless of its shocking plot elements. She infers that the film does not do justice to the novel since it is less explicit; nonetheless, she concedes to the fact that at least some of the editing is, indeed, powerful. For instance, Jack's obsession with his own body is vividly conveyed, even when it comes to his masturbatory habits, "shown discreetly, but unmistakably" (*ibid*.). James praises Birkin's "grip on the superficial elements of the story",

especially when it comes to the mise-en-scene. The filming locations are extremely well chosen, with "the boxy cement house eerily isolated among rubble-filled fields". Yet, despite the actors' first-rate performances, James contends that it is "the emotional heart of the story" that seems to elude the director" "in trying so hard to make Jack's obsessions seem natural rather than lurid, Mr. Birkin makes his hero and everyone around him uninteresting" (*ibid*.).

The style notes written at the beginning of the screenplay compellingly presents the story that is the book and the film (the difference between the two in terms of content is negligible):

> As a simple metaphor – and at the risk of sounding pretentious – this story is like an air-balloon, tethered to reality by two restraining ropes: the father and the mother. When the father dies, the first rope is severed, and the stability of the children begins to drift; with the death of the mother, the second mooring is cut, and the balloon starts to float slowly away, gaining height and distance from reality, as the kids become almost weightless, losing all sense of gravity. (Birkin, 1992)

As the film gradually gives way to surreality, the director employs cinematic devices which are so subtle that it is almost impossible for the viewer to become aware of them. By the end of the film, everything else except for the children will lose depth of focus, which leads to "a gradual loss of all background detail"; similarly, "all extraneous sound will have been eliminated" (*ibid*.). The second half of the film almost indiscernibly shows how different things in the children's lives gain in importance, whereas some of them become totally insignificant. As such, the book that Jack reads and the cot seem larger, whereas the clock, for example, gets smaller. Likewise, Julie's swimming suit intensifies in color, as opposed to the remaining grass in the garden, whose color fades so that it becomes washed-out to suggest the barrenness of the landscape. It is only in the very last scene of the movie that picture and sound are restored a certain amount of depth, as reality, represented by the blue light of the police car, finds its way back to the protagonists' story.

The director's stance is that the effects are never overtly conspicuous to the audience. It is an overall sensation into which we gradually slip, a seamless transition into a landscape imperceptibly enshrouded in mist" (*ibid*.). This is why McEwan is admittedly very fond of this particular adaptation: it manages to convey the overtones of the book and it does so by practically rendering every word of it on the screen. In spite of the controversy around it and the

mixed criticism that it attracted, *The Cement Garden* is seen as a successful directorial enterprise, which is why Birkin was awarded the Best Director Award at the 1993 Berlin film festival.

4.2. The Power of Coincidence and the Impending Threat of Death in Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance*

> ***Motto:*** *"Chance is part of our reality: we are continually shaped by the forces of coincidence, the unexpected occurs with almost numbing regularity in all our lives" (Auster, 1992: 269)*

Published in 1990 and turned into a movie in 1993, *The Music of Chance* foregrounds some of the thematic concerns that are to be found in all of Auster's fiction, namely coincidence, solitude, lack of or loss of money, imminent catastrophe or even death and the absence of a paternal figure. Seemingly uncomplicated in terms of plot, the novel is both thrilling and unsettling, exhilarating and disturbing, as it presents the reader with the works of chance in the life of the protagonist, Jim Nashe. Thematically, the novel is situated at the border that separates "the random from the predetermined, the accidental from the carefully designed" (Varvogli, 2001: 76). Whereas the former half of the book feels like a tribute to Kerouac's *On the Road*, the latter is a haunting piece of fiction in which we see Nashe deprived of freedom as a result of a sequence of chance events and several choices that do not seem entirely his. Chance is, undeniably, a leitmotif of Auster's work: with no exception, his fiction tackles the unpredictable, the arbitrariness and randomness of life, the twists and turns that shape it. His prose is pervaded by "stories filled with strange and mysterious events, oblique connections, bizarre coincidences and apparently chance acts" (Astorga, 2005: 3). Most of Auster's characters are profoundly affected by how they react to "contingent occurrences", being unable to "dismiss the significance of these random events" (Martin, 2008: 35).

In a nutshell, *The Music of Chance* explicitly deals with coincidence and chance and with how random events can change one's life forever. Apart from contingency, death is also an everlasting presence in the novel; its threat - both appalling and appealing. The denouement presents it as an enticing option, one that the protagonist welcomes. Our analysis of *The Music of Chance* will, therefore, take into account these thematic nuclei so as to reveal how contingency

inexorably affects the protagonist to the point that, in the end, he finds the possibility of dying too luring to dismiss. In other words, we will focus on the role chance plays in shaping human existence and, conversely, on the very limited part that the protagonist's choices play in influencing the final outcome. Finally, we set out to prove the novel's emphasis on the individual's incapacity to cast away the everlasting menace of death, in spite of never giving up until the very end.

4.2.1. The Works of Happenstance, Contingency and Luck in *The Music of Chance*

A novel with a very basic plot, in which not much happens, *The Music of Chance* brings to the fore a protagonist that is solitary, yet craving for human connection, full of guilt, yet never losing hope of redemption. In other words, Jim Nashe's "relentless pursuit of a grounded self… comes to an end in bizarre circumstances" (Brown, 2007: 131), all because of contingency events. The novel under discussion emphasises the effects of chance to the point that it becomes an absurdist piece of literature. In philosophical terms, absurdism refers to the inability to find meaning in life, in spite of the human tendency to constantly seek for it. The main character of *The Music of Chance*, Jim Nashe, epitomizes this contradiction, while at the same time being aware of his absurd ontological condition. Despite this awareness, however, he never ceases to search for value and meaning, both embracing and defying his circumstances. Almost inevitably, the protagonist chooses to resolve his dilemma by means of suicide. As a matter of fact, death represents a constant threat all throughout the novel and it materializes itself into the only possible escape from Nashe's absurdist existence.

The incipit of the novel provides the reader with biographical information about the protagonist, Jim Nashe, setting the background against which the action will unfold. We find out that Nashe is a fireman who has been left by his wife and decides to give custody of his two-year old daughter Juliette to his sister, in Minnesota. Meanwhile, a lawyer manages to track him down and informs him that he has inherited &200,000. Thus, the protagonist "is catapulted into existential uncertainty" by the two "inadvertencies", "the desertion of his wife and the death of his estranged father" (Smartt Bell, 1990). Nashe perceives the money as providential: he is convinced it offers the possibility of finally being free. Therefore, he decides to quit his job and

buys himself a car, the only new car he has ever owned. What happens then seems to prove that he is no longer is control of his life. He discovers the sheer joy of being on the road, of driving "from a nowhere to another", and wanders aimlessly for a whole year, giving into a compelling need to do so, almost like an invisible, irresistible force: "Speed was of the essence, the joy of sitting in the car and hurtling himself forward through space. That became a good beyond all others, a hunger to be fed at any price" (10). All he wants is "to preserve this state of orbital nullity, which is inherently unstable and begins to decay as his money decreases" (Smartt Bell, 1990).

Once again, the unexpected will serve, at least temporarily, as a means of illusory salvation. During the thirteenth month, he accidentally meets Jim Pozzi, also known as Jackpot, a young man whose only way of making a living is playing poker. Their meeting is, according to the narrator, "one of those random, accidental encounters that seem to materialize out of thin air – a twig that breaks off in the wind and suddenly lands at your feet" (1). On their way to New York, Pozzi, a professional gambler, tells Nashe that he has recently played poker against Bill Flower and Will Stone, two men who became multi-millionaires after winning the lottery. Since Pozzi won the game, the two would like to arrange a rematch, but the stakes would be very high, as Pozzi needs at least &10,000 to be allowed to play. In a reckless act, Nashe decides to use his last financial resources to help Pozzi get into the game with Flower and Stone, not before negotiating the terms of their deal. Apart from getting the initial investment back, Nashe wants half of the pot, as he plans to make enough money to buy a house in Minnesota and take Juliette back. Thus, he perceives Pozzi as "an opportunity in the shape of a human being, a card-playing specter whose one purpose in the world was to help Nashe win back his freedom" (33). Well aware of the risks involved, he agrees not to have any claims in case Pozzi loses the game. During a few rounds of poker together, Nashe is impressed by the young man's skills and gets to know more of his background. Their relation takes a new turn at this point, as the two realize how much they have in common: "the early abandonment, the unexpected gift of money, the abiding anger" (45). "The curious correspondence" he finds between their lives strikes a chord in Nashe, who becomes very empathetic: "Like it or not, a bond is formed" (*ibid.*).

The two drive to their opponents' property in Pennsylvania where, before the actual poker game, they are offered dinner and a tour of the huge, yet strange place:

> During a tour of their baroque mansion in rural Pennsylvania, the fat and garrulous Flower, a former accountant, expatiates at length on the proposition that "numbers have souls" (so that what seems to be chance may not be at all), while the compact and monosyllabic Stone merely indicates the miniaturized City of the World that he is building, including replicas of his own house and minuscule figures of himself and his friend, and describes his plan to build a second model within the model, so creating an infinite recession. (Smart Bell, 1990)

Stone's passion baffles them and strikes them as really uncanny: he has taken five years of his life to build the model, a sort of utopian place that does not seem very different from the real world. It even includes a prison, one in which most inmates seem to be more than happy to serve time, except for a convict who is sentenced to death, facing a firing squad. This gives Nashe and Pozzi some sort of apprehension, as they begin to doubt the sanity of their hosts and to have second-thoughts about their decision to come to the mansion in the first place. There seems to be more to Flower and Stone than meets the eye, they are not the "easy marks" they were expected to be (Smartt Bell, 1990).

Although, at the beginning, the poker game seems to favor Pozzi, by the end of it, after playing all night, Pozzi loses all of Nashe's money and the car. Moreover, they also find themselves owing &10,000 to Flower and Stone. It is very quickly that the millionaires come up with a solution so that the debt can be paid: Pozzi and Nashe are to remain on the estate and build a huge wall "of Egyptian magnitude" (Smartt Bell, 1990) with 10,000 bricks that used to form a castle in Britain. In other words, the two "are consigned to building an enormous wall in a meadow, an utterly senseless assignment whose origins lie in the impenetrable concatenation of a series of chance events" (Alford, quoted in Bloom, 1998). Although Pozzi is extremely reluctant and feels that they have been cheated, Nashe convinces him to sign the contract that stipulates the working hours and the payment. The two are to become free men not necessarily upon the completion of the job, but after fifty 10-hour working days. They are set comfortably enough in a trailer and are told that they can get any living supplies they ask for.

The very next day, they begin working under the supervision of Calvin Murks, but it takes some time for them to get accustomed to the exhausting, Sisyphean endeavour. The fifty days pass slowly, with Pozzi having numerous fits of rage: he is now convinced Flower and Stone had not played the poker game fairly and that they are some very strange, dangerous

individuals. Both Nashe and Pozzi understand they are not free men; on the contrary, they are "at the mercy of powers they do not fully comprehend" (Varvogli, 2001: 76). One morning, Murks comes carrying a gun. It becomes obvious that they are trapped, probably never able to escape, sensing an impending threat of death lurking in the air at all times:

> Sometimes, powerless to stop himself, he [Nashe] even went so far as to imagine that he was already living inside the model. Flower and Stone would look down on him then, and he would suddenly be able to see himself through their eyes - as if he were no larger than a thumb, a little gray mouse darting back and forth in his cage. (178)

Their worst suspicions are confirmed when, at the end of the fifty days, they decide to throw a party in their trailer. The next day Calvin brings them the bill for their entire stay, the party included, all amounting to almost $4000. It turns out that they had been charged for everything, including the food, and they have to keep on working until they pay the new debt. They know it is nothing but a trap, so they make up a plan to help Pozzi escape and call the police. Nashe's decision is that of staying until the entire debt is paid off. When the night comes, they dig a hole under the fence and Pozzi runs away, but the next morning Nashe is shocked to find him outside the trailer, savagely beaten, close to dying. Murks and Floyd, his son-in-law, supposedly take Pozzi to the hospital, but Nashe is convinced they killed him. Nonetheless, he continues to work until he pays his debt and one extra week, to earn some money that would help him travel. When he finally manages to do that, Murks and Floyd offer to take him to a bar in a nearby town so that they can celebrate together. On their way back, Nashe is allowed to drive the car (his own car, the one that he had lost during the poker game). It is snowing; the road is icy and, as Nashe gradually increases the speed, he cannot avoid the collision with another car. The end of the novel brings about his "escape":

> There was no time to stop, no time to prevent what was going to happen, so instead of slamming his foot on the brakes, he pressed down even harder on the gas. He could hear Murks and his son-in-law howling in the distance, but their voices were muffled, drowned out by the roar of blood in his head. And then the light was upon him, and Nashe shut his eyes, unable to look at it anymore. (198)

"The haphazard wandering of the plot, random as the path of Nashe's Saab" is justifiable when we think of the title and it leads "the book to a convincing statement of Mr. Auster's insistent theme that Nashe's identity" does not represent a "an innate quality"; on the contrary, "it is the product of surrounding circumstance", of pure chance, of mere coincidences (Smartt Bell, 1990). The entire novel is built around accidental occurrences: chance, coincidence and randomness play a huge part in shaping the individual's fortune, both literally and figuratively. The games of chance resorted to in the novel are metaphors for the uncertainties of human existence, symbolic ways of handing destinies over to the fate (Astorga, 2005). Gambling reflects lack of certainty, as it always leaves the results "to the whims of chance" (*ibid*.). The poker game that represents the utmost trigger of the sinister unfolding of the plot, is based of luck, that is to say, chance, in spite of the fair share of knowledge and experience that can turn the odds in one favour. Winning the lottery is also a matter of luck, although Flower seems to claim the opposite:

> "I've dealt with numbers all my life, of course, and after a while you begin to feel that each number has a personality of its own. A twelve is very different from a thirteen, for example. Twelve is upright, conscientious, intelligent, whereas thirteen is a loner, a shady character who won't think twice about breaking the law to get what he wants (…). Numbers have souls, and you can't help but get involved with them in a personal way." (73)

The *Music of Chance* "symmetrically pivots" around the poker game, which "is placed at the exact center of the book and thus can be said to separate the realm of the road from the realm of the wall" (Herzogenrath, 1999: 193). Despite of strict rules, poker consists of a series of mainly uncontrollable outcomes, as it is impossible to know the winners and losers until the very end of each game. To put it differently, it is nothing short of a "ritual of contingency" and, thus, it "functions here as another expression of the intersection of rule and chance shaping the lives and narrative outcomes of Auster's novels" (Brown, 2007: 131). For both Pozzi and the reader, the poker match is extremely tantalizing, as it is almost impossible to pinpoint to what extent the loss can be attributed to bad luck (chance) or to the cheating (agency):

> Like the poker player, the reader looks for patterns in the novel, only to find that the patterns are hesitantly presented, and tentatively gestured toward. Like the poker player, the important thing is to

> remain inscrutable, and the text operates by minimizing clues to what is occurring. With these preoccupations, Auster's novel deals with the perennial postmodern anxiety of neurosis and paranoia about the extent to which everything is plotless or totally plotted: whether one lives in a world of hermetic containment in complete meaning, or in a world of undifferentiation and pure randomness. (Woods, in Barone, 1995: 149)

The analogy between human life and chance is, of course, not a new one; it dates back to ancient times, when the Romans considered that the goddess Fortuna was in control of the random acts of human life. The wheel of fortune, ridden by people who were either on top or hitting the bottom, had about the same connotations. Auster's fictional world, whose characters' lives change dramatically after chance encounters, is inextricably subjected to these forces. The author himself, in *The Art of Hunger* (1992: 260), argues that "the world is filled with strange events. Reality is a great deal more mysterious than we give it credit for". Convinced that human experience has an "utterly bewildering nature", his contention is that the powers of contingency can demolish "our life-long certainties about the world" in the blink of an eye. This leads him to the conclusion that "or lives do not really belong to us, they belong to the world, and in spite of our efforts to make sense of it, the world is a place beyond our understanding". Moreover, since "the improbable exists in reality", Auster believes it is "the task of the realist writer to use it as a source of imagination and present it in his fiction" (*ibid*.: 270).

Auster's fiction denies the reader a definite answer or solution concerning the real nature of events: we are left wondering if there is a pattern that rules the uncanny. In the case of *The Music of Chance*, for instance, although the possibility of Nashe (and the reader) finding out the truth is never dismissed, it never gets materialized either. The end-result is "the presentation of something that is beyond our control, something that destroys the neat ordering of cause and effect", namely chance (Nikolic). Lexemes and phrases such as "random", "out of thin air", "out of the blue", "accidental", and even Jackpot, Pozzi's Nickname, emphasise the prominence given to unpredictability. The protagonist welcomes this state of affairs and, as if having nothing to lose, he always goes all-in: "And just like that, he went ahead and did it. Without the slightest tremor of fear, Nashe closed his eyes and jumped" (1). After losing the poker game, however, Nashe is forced to acknowledge that the freedom obtained through wealth and travel had only been an illusory one. Having entrusted himself entirely to chance has led to chaos and he has now come to a nihilistic point in which his own liberty is at stake. He need to find order again

leads to immediately accept building the wall for Flower and Stone. After all, "the life on the road, stripped of connections and responsibilities, has not provided a coherent and grounded inner self" for him (Brown, 2007: 131). His somewhat tragic fate is the result of missed opportunities and the protagonist is aware of the entirely different possibilities, if only the sequence and timing of events had been different.

In spite of the inference that characters lack control of their lives, being subjected to the whims of chance, Nashe and Pozzi respond to this realization in opposite ways: the former acts in compliance, accepts his fate and yields to the probability that he might never be free again; his contention is that this might be "a crisis that he had been searching for all along" (98), welcoming it. The latter, on the contrary, is defiant, subversive, malcontent, never at peace with the obvious implication that he is not going to get out of there alive. Steven Alford (quoted in Bloom, 1998) accounts for such reactions:

> Nashe's attitude to his fate is fatalistic, he accepts that his freedom is taken from him and the building of the wall becomes a kind of atonement. (…) Once released from the world of infinite chance with indefinite possibilities, Nashe stoically tolerates his new position. *The Music of Chance* contrasts these two disparate worlds – the improbable world of chance and the determinate world of law.

By and large, human existence seems to be inescapably linked with these two possibilities: there is always an element of chance, the ineffable force that makes life resemble a poker game, and yet, the rational world characterized by law and order allows for almost anything to be explained and for the individual to be in some state of illusory control. All in all, neither of the two proves capable of achieving harmony with oneself and with the world – neither of them "establishes any degree of ontological certainty because they are unable to locate correspondences between their understanding of reality and their experience of it" (Brown, 2007: 132).

4.2.2. Dis-/Location and the Importance of the Environment in the Novel

In "Memory's Escape: Inventing the Music of Chance", Mark Irwin asserts that Auster's writings display "a wonderful obsession with space", as the characters "vacillate from boxed-in extremes to expansive, often vagrant wanderings" (Irvin, quoted in Hutchisson, 2013). *The Music of Chance* is Auster's novel which "best exemplifies mobility" (Brown, 2007: 102).

Solely "guided by instinct and chance" (*ibid*., 103), the protagonist embarks on an identity quest that would finally lead to his death. Ironically, however, as Nashe shuttles between open space and confinement, he seems to be most free when confined. His freedom to wander brings about loss and confusion, whereas living and working in the carceral environment of the meadow offers him clarity and lucidity, which is quite the opposite of what one might expect.

At a close scrutiny, *The Music of Chance* represents the exploration of the different stages of Nashe's life, "as he passes from family man, to wanderer, to gambler, and then to the prisoner of unseen powers of control and oppression in a mysterious meadow (*ibid*.). The protagonist's life is, thus, subjected to a world of change as he travels the United States in a car. In fact, this is how the novel begins and ends – with Nashe behind the wheel. The transition from one stage to another is always marked by contingency and coincidence, as we have already proven. Receiving the inheritance, for instance, brings Nashe immense joy, as it enables a sense of freedom that is "monumental in its consequences" (3). Now that money is no longer a concern, the prospect of being able to do everything he wants and go everywhere he wants becomes a dizzying one, and by no means can it be discarded. But for his daughter Juliette, he no longer any connection or responsibility. Driving at the high speed, gradually increasing the number of hours spent in the car, only stopping to get fuel and some rest, becomes the sole purpose of the protagonist's life:

> Nashe realized that he was no longer in control of himself, that he had fallen into the grip of some baffling, overpowering force. He was like a crazed animal, careening blindly from one nowhere to the next, but no matter how many resolutions he made to stop, he could not bring himself to do it. (6)

The urge to get back into the car becomes irresistible and whenever he feels like settling down, his mind wanders back to the road, to the exhilaration provided by the a (un)fortunate combination of solitude and freedom. A wanderer crisscrossing America for more than a year, Nashe is, nonetheless, by no means free, as freedom isn't possible until taking on responsibility for something. The underlying paradox is dealt with by Auster himself: "Freedom, confinement: those are the two sides of a single thought, and the one couldn't exist without the other" (Auster, quoted in Hutchisson, 2013). The solitude that Nashe experiences while driving leads to utter self-reliance and egocentricity – he feels as if he were "a fixed point in a whirl of changes, a

body poised in utter stillness, as the world rushed through him and disappeared" (11-12). In other words, his perception is that the landscape moves past him, and not vice-versa. The car becomes a refuge, a sanctuary, a place where, while driving and listening to music, he can be carried "into a realm of weightlessness" (12). Thus, the effect that mobility has on the main character is that it releases him from his "corporeal reality", while at the same time leading him "from one sense of the self to the next" (Brown, 2007: 105). By perceiving himself as a fixed point, Nashe proves his nostalgia for quite the opposite of what speed and change usually bring about: what he longs for is certainty, immobility and tranquility. This goes in line with what Baudrillard's conception of speed as "simply the rite that initiates us into emptiness, a nostalgic desire for forms to revert to immobility, concealed beneath the very intensification of their mobility" (Baudrillard, quoted in Brown, 2007: 132).

Auster's novels frequently employ settings which comprise unearthly places, weird places which seemingly originate in real locations. Such fictional places allow for the exploration of "the extremes of human experience and they show how ontological stability is constantly undermined by spatial instability (Brown, 2007: 130). When compared to conventional ones, these places, inhabited by the imaginary and the symbolic, are shaped and governed by different forces altogether. Therefore, they are nothing but "spaces of imagination themselves" (*ibid*.: 129), and it often becomes impossible to say whether they are utopian or dystopian. "The City of the World", Stone's utopian model described in detail in *The Music of Chance*, appears to actually come into existence at the mansion of the two millionaires. Displaying the characteristics of a dream, the house itself seems to distort the sense of reality, as Nashe feels when he arrives at the gate:

> An overpowering sense of happiness washed through him. It lasted only an instant, then gave way to a brief, almost imperceptible feeling of dizziness… After that, his head seemed curiously emptied out, and for the first time in many years, he fell into one of those trances that had sometimes afflicted him as a boy: an abrupt and radical shift of his inner bearings, as if the world around him had suddenly lost all its reality. (65)

Under such circumstances, what the characters experience pertains to the field of the improbable, even unreal; in spite of the fact that there is still a dimension of plausibility to it, the "fairy tale elements" cannot be dismissed (Varvogli, 2001: 76). Driving to the house and

actually getting there poses some problems for Nashe and Pozzi, as the roads that lead to it are mazelike and they are not included on a map, which is really striking. The inside of Flower and Stone's house resembles, from Nashe's viewpoint, a movie set, which suggests that it might be an illusion, like the Blue Stone ranch situated in Tierra del Sueno, as part of the fictional universe of Auster's *The Book of Illusions*. Furthermore, inside the Pennsylvania mansion, the miniature scale-model of the City of the World, seemingly "a replica of the average American city" (Martin, 2008: 161), is situated in a room that seems to be "suspended in the middle of the air" (77). This represents another allusion to the dreamlike quality attributed to the setting. Stone describes his unfinished project, an endless cycle of representation, as "an artistic vision of mankind", "an autobiography", "a utopia" (79). It is his view of the world, of how it is supposed to look, placing heavy emphasis on the institutions that are meant to maintain order: the Hall of Justice, The Library, the Bank and The Prison. As Flower explains: "Willie calls them the Four Realms of Togetherness, and each one plays a vital role in maintaining the harmony of the city" (80). The rational order that is sought for and imposed in the Stone's model placed in sharp contrast to the random development of Nashe's life up to this moment.

The utopian view represented by the City of the World, "a society clearly based on surveillance and discipline" (Brown, 2007: 137) comes into existence in the meadow, and is thus forcefully turned into a "cure for conceptual chaos" (Rykwert, quoted in Brown, 2007: 134). What catches Nashe's attention while looking at the miniature model is the fact that in the prison, the inmates seem more than happy, putting on smiles, most likely content and grateful that they have the chance to redeem themselves through work. However, there is one prisoner that faces a firing squad, probably because of his disobedience. In the narrator's words, the model shows a "voodoo logic", "an atmosphere of cruelty and revenge" (87), an "overriding mood of terror, of dark dreams", "a threat of punishment" hanging in the air (96). At a first glance, the miniature city seems idyllic; and yet "the overriding sentiment is suppression":

> The 'contented citizens must adhere to enforced protocols, and any differentiation from the established norm is considered an aberration. As such, the severest punishment is meted out. The city's populace is incapable of independent thought, and the possibility of escape and future happiness is never an option. (Martin, 2008: 161)

Rejecting conformity is, thus, not allowed in the City of the World and the inference is that it will not be allowed on Flower and Stone's property either. Indeed, the prison stands as metonymical of the meadow itself, with Nashe and Pozzi's fate sealed, a fate foreshadowed by that of the inmates included in the model. The unknowable, inescapable forces that are at work at the mansion and in the meadow represent a "dangerous recipe" for oppression enforced in the name of law and order, and the City of the world is symbolic in this respect (Brown, 2007: 135). The meadow, like the City itself, "offers no possibility for subversive or fugitive activity", displaying an organisation that is "oppressive and menacing, rather than cooperative and benign" (*ibid*.: 136). Both characters will end up feeling incarcerated, with no possibility of escape whatsoever. "The power structure ensures that attacks upon the status quo are nullified"; consequently, "those who advocate change are dismissed as subversive and unpatriotic" (Martin, 2008: 162). Thus, transgressing established boundaries inevitably leads to death. The paradox is that, despite his apprehension, Pozzi never quits trying. As opposed to Nashe, it is simply impossible for him to embrace the forced labor imposed on him, viewing it as a means of atonement, of redemption. Predictably, his refusal to accept the totalitarian forces at work in the meadow is to be punished. As Brendan Martin argues, death here "is employed as a weapon to neutralize the opposition" and "it reflects the barbarity of Stone's oppressive regime" (Martin, 2008: 162). What is striking about the entire affair is the two millionaires' inability to see how abominable their deeds are; Flower justifies their atrocious view of the world by explaining how things work in Stone's miniature model:

> That's what I find so inspiring about Willie's city. It's an imaginary place, but it's also realistic. Evil still exists, but the powers who rule over the city have figured out how to transform that evil back into good. Wisdom reigns here, but the struggle is nevertheless constant, and great vigilance is required of all the citizens – each of whom carries the entire city within himself. (72-73)

The meadow lends itself to the possibility of turning Stone's aesthetic vision, his utopian view, into actuality. In spite of the fact that Nashe and Pozzi are to work under the terms of a legal contract, which presumably protects them, it soon becomes obvious that the space they are about to inhabit is appallingly cruel. The unexpected brutality of the forces that control their work turn the meadow and its surrounding into a carceral space, a space of complete control and repression. By losing the poker game and being left with nothing to pay their debt, Nashe and

Pozzi enable Stone to impose the "corrective measure" of building the wall, "in a parallel with the prisoners in the model" (Brown, 2007: 138). As Tim Woods (1995: 153) argues, the "ideologies that are theorized and conceptualized in the model are reproduced practically in the meadow". What is sinister about the whole affair is that it seems carefully planned in advance by Flower and Stone: the barbed-wire fence that surrounds the estate is a new one and the work is supervised at all times by Murks who, by means of the gun he is wearing, represents a constant threat. Therefore, "Flower and Stone's authority is imposed by a combination of confinement, coercion and fear" (Brown, 2007: 138). The correspondence between the City of the World and the meadow is undeniable: reduced to a population of three, the carceral space of the mansion represents a setting in which prisoners – with Murks himself holding the same status, as he is required to supervise at all times – have no chance of regaining their freedom.

4.2.3. The Death Drive versus the Threat of Death in *The Music of Chance*

When, at the very end of the novel, Nashe accelerates instead of hitting the breaks, he might be experiencing what Luca Winer (2011) describes as "the thrill of dread", "the horror of un-admitable horrors", namely welcoming the possibility of dying and doing it "on purpose". In circular fashion, the book ends by reiterating the same idea that was brought to the fore in the incipit: "Without the slightest tremor of fear, Nashe closed his eyes and jumped" (1). Winer contends that this type of behavior is inherently ascribable to all individuals and it represents "a conflicted drive towards self-oblivion", the thanatic instinct towards chaos. The term Thanatos first appears in Greek mythology and it refers to the son of Nyx and Erebos (Night and Darkness, respectively). A demon of death, it acts as a guide that leads souls to Hades, that is, to the realm of the dead. Freud, the father of modern psychology, assigns a new meaning to the term: Thanatos becomes the death drive which compels individuals to engage in risky acts that could bring about their own death. Conversely, according to Freud, all humans also life a life instinct called Eros, which ensures their survival by means of procreation. However controversial this conception might be (together with most Freudian ideas nowadays), the evidence for the presence of Thanatos in the fictional universe of *The Music of Chance* is fairly compelling, if not overwhelming. Self-destructive behavior is employed time and again, almost quixotically, by

both Nashe and Pozzi, as if it is only the ability to feel pain that keeps them alive. Their death drive persists irrespective of the consequences, as we are going to prove in what follows.

The protagonist of the novel finds himself always making decisions that are the opposite of what is expected of him. At the beginning, in spite of having the money to raise Juliette and despite loving her and feeling guilty and remorseful, Nashe feels the urge to leave everyone behind and get back on the road. He is well aware of the fact that his choice will eventually prevent him from building a strong relationship with his daughter and, inevitably, he will become the absent father-figure that his own father was; however, almost fatalistically, he is unable to change his mind. And, although he plans to go to Massachusetts, he ends up going in the opposite direction, thrilled by the very possibility of uncertainty and freedom entailed by such a decision:

> That was because he missed the ramp to the freeway – a common enough mistake – but instead of driving the extra twenty miles that would have put him back on the course, he impulsively went up to the next ramp, knowing full well that he had just committed himself to the wrong road. It was a sudden, unpremeditated decision (…), a dizzying prospect – to imagine all that freedom – to understand how little it mattered what choice he made. (5)

By quitting the job that had brought him nothing but satisfaction and pride, and then by driving his car too fast to control and pushing himself "a little father" each day, Nashe engages in a deliberately self-destructive behaviour. However, it is as early as the second night on the road that he realizes "he was no longer in control of himself"; in other words, "he had fallen into the grip of some baffling, overpowering force" that turned him into "a crazed animal, careening blindly from one nowhere to the next" (6). His new life brings exhilaration and enjoyment, despite his awareness that what he is doing is simply "perverse", namely throwing everything away "on the strength of an impulse, because of some nameless agitation" (7). Yielding to this urge brought him an ennobling kind of pain, one that could only be paralleled with "the courage to put a bullet through his head". What is paradoxical about his perception is that "in this case, the bullet was not death, it was life, it was the explosion that triggers the birth of new worlds" (9). What Nashe does is seek an entirely "new existence by exercising the old one (…). He forges a new life as he melts the old, cutting off his past through an orgy of aimless travel and topographical shiftlessness" (Woods, in Barone, 1995: 146).

While on the road, Nashe knows he is not entirely free of danger, "even under the best conditions"; traffic and the "inclemencies" of weather, "swerves and potholes, drunken drivers, the briefest lapse of attention", they are all "constant perils to watch out for". But in spite of the fact that "any one of those things could kill you in an instant" and "once or twice he came within a hair's breadth of crackups himself", Nashe was more than happy to welcome the element of risk that those close calls involved (11). He longed for them and always felt at ease on the road. The only problem that would eventually interfere with his ramblings is the fact that he will eventually run out of money. The paradox of the adventure was that "the money kept him going, but it was also an engine of loss, inexorably leading him back to the place where he had begun" (16). Perhaps that is why he so easily accepts the opportunity that the poker game brings about: it they are lucky enough to win, he can continue living on the edge and push "himself into conquering new barriers of endurance" (17). He understands, of course, that trusting his last money to Pozzi is an utterly reckless act; after all, he does not know him at all and he only gets few clues after analyzing Pozzi's appearance. At the same time, he knows it is "the chance of a lifetime", "a goddamn invitation to Fort Knox" (27). Which is why, in the split of a second, Nashe decides to go all-in:

> A small idea had flickered through him, and by the time the words came to his lips, he was already struggling to keep his voice under control. The entire process couldn't have taken longer than a second or two, but that was enough to change everything, to send him hurtling over the edge of a cliff. (27)

Admittedly, Nashe finds motivation in the risk involved; in an unprecedented hasty, irresponsible, self-destructive act, he takes a huge leap of faith and proves that he is ready for anything. There is a fifty-fifty chance he might lose all his money, and yet, the prospect of risking everything feels more exciting and enlivening than anything he has done before.

The main character proves the same irresponsible stance towards the end of the poker game, when he decides that it is all or nothing: he uses his own car, now his sole possession, to raise the stakes of the game. What is more, he does not try to escape his punishment after losing the game, as opposed to Pozzi. The latter seems more lucid and less inclined to accept his fate and give into the death drive: "You don't negotiate with madmen. Once you start to do that, your brain gets all fucked up". Pozzi is able to assess their situation correctly and realizes the two

millionaires "belong in the nuthouse", that they are "one-hundred-percent bonkers" (97). The protagonist, however, almost suicidal, seems to be unreasonably calm under the circumstances: "There was no doubt that things had taken a strange turn, but Nashe realized that he had somehow been expecting it, and now that it was happening, there was no panic inside him" (*ibid*.). It is this queer, uncanny expectance, this longing for such negative outcomes that turns Nashe into a character that is so powerfully, inescapably driven by Thanatos. Unlike Pozzi, he does not even try to escape the carceral environment of the meadow; he readily accepts building the wall and, despite his inner turmoil caused by his certainty that Pozzi has been killed, he does not stop at anything until he pays the entire debt.

The key to understanding his standpoint is offered halfway through the book: "it was almost a relief to have the decision taken out of his hands, to know that he had finally stopped running" (100). One cannot stop but compare Nashe's and Pozzi's fate to that of the prisoners held captive in Flower's City: it is the latter's rebellious nature that leads to him being killed, whereas the former's compliance seem to endow him with the ability to decide the circumstances of his own demise. For the protagonist, the wall is not "a punishment so much as a cure, a one-way journey back to earth" (ibid.), journey that can metaphorically be understood as his passing away. Soon enough, he easily adjusts to the new circumstances. This is not to say that he does not feel suspicious, like Pozzi. The atmosphere is one of mistrust, especially on the part of Flower and Stone, which bewilders Nashe, since he is a man of his word. The sheer implication that he and Pozzi would not keep their end of the bargain is an offence, and the fact that the property is surrounded by barbed wire adds a menacing dimension to it all:

> The fence went everywhere, encompassing the entire extent of Flower and Stone's domain. They did their best to laugh it off, saying that rich people always lived behind fences, but that did not erase the memory of what they had seen. The barrier had been erected to keep things out, but now that it was there, what was to prevent it from keeping things in as well? *All sorts of threatening possibilities were buried in that question*. (115, our emphasis)

The protagonist's death is foreshadowed from the very moment the poker game begins; his awareness comes abruptly, "with a surging of his pulse and a frantic pounding in his head". But, although he understands how much is at stake for him and he knows he is about to "gamble his own life at that table", he is filled with "a kind of awe" (82). Thus, instead of being afraid

that he might lose his life, he finds himself in a state of astonishment. Later on, when he and Pozzi are confined in the meadow and forced to build the wall, the threat of death becomes inescapable. There is not one single moment in which they feel safe; the thought that they are not going to regain their freedom can never be entirely dismissed. Nashe's resignation is, undoubtedly, symptomatic of his death drive. Finally, when he sees "the headlight looming up at him", coming "out of nowhere", "a Cyclops star hurtling straight for his eyes" (198), he understands he can turn this into the last thought he would ever have. Ironically, it is in dying rather than living that he can regain his sense of agency.

Music is the one friend that accompanies the protagonist wherever he goes, even in his confinement. While driving, it was as if the sound of "the endless tapes of Bach and Mozart and Verdi" turned "the visible world into a reflection of his own thoughts" – the music would "carry him into a realm of weightlessness" (11). It had always exerted "a calming effect on him, as if the music helped him to see more clearly, to understand his place in the invisible order of things" (10). Since music is harmony and rhythm and order, the title of the novel seems at least paradoxical, if not ironical. As Tim Woods puts it:

> The title of *The Music of Chance* suggests an oxymoronic state of affairs, wherein there is a harmony of discontinuities, a set of uncontrollable parameters that nevertheless provide a fine pattern of togetherness and interconnectedness. This paradoxical 'ordered disorderedness' signals the text's central concern with the implications of chance, and the extent to which an arrangement of events is predetermined or not. (Woods, in Barone, 1995: 146)

According to Ilana Shiloh, *The Music of Chance* brilliantly intertwines the American picaresque tradition with elements of the Greek tragedy, with unpredictability belonging to the former, while the determinism that the characters face is illustrative of the latter. Chance gradually gives way to determinism and it is undeniable that at the heart of all this money. Initially associated with freedom, money becomes a catalyst of fate. In other words, Nashe's tragic flaw consists of the fact that "he mistakenly identifies ethical values – freedom and justice – with a material value that has nothing to do with ethics: money" (Shiloh, 2002: 172). As Shiloh further contends, this is symptomatic of the American culture at large, one in which money holds the so-much needed redemptive power. Here, like in *The Book of Illusions*, money enables the entire experience. The American dollar, thus, has the capacity to turn free will into determinism,

which is, ultimately, what happens to both Nashe and Pozzi. Consequently, money could very well be the mysterious force that controls the characters' fate. After all, it is money that endows Flower and Stone with so much power.

4.2.4. *The Music of Chance* (1993)

Released in 1993 and directed by Philip Haas, the eponymous cinematic adaptation of *The Music of Chance* is a drama that, apart from some minor additions, remains very faithful to its source text. The accurate rendering of the plot, together with the fact that most of the performers' lines are literally taken from the novel, turn the book into a strikingly good screenplay. Due to Haas' directing genius, a book that is otherwise not unusually thrilling is adapted into an edge-of-the-seat movie, one that actually enhances the possibilities of the text. Whereas *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* (2007), directed by Paul Auster, represents a somewhat second-rate adaptation of a brilliant book, it seems that *The Music of Chance* (1993) does greater justice to the novel it is based on. Perhaps this has a lot to do with the fact that Auster is no longer the director and the actors put out some outstanding performances: James Spader as Pozzi, Mandy Patinkin as Nashe, and M. Emmet Walsh as Murks. The gripping, captivating film is full of meaning due to its rich symbolism, effectively conveying how both chance and choice, i. e. destiny and free will, are inescapably linked to the enslaving nature of wealth.

Notably similar to *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* (2007), the film begins with the camera panning from the right to the left: the establishing shot is filmed from the inside of a car, driven at full speed on a desolate road that goes through a forest. As the camera zooms out, the viewer is able to see the red car, a direct allusion to the Saab that Nashe drives in the novel. In a matter of moments, we realize that the classical music accompanying the scene represents diegetic sound: the camera cuts to the driver, namely the protagonist, changing the tape. There is a series of crosscuts that follows: they present the pensive, expressionless, almost empty-minded Nashe in close-up and the car in long-shots, with the music changing in rhythm. Then, all of a sudden, the mood changes entirely: the scared Pozzi appears on the side of the road, blood on his clothes, running for his life. The action begins to rise as Nashe offers to help him by giving him a ride to New York.

Nashe remains calm, detached, and almost impassive as the foul-mouthed Pozzi starts recounting everything that has happened to him, in spite of not being asked to. There is a prominent, marked distinction between his and Pozzi's attitude: the former shows no emotion whatsoever, whereas the latter is highly impulsive. As a matter of fact, it is this deadpan approach that constantly characterizes Nashe all throughout the film. The pervasive feeling is that of friendship and familiarity, although the two have obviously never met before. As they approach their destination, the road gets wider and the number of cars increases dramatically. We then learn that they are already there by means of abrupt cuts to the skyscrapers and busy streets of New York. The music is replaced by the tiring, almost deafening noise of the metropolis. There is a sharp contrast between the empty road going through the forest and the traffic congestion presented by means of the aerial shot that introduces the scene. Seven minutes into the film, we already understand that it is utterly different from what we are used to when it comes to the adaptations of Auster's books: no voice-over narration, no trace of the written text, no clues to the writing process. It is a purely visual experience and auditory experiences and images are allowed to talk for themselves, in a highly successful cinematographic achievement.

Once they get to New York, they are caught in a traffic jam, so there is plenty of time for Pozzi to talk about the im-/possibility of playing poker against the two millionaires. The completely expressionless Nashe, without the slightest hesitation, proposes to give Nashe the money he needs. He remains deadpan, making it impossible for the viewer to decide whether he is outrageously bold or simply insane. Non-diegetic music is added during the editing process to accompany the two performers as they head towards the hotel on foot. The upright Nashe walks in front of Pozzi, who looks ostensibly weak, almost shrunken. The shot that tracks them to the hotel is meant to show that Nashe is clearly in a better position than Pozzi, although, of course, Pozzi will be the one to play the poker game and, thus, decide their fate. Aware of his inferior status, Pozzi is not bent on showing that he is not at ease with it; on the contrary, inside the expensive hotel room, he ostentatiously attempts to look composed, self-possessed and relaxed. With his feet on the coffee table, he confidently negotiates the terms of his verbal agreement with Nashe. As they present their arguments, we do not see the two of them in the same frame: the other's reaction is presented by means of a countershot. Here, the parallel editing makes use of an interesting cinematic technique: the camera films Pozzi in high-angle shots, whereas Nashe is depicted by means of low-angle shots. Again, it is a matter of hierarchy that the camera-eye is

trying to establish, as Nashe, both figuratively and literally, looks down on Pozzi. Moreover, the film highlights the protagonist's doubts regarding Pozzi's background: whereas in the novel he merely thinks Pozzi might well be a criminal, he voices his suspicions in the film, openly telling his interlocutor that there are plenty of reasons for his mistrust.

Predictably, Pozzi wants to prove himself worthy of being trusted, so their dialogue is followed by an abrupt, immediate cut to the demonstrative game, first hinted at by the close-up on their hands as the deck of cards is shuffled and then dealt. Then, the camera zooms out to a medium shot that presents them sitting at the table, with Pozzi winning all hands. The close-up on the protagonist's face shows his contentment: Pozzi has managed to persuade him beyond any shadow of a doubt. Interestingly enough, Pozzi's self-esteem does not seem to have increased substantially, as the next cut shows him trying on an expensive suit, talking to himself in the mirror, visibly trying to convince himself that he can do this. The mirror, a recurring symbol in Auster's writings, stands for the illusory nature of one's perception and, ultimately, of what we conceive as real/-istic. The increasing tempo of the non-diegetic music is meant to create suspense; indeed, there is a lot of mystery surrounding the subsequent unfolding of the events. Little does Pozzi (or the viewer, for that matter) know about the outcome of the decisive poker game he is about to play. And yet, the persistent feeling is that of uncertainty. The dim lighting, the suspenseful soundtrack and Pozzi's own lack of self-confidence are undeniable indicators of the negative implications.

The next cut is back to the inside of the car; it appears like a natural transition, as the music continues, functioning as a sound bridge. As the car passes through a tunnel, the darkness surrounding it suggests both the characters' lack of knowledge and their apprehension. The wide shot of the vehicle being driven into complete obscurity foreshadows their misfortune. Likewise, the viewer begins to feel suspicious of the foreboding evil. We follow the car as it leaves the city, back on the road through the forest, and then entering Flower and Stone's property. The rhythm is fast-paced and, when they are finally allowed to go in, the camera lingers unexpectedly long on the gates. In a slow upward movement, the camera gradually reveals their incredible height, which obviously alludes to the fact that there is no going back, no escape whatsoever. The scene is overwhelming, indeed, so the director chooses to almost instantly meet the need for comic relief: the doorbell the two outsiders ring produces a totally unexpected piece of music. Since it

is funny, light and childish, Nashe and Pozzi burst into laughter and seem to dismiss the menace they had previously felt.

As they are welcomed inside the huge strange house, they are greeted by Flower and Stone, all dressed in white, as if to cast away any remaining doubts: the hosts seem good-natured and friendly and the atmosphere is relaxed. The comic effect is further enhanced when we see both of them in the same frame: following the lines of the direct characterization provided in the novel, Stone and Flower ostensibly resemble Laurel and Hardy, the early classical Hollywood comedy team. The hard lighting is employed as a means to ensure that everything in front of the camera is well lit: there are no shadows, no chiaroscuro; there is nothing that could suggest the idea of evil. Flower and Stone seem harmless, good-natured, posing no threat whatsoever to Nashe and Pozzi. What they say to one another is taken word-for-word from the novel and there is great emphasis on Flower's theory concerning numbers, readily reinforced by Stone. Flower becomes very excited as he reveals the way they had chosen the winning lottery numbers, and, by means of parallel montage, we see the two millionaires completing each other's lines and explanations. The shots and countershots follow one another with increasing speed to convey the hosts' growing enthusiasm. Once again, the two seem inoffensive, almost childish in their behaviour.

However, the mood subtly changes at the end of the scene, when we finally see the two in the same frame and Flower concludes: "It's as if God had singled us from other men". This is highly revealing of how distortedly he and Stone perceive the power provided by their immense wealth: they think they have been endowed with divine rights. After this moment, they no longer pretend to be on equal footing with their guests; on the contrary, not only do their ensuing facial expressions reveal how sure they are of winning the upcoming game, but they also display mockery, lack of trust and delusions of grandeur. The clear inference is that Pozzi is a no one, in spite of the self-confidence that he makes a show of; thus, there is no way he can win.

What follows is a tracking shot of Nashe and Pozzi, as they follow the two millionaires upstairs. The music is light and cheerful again, but the mood has already been altered. Once they see the City of the World, the two guests become aware of the danger and sinister possibilities involved in the whole affair. Again, the hard lighting suggests that all cards have been put on the table: although Flower and Stone's true intentions have not been revealed yet, it is clear now that they might not be so harmless. Stone is depicted against the background of a huge window, with

the clear sky behind him. As he talks about the model, his head becomes almost transparent, losing itself to the background. This is a direct allusion of his perception: he is a god-like figure able to control everything not only within the boundaries of his City of the World, but also outside those boundaries. Unsurprisingly, the cut to Nashe and Pozzi presents them near the cemetery, as a means of foreshadowing their eventual death.

Dinner is followed by a sudden cut to the room in which they play poker. The mise-en-scene only includes the minimum: the ridiculously large room is empty but for the table and chairs, perhaps as an allusion to the meadow in which Nashe and Pozzi will subsequently spend the remaining days of their lives alone, deprived of freedom. The long shot presenting the setting is immediately followed by a close-up of the new pack of cards about to be opened. The mise-en-temps is subtly displayed: as we hear the diegetic sound of the clock on the wall, we are also shown that it is five minutes to eleven p.m. then the camera pans to the left to find them all concentrated at the table, with Pozzi winning a hand. Cheerful, non-diegetic music accompanies the scene and the camera zooms in on Nashe to reveals the satisfaction on his face. Pozzi continues to win the next hands and gets increasingly confident, as if nothing can ruin the state of affairs any more. What follows represents the turning point of their night and, consequently of the entire plot. Nashe excuses himself as he needs to go to the restroom, but, instead, he goes upstairs and takes a closer look at the model, clearly fascinated by what it represents.

Numerous close-ups present the viewer with parts of the City that otherwise would have remained unseen: a thief slips on a banana peel, the miniature Flower and Stone buy the lucky

lottery ticket and, finally, we see the prisoner in front of the firing squad. As Nashe notices this detail for the first time, the camera zooms in on his face: he feels shocked and appalled. The soundtrack becomes dramatic in its crescendo, not only creating suspense, but also exposing the negative implications of being in Flower and Stone's house. The City of the World is portent of the inherent evil lurking inside the mansion and on their property; the prisoner represents a bad omen for both Nashe and the viewer, who are forewarned of the great danger Nashe and Pozzi are exposing themselves to. And yet, Nashe acts recklessly, almost childishly: determined to leave the room, he suddenly stops and, in a change of heart, decides to take the miniature Flower and Stone from the model. It is this particular decision that Pozzi will interpret as the one disrupting the harmony, resulting in terrible consequences.

The scene ends abruptly with a cut to the poker-game in close-up; the viewer cannot see who is winning or losing, but the allusion is quite obvious, since the same dramatic music bridges the two shots. Indeed, the camera zooms out and the confirmation is there: Pozzi has lost almost all the money, whereas Flower and Stone are bragging about their hands and laughing at Pozzi's mistakes. Flower's conclusion is highly disturbing for the guests: "This is poker as it was meant to be played". With the millionaires in soft-focus, the camera centers on Nashe and Pozzi: the former keeps his composure and, in a reckless act, gives Pozzi his very last money. One again, the soundtrack becomes dramatic, conveying the tense, highly charged atmosphere. The hosts keep on winning and, as they laugh and compliment each other, Pozzi cannot seem to believe his eyes. He is utterly baffled, shaking his head as if to say no. He does not seem to understand how this is even possible: he finds himself in a state of denial. Nashe remains calm, yet pensive, although it is Pozzi that is presented in deep focus. Finally, a cut to the clock on the wall shows the viewer how much time has elapsed: it is a quarter to three a.m. now. The accompanying music becomes joyous, in sharp contrast with the general mood. The implication that there is nothing to worry about does not hold any more.

Next, in what represents an example of breaking the fourth wall, the viewer is allowed to become a partner of Pozzi and Nashe. It is the first time we get to see Pozzi's cards, who deliberately shows them to us: we are being included in the game, as the tension becomes almost unbearable for Pozzi. The cards he holds are promising, but whether he should be bold or foolish enough to risk everything on a single hand is something he cannot decide for himself. We empathize with the losing team and the fact that we know more than Flower and Stone gives us a

sense that, at least temporarily, they hold the upper-hand. As a result, the proposition Nashe is about to make, however outrageous it might seem, becomes justifiable and less condemnable. It is, thus, highly noteworthy how one single shot, one single frame, turns the otherwise highly unlikely and completely unfavorable choice into a perfectly plausible and realistic one. Had we not been included in the decision-making process, it is very likely that we would have strongly disapproved of their subsequent actions and we wouldn't have been able to express empathy for the characters anymore. A brilliant touch on the director's side, as identification is the key to keeping the viewer interested.

As Nashe negotiates the inclusion of his car into the pot, the parallel editing reveals the mockery in Flower's voice and facial expression. Flower's attitude gradually turns into anger, yet Nashe does not feel intimidated. There a complete shift in tone: Flower no longer smiles or laughs, he is obviously upset and he talks loudly, throwing the chips on the table. For Nashe and Pozzi, the new deal they have managed to cut seems like a new chance altogether: they are back to square one, although in a much vulnerable position. The following round is marked by anxiety, and since the players' ability to self-contain their reactions and their bluffing skills are crucial, we are offered numerous close-ups in which we see them extremely focused, trying as hard as possible not to reveal anything. Nobody talks anymore and we only hear the sound of the chips being thrown on the table. Once again, words are rendered futile and images become self-sufficient. Then, as the tension being built becomes almost agonizing, Pozzi decides to go all in, to Flower's satisfaction: unsurprisingly, the outcome of the game favors the hosts. Flower sadistically bursts into laughter, mocking the losers.

In a desperate attempt to win back the car, Nashe comes up with an idea: one cut that would save them. Of course, the reverse situation is taken into account. If he loses, he and Pozzi would owe their opponents &10,000. The camera zooms out to present the four as Pozzi shuffles the cards. Granted the fact that it is the first time Nashe plays, he seems incredibly confident; nonetheless, the card he draws, a four, seals their fate.

Stone's line is, indeed memorable: "Looks like we've hit the magic number again". Similarly, Flower's reaction is that of sheer astonishment: the stroke of luck is simply unbelievable, so he slaps himself on the face. To solve the "dilemma" of how the debt could be paid, Stone comes up with the idea that the two should build the wall. Pozzi's and Nashe's reactions are exactly those presented in the novel; finally, in spite of his anger, the former needs to accept that there is no escape. The low-angle shot presenting Nashe during their private discussion shows that the protagonist has the high ground and is thus capable of persuading Pozzi. The camera cuts back to the room and we see the losing team signing the pre-existing agreements.

It is now that their actual confinement begins. There is an extreme wide-angle shot - similar to a bird's eye view - that shows them heading to the meadow in a jeep driven by Murks. What we probably deal with here is Flower and Stone's perspective, looking down at their prisoners; the allusion to the City of the World is more than obvious. The non-diegetic music that accompanies the long tracking shot is gloomy, matching the weather and the atmosphere outside. Once they get to the meadow, they slowly set into a routine, always under Murks' supervision. Perhaps one of the most striking shots is represented by a still image of the meadow in what

seems an aerial shot (filmed from high above). It takes a few seconds until we realize that what we are looking at is merely a replica of the actual meadow, replica included in the model Stone is building. The viewer's apprehension is enhanced when Stone's hand lowers itself onto the meadow, holding the trailer in which the two prisoners are about to spend their last days. Suspicion hangs in the air, as Pozzi and Nashe find the newly built fence that would prevent all attempts at escaping. Murks comes on foot, as the jeep would present itself as an opportunity to get away. Moreover, all tools are locked in the shed for the night. In an act of unprecedented mockery, they are supposed to carry the stones in a child's wagon. It becomes obvious that they are no longer free men: they are now in the hands of the two eccentric millionaires.

In opposition to the decisive night of the poker game, when every minute counted and the clock was the symbol of the quick, inexorable passage of time, life in the meadow flows unbearably slowly. As time goes by, we see either Nashe or Stone counting off the days in a calendar; it is their means of coping with the harsh reality of their imprisonment; at the same time, it fuels their illusory belief in eventually being set free, provided that enough days elapse.

Building the wall becomes a purpose in itself, a relentless endeavor that is to continue under any circumstances. As Pozzi argues, having stolen the piece from the model was like a sin: "We had everything in harmony, we'd come to a point when everything was turning into music for us, and you had to go upstairs and smash all the instruments". One particular scene that depicts them carrying the heavy stones through the rain is accompanied by a highly illustrative soundtrack: the ceremonial, church-like music alludes to the redemptive power of the wall. It seems that Pozzi too has come to the realization that they need to pay for their deeds. This

accounts for his feelings of accomplishment, satisfaction and pride that when seeing the wall getting higher and higher by the day. Likewise, planning the leaving party sets him in higher spirits. There is little camera movement, as the film faithfully renders the ensuing action as presented in the novel. However temporarily, the optimistic mood is restored, together with the possibility of escape.

Nonetheless, the morning following the party brings presents the viewer with another foreshadowing instance: outside the trailer, as Murks approaches, Pozzi's chair is empty. The piece of paper Murks brings, together with the news that the two still owe a large amount of money, strikes Nashe as abominable: "Once Pozzi sees this paper, it's gonna kill him". The jump cut to the prisoners digging a hole under the fence is proof of Pozzi's attempt to escape his fate. Pozzi manages to get out the property: the camera depicts him in a full shot, with the road behind him, as a symbol the freedom that awaits him. Conversely, the medium shot framing Nashe shows him behind the fence – the prison association is impossible to dismiss. Nonetheless, he is the one dismissing the possibility of escape. While he looks at Pozzi disappearing into the forest, the camera focus on the fence becomes softer and softer. Consequently, it becomes so blurred that it is almost non-existent. It would seem that the barrier holding Nashe inside is mostly psychological in nature, which is a faithful rendering of his stance as it appears in the novel.

Nothing can prepare Nashe for the jolt he is about to have the next morning as he gets out of the trailer and sees Pozzi body on the ground. The editing builds the scene by adding increasingly dramatic music as Nashe starts running towards his friends. The tracking shot

presents him in close-up: it is his facial expression that matters most, and not the physical space that he is covering in his movement. Pozzi's disfigured face represents a shockingly vivid image, one that would haunt Nashe until the end of the film. What follows is a violent encounter with Floyd, Murks' son-in-law, as a result of Nashe's attempt to join Pozzi to the hospital. The cut to Nashe running to the fence, falling on his knees as he discovers the hole has been covered, is equally disturbing: literally and figuratively kneeled, he starts crying, as if for the first time aware of his desperate situation. His ensuing dream of managing to break free, conventionally presented by means of a color filter, is all the more dramatic: it is only in a state of reverie that he can visualize his escape from this moment on. He also knows Pozzi is dead, despite Murks' insistence that he survived; it is the twofold meaning of Murks' own words, "Pozzi is gone", that confirms Nashe's worst suspicions.

Eventually, after 90 days (as noted in the calendar) of constant hard work, Murks joyfully brings him the good, somewhat unexpected news that he is a now a free man. The countershots that present their following discussion are illustrative of the reversal in status: now that he no longer owes anything to Flower and Stone, he is finally in control of his life again, as opposed to Murks, who remains their employee, forced to follow their orders at all times (hence, in a state of imprisonment). Nashe is framed by means of extreme low-angle shots, as if he is looking down at the model City, with Murks trapped inside. Indeed, in the upcoming evening, Nashe will decide Murks' and Floyd's fate. Back on the road after having a few celebratory drinks, in a dizzying succession of shots, we see the protagonist behind the wheel, repeated close-ups of the speedometer, a cut to his foot pressing the accelerator, immediately followed by one showing the dangerous road ahead. Once more, images build up the entire scene, which is highly cinematic. A car appears all of a sudden and, as Nashe tries to avoid it, he crashes the car into some trees. As we have previously mentioned, this represents the major alteration to the plotline of the novel: the next day he wakes up and a car driven by Paul Auster himself picks him up from the side of the road. As Nashe reveals his intended destination, Minnesota, we understand that his desire is to get back to his daughter.

All in all, *The Music of Chance* (1994) can be interpreted on at least two levels: from a literal point of view, it presents the consequences of losing a poker game; but when the viewer goes beyond the pretty straightforward plot, s/he discovers the thought-provoking issue brought to the fore: how one single moment can change – and even destroy – lives forever. Chance is,

thus, foregrounded here almost to the same extent as in the novel. Overall, the film has a mesmerizing cadence that enthralls the reader. In addition, it manages to capture the sinister forces that affect the protagonists' lives without becoming inauthentic or unrealistic. When compared to the novel, the adaptation delivers the imminent threat of death in less dream-like fashion. The mood that the film sets is also quite different: the one major alteration at the end of it, regardless of its intrinsic ambiguity, opposes Auster's nihilistic viewpoint by inferring that there is still hope for Nashe after all.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Our dissertation aimed at offering a contrastive analysis of some of Paul Auster's and Ian McEwan's fictional works, namely at foregrounding the cinematic quality of their writings and the capacity of the filmmaker to find equivalents for certain "untranslatable" elements that solely pertain to the field of literature. Without operating a hierarchy between the two media, the investigation prominently addressed the literary sources. After all, the research was not conducted from the standpoint of a film scholar; we do not claim to have the necessary expertise, either. Therefore, the film analyses employed basic terminology and took into account film "grammar" that is easily discernible on screen, with the purpose of identifying those techniques that render the quintessential aspects of the source texts. This is not to say that we were particularly focused on the similarities between the two media. On the contrary, we also pinpointed what makes each of them unique and, more often than not, the conclusion was that both the piece of fiction and its adaptation were equally compelling. Hence, after an introduction that presented the state of the art and briefly outlined the two writers' interest in and involvement with filmmaking, we provided a much-needed theoretical background, discussing key concepts of adaptation studies, as well as matters connected to the film industry.

One of the major difficulties of film is that of adapting a specific narrative point of view (or even the multiple points of view) employed in the source-text. Cinema has, however, found solutions and there are ways of conveying first-person narration, such as: voice-over, oral narration, soliloquies or close-ups. It is noteworthy, though, that such techniques are rarely maintained throughout a whole film, as it is often the case with novels. Omniscient narration, on the other hand, is very similar to the cinematic narration of events. The camera is considered to be the equivalent of the omniscient narrator, as both of them are in a position of knowledge as instruments of authorial power. The way the camera focuses on character movements, gestures or details of the setting can be compared to the omniscient narrating voice of the novel. Nevertheless, the correspondence between the two is rather artificial: the camera is not part of the discourse of the film, whereas the narrator always functions inside the novel. Despite the similarities and differences between cinematic and novelistic narration, film can easily express point of view by means of different camera angles, focus and mise-en-scène.

Another generally acknowledged limit of movies when compared to novels is the difficulty of conveying the "interior" of the characters. However, character subjectivity can be created by means of slow motion, rapid cutting, lighting or optical distortions. Sound effects, editing, camera movement, flashbacks and flash-forwards can also help convey a character's inner life. Conversely, the strong point of cinema is that it can effortlessly show "exteriority", while novelists often encounter difficulties in doing that. Time and again, novels need to resort to lengthy descriptions, but movies only need a frame to render the same thing. This apparent limit of the novel can also be seen as an advantage, though. Whereas a novelist can choose significant details or omit certain visual information for narrative reasons, film does not seem to leave room for imagination. If a director wants to trigger the viewer's imagination, s/he has to omit images or limit what is shown.

Other major differences between literature and film are represented by the way in which they present space and time. On the one hand, according to McFarlane, the novel is linear and the film is spatial (McFarlane, 1996: 27). Novels provide information gradually, word after word, whereas films function spatially; the smallest units of movies, frames, are visually complex and offer a variety of signifiers at once. As a result, it becomes almost impossible for the filmmaker to control the order in which these signifiers will be perceived, although focusing techniques can be used to direct the viewer's attention towards specific elements included in the frame. On the other hand, it is very easy to go from present to past or future events through language, since it has an inherent telling ability. On the contrary, the showing mode of the film makes the viewer perceive the actions as always taking place in the present. However, film has developed its own strategies to convey past or future actions: flashbacks and flash-forwards are often accompanied by dissolves, fades, color filters or changes in setting and costumes.

All in all, the transition from literature to film is not an easy endeavor, for artistic, financial and practical reasons. Whether we see adaptation as *"critique, translation, transmutation, metamorphosis, recreation, transfiguration, transmodalization, dialogization, cannibalization, reinvisioning, incarnation, or reaccentuation"* (Stam, 2004: 25), making movies based on literary sources involves a great deal of vision and courage. This is largely due to a paradox: *"[g]reat stories always make less-than-great movies"* and some of the most successful adaptations of all time have come from *"low places"*. However, *"the why is elusive. When an*

adaptation goes well, it's easy to point to a felicitous mixture of people, talent and circumstances, but when one doesn't go well…" (Harrison, 2005: pp. 363-368).

In the second part of our doctoral thesis, the investigation brought into the limelight the adaptations of some of the Auster's and McEwan's most critically acclaimed pieces of fiction. Firstly, we dealt with the self-reflexive writings, the ones that flaunt their metafictionality: Paul Auster's "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story" (1992) and *The Book of Illusions* (2002), and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2007). It is worthwhile mentioning the fact that, while all three of them display obvious metafictional concerns, *The Book of Illusions* is uniquely metacinematic and it is Auster himself that would direct the movie based on it, namely *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* (2007). We then proceeded with an exploration of two novels that are hauntingly sinister, yet fascinating, grotesque, yet enthralling, macabre, yet compelling: Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance* (1990) and Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* (1978). What the two novels have in common is their depiction of characters that seem to be inescapably controlled by inner drives and external forces; their final doom seems, thus, inexorable. The conclusions that we reached as a result of the contrastive analyses of these books and their adaptations are going to be outlined in what follows.

Atonement (2001) makes use of several metafictional strategies that enhance the novel's narcissistic narrative. Firstly, its composition is retrospective: it is only at the end that the reader realizes what s/he has read is nothing else but Briony's account of the events. Since Briony confesses she changed their outcome in order to make her lovers survive and flourish, we are no longer sure of what is "real" and what is fictitious in the novel. Secondly, the multiplicity of narrative perspectives draws attention towards the writing process itself and how it is essentially a matter of vision, perception and witnessing; it also highlights the fact that any process of vision and interpretation inevitably involves limited knowledge and, therefore, partiality. Thirdly, the novel is overtly intertextual and its intertextual references also point to its metatextuality. For instance, Virginia Woolf is one of the great influences on Briony's writing, as the protagonist herself admits, and the very composition of her last novel (*Atonement*, in fact) follows the structure of *To the Lighthouse*. Finally, it is also by means of framed narratives (mise-en-abyme) and foreshadowing that we are made aware of the novel's status as fiction. *The Trials of Arabella, Two Figures by a Fountain*, Briony's final draft of her twenty-first novel (what we

actually read up to the epilogue), all of these represent examples of fiction-writing that are highly illustrative for the way in which their author understands fiction and ultimately writes it.

The 2007 screen adaptation of Atonement also resorts to a number of strategies that show how Briony imposes "the patterns of fiction on the facts of life", how she is unable "to disentangle life from literature" (Finney: 79). On the one hand, in terms of content, the film's high fidelity to its source text means that it focuses on the nature of writing and the quest of redemption through literature. As a result of ellipsis and condensation, the movie has fewer scenes than the novel, but the scenes that the filmmaker decides to keep are highly illustrative in terms of their metafictionality. On the other hand, in terms of form, Wright uses devices and techniques that "foreground the media" (Geraghty: 2007), namely literature *and* cinema. The typewriter or the sound it produces accompanies almost all shots in which Briony appears and either plans to distort reality or actually does it. This way, it represents a metonymic device that stands for fiction writing. There are also multiple perspectives that lead us through the action, demonstrating that reality is a rather elusive term. The way the camera positions itself in relation to the characters that are depicted in each shot is also noteworthy in what concerns the degree of knowledge attributed to the key figures and how this is degree of knowledge is likely to affect the subsequent events. The color palette employed in the movie is not fortuitous either; for instance, the scene in which Robbie is taken away by the police is dominated by red and black to suggest that a crime is being committed, although the word crime is never mentioned. In fact, words used with scarcity and, unsurprisingly for cinema, images prevail. But they are highly symbolic images, with a great "telling" power. For example, mirrors and other reflecting devices are present everywhere in the pro-filmic space, as a means of suggesting that reality can be reflected in many different ways, some of them distorted. In other words, mirrors (like the fountain itself) dramatize the duplicitous nature of perception, which represents the very focus of both the novel and the film.

All in all, as it has been shown, McEwan's novel proves to what extent fiction can be deceptive by means of words, whereas Wright's film successfully uses images to the same effect. By the end of both the book and the film, we become aware of the fact that Briony "has taken a novelist's license to alter the facts to suit her artistic purposes" (Finney: 69). In spite of the novel and the film's title, nothing quite fitting the notion of atonement seems to occur; perhaps, atonement is not even possible in the context of the two works of art under discussion here. In

fact, Briony "doubles the crime by imagining (again) the lovers' interiority and their togetherness – an act of imagining that is inescapably appropriative" (Worthington, 2013: 161). To put it differently, "the self-confessional 'truth' at the end 'cohabits' with, or is perhaps constituted in, 'lies'" (*ibid*.: 160). And yet, as 13-year-old Briony puts it in the novel, "[s]he was under no obligation to tell the truth. She had promised no one a chronicle" (McEwan, 2011: 280). In its dual form, *Atonement* proves how, in spite of the young girl's warning, (Briony's) fiction still has the power to convince us of its veracity; at least up to a point, when it lays bare its fictional status. The knowledge that the lovers did not survive and the "author" is about to lose her memory prevents us, in the end, to take the imagined outcome for the actual one. Both the novel and its screen adaptation are brilliant in making us aware of that, each resorting to specific strategies and devices.

The Book of Illusions (2002), as we have already stated, is both metafictional and metacinematic. There is constant proof of the story's counterfactuality. What is more, doubt and uncertainty seem to pervade the narration - time and again, Zimmer shares his inability to fully believe what he recounts, sometimes even in spite of compelling evidence: *"we have no choice but to conclude"* (20); *"we can come to only one conclusion"* (3); "*We are led to believe"* (46). What is more, the first person narrator always identifies himself with the reader, as if trying to absolve himself from the liability of putting false things on paper. When Zimmer, for instance, reads Alma's first letter, his reaction is highly revealing: "*I might have smiled when I saw those words, but I can't remember now"* (4). Since it is so unlikely that Alma's words are true, he takes them with a pinch of salt, distancing himself from what he reads. Thus, Alma's letter becomes metonymical of the novel itself and it plays a key role in building the illusion of the book: "*That didn't make the letter genuine, of course, but at least it gave it an air of credibility"* (4). However intolerable might the narrator find counterfactuality, although he intentionally exposes himself as the author of the story, despite his numerous attempts to substantiate the findings of his research and in spite of his work ethics, the reader is warned all throughout the novel that the book is, as a matter of course, purely fictitious.

In a nutshell, *The Book of Illusions*, an intense journey into a shadow-world of lies, illuminated by its narrator's hard-won wisdom, represents and artful and elegant novel full of twists and turns. It is a novel that, through its brilliant metafictional strategies, constantly urges its readers to search for the "set of invisible keys" that would allow them to unlock the truth

obvious from the very beginning: "every sentence [of it is] a lie and yet every word written with conviction" (176). In Auster, the theme of writing is not a mere fictional strategy; likewise, "the relation between life and text is not a simple rhetorical device":

> Life is a text that must be written with the greatest urgency, while the wall of death does not surround the writer-character, even if, fatally and eventually, the text turns out to be the memory of other texts. In the solitude of life, close to the edge of annihilation, some words are aligned on the page, and written sentences start a dialogue with the pages of those who occupy or haunt other scenes of writing (Sarmento, 2017: 121).

The novel is "a book of fragments, of half-remembered dreams" (316), in which, as "a means to emphasise undecidability", "fact and fiction, truth and lying, original and imitation" are treated "on an equal footing" (Călinescu, in Martin, 2008: 11).

What is really interesting and unique about this book is how the writer manages to enrich its multi-layered story by "constantly discussing another medium (intermedial thematization)" and by "inserting film scripts (intermedial imitation)" into it (Bökös). As is has previously been shown, the novel is both metafictional, mainly through its use of the first-person (unreliable) narrator, a writer who constantly documents and hedges his writing, and metacinematic, by translating into fiction the effects of the cinematic medium. The translation "occurs through the evocation and imitation of certain film techniques (*ibid*.) and through the insertion of meticulous description of film scripts. It is as though we the reader were dealing with "the filmicization of fiction" (Wolf, in Bökös).

In "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story" and in *Smoke*, the reader/viewer learns an important lesson: fiction is not true, it is mere artful invention; the lesson extends to the reader, who also has an epiphanic moment: the uncritical reader can be easily deceived. The critical reader is like Ethel: s/he participates immensely, invests in the game, but only pretends to believe. The success of Grannie's day is based on investment in illusion – her benefits are proportional to this. The paradox is that, although Grannie is blind, she is able to see into things. Like in *Oedipus the King*, those who have their eyesight are blind to the truth, whereas those who are literally blind can "see" it. Thus, both the embedded and the embedding story are stories of lying and stealing. The author's literal gift to the reader – by means of his unconventional Christmas story - is a lesson about art. It alerts the reader to the fiction in fiction, to the dangers of literal, biographical

interpretation. Art is different from life, it transforms life. The reader can both participate and distance himself/herself, i.e., play the game willingly, not tricked into it. It will be the task of both the screenwriter (who is also the writer of the short story, namely Paul Auster) and the director to adapt the source text in such a way that, this time, it alerts the viewer to the same dangers.

Malcolm argues that, "in true Pinteresque fashion" (Pinter's *The Homecoming* is intertextually echoed in McEwan's novel), *The Cement Garden* reveals "the potential for the seemingly normal, banal and everyday to tip into the grim and macabre"; the critic goes on arguing that "the gothic intrudes on the psychological narrative, just as bizarre death, mother burial, transvestism, infantile regression and incest penetrate the seemingly normal world of the family" (Malcolm, 2002: 53). What we deal with is "a narrative in which, rather in the manner of Kafka, unconscious or sexual forces are interfused with otherwise ordinary scenes or events" (Stevenson, qtd. in Childs, 2006: 36). In fact, the grotesque atmosphere of the novel is often humorous yet inappropriate, appealing yet disgusting, strange yet familiar; in other words, although it unsettles us, we are also fascinated by it. Thus, "*The Cement* Garden delivers both titillation and revulsion in its uncanny unraveling of the traditional family unit" (De Coning, 2011: 84). Undeniably, in Jeanette Baxter's (in Groes, 2009: 13-14) words, there is always "this unsettling aspect of reading McEwan's work".

As we reflect on our own response as readers, the question to be answered is whether or not we "should refrain from indulging" in this tale "of violent transgression" or if we should "allow ourselves to fall into the textual abyss" (*ibid*.: 14). In a nutshell, "in contrast to Derek's stock response – 'It's sick (…) he's your brother' – the reader is provoked into considering the possibility that extreme sexual practices might just be understood as troubling resources for breaking through the limits of consciousness" (Baxter, in Groes, 2009: 24). After all, "the love of Jack and his sister Julie is seen with truth and as truth" (Ricks, in Roberts, 2010: 19), in spite of the fact that "the world of *The Cement Garden* is one of unremitting decay" (Malcolm, 2002: 56). Although "sexuality and violence are incorporated in the novel in a uniquely shocking and appalling way", McEwan's text simultaneously becomes "a cult novel", turning its "transgressions into 'marketable' assets" (Volkmann, in Stierstorfer, 2003: 308).

Andrew Birkin's adaptation of *The Cement Garden* is a great cinematographic achievement, faithfully rendering the plot of the novel. The mise-en-scene and mise-en-temps are

also very similar to the ones we find in McEwan's text. The actors' performances brilliantly depict the characters' interior consciousness and their dialogue can be traced back to the book almost word-for-word. It is this particular fidelity that makes McEwan so fond of the adaptation: it basically presents the story as he imagined it. According to the categorization offered by Ian Wojcik-Andrews, *The Cement Garden* falls into the category of avant-garde films, "aimed at a minority rather than a majority of viewers", focusing on "taboo subjects", abounding in sexuality, masturbation included. Indeed, as the author claims, mainstream movies unavoidably tackle such issues superficially, "precisely because they deal with so-called mature themes" (Wojcik-Andrews, 2000: 191). The film under analysis is avant-garde "not just because the politics of sexuality graphically articulated within it", but also because it stars children and young adults (*ibid*.). To a great extent a twisted story of devious secrets, the movie is successful at creating a sense of gloomy claustrophobia and the unsettling soundtrack contributes to the general overtone. Quintessentially, the film seems to be more about the weakness and insecurity of a teenage boy (as opposed to the power held by his teenage sister) and less about overt sexuality and insecurity. It is a small world where dark impulses and secrets are indulged, with hardly any superego representative to restrain them.

The Music of Chance explores the potential of any given situation to develop in countless directions more as a result of chance and less as the result of personal choice. What is more, happenstance, fate, contingency, they all seem to stand at the very heart of Auster's fictional worlds in general. As a matter of fact, Paul Auster's detractors often accused him of displaying an obsessive preoccupation with coincidence, which turn his writings into forced, artificial ones. The novelist's response to such allegations is that life itself is full of "weird moments" and that readers who claim this have probably read too many books:

> They're so immersed in the conventions of so-called realistic fiction that their sense of reality has been distorted. Everything's been smoothed out in these novels, robbed of its singularity, boxed into a predictable world of cause and effect (Auster, quoted in Hutchisson, 2013: xi)

The novel under discussion "operates with metaphors of chance and gameplay in a very literal sense, by the inclusion of the chance-based game of poker into the plot" (Meifert-Menhard, 2013: 167). Chance is undoubtedly, the operative force behind the preceding unfolding

of the narrative. Following the game, Nashe and Pozzi are denied all personal freedom: it is impossible for them to act spontaneously any more, as they become prisoners stripped of their former status, mere puppets in the hands of their captors. By extrapolation, characters are, admittedly, puppets in the writer's hands. This could be the key to the understanding of the absurdity inherent in the construction of a wall with no real utility - it might be viewed as a metaphor which stands for the authorial inspiration to create fictional worlds. As Aliki Varvogli (2001: 76) puts it, "the act of writing is equivalent to the arduous task of building a wall". In the novel, the Sisyphean effort to build the wall might be an attempt to "defeat the random" (*ibid*.: 77), the chaotic. Indeed, whereas a poker game is, irrespective of how much practicing and studying is involved, a matter of chance; conversely, the construction of a wall implies structure and order.

What makes the novel so harrowing is the protagonist's awareness of his fate and his compliant surrender. In spite of knowing death is inescapable, Nashe seems to welcome it – the menacing, oppressive circumstances fill him with a kind of awe that is proof of his death drive. By being denied the possibility to make his own choices, he decides to "surrender to the arbitrary forces of an environment" neither him nor Pozzi are able to understand. Only in death do they regain freedom, and death permits them a final choice, the choice to escape the uncanny situation they have become entangled in (*ibid*.: 175). As Nashe learns, death is the only ontological certainty. At the end of the book, what matters is Nashe's triumph; in other words, "whether he lives or dies is almost unimportant". The fact that he transcends everything he had ever been, gaining the ability to understand himself and "willing to take the world as it comes to him", makes him win an "inner victory" that is far more significant (Auster, quoted in Hutchisson, 2013).

Haas' directing genius turns *The Music of Chance* into an outstanding cinematographic achievement. Apart from some minor additions, the film remains faithful to its source text, being equally rich in symbolism. To the same extent as the novel, it effectively depicts the role played by chance and contingency in the characters' lives and it also manages to subtly convey the enslaving nature of wealth. While capturing the sinister forces at work in the novel, the film does not become inauthentic or unrealistic. The use of camera movement and the montage make the film particularly captivating and the actors' performances are equally enthralling. The denouement of the film brings the one major alteration in the plotline of the novel, altogether

changing the mood and opposing Auster's nihilistic view of the world. Not only does Nashe get to live, but he is also allowed to at least envision the so much-longed for reunion with his daughter.

The overall conclusion that we came to after our incursion into adaptation studies, followed by the contrastive analyses described above, was that cinema can sublimely combine the visual, the aural and the kinesthetic, but it is precisely this ability that does not allow for the approximation and allusiveness typical in novels. In James Monaco's words, *"the great thing about literature is that you can imagine; the great thing about film is that you can't"* (Monaco, 2000: 158). Or, as Linda Hutcheon put it, *"[t]elling a story in words, either orally or on paper, is never the same as showing it visually and orally in any of the many performance media available"* (Hutcheon, 2006: 23). Similarly, McFarlane argued that *"the novel's metalanguage (the vehicle of its telling) is replaced, at least in part, by the film's mise-en-scene"* (McFarlane, 1996: 29). So part of the problem of adapting literary texts to films is connected to the ever-lasting image-word war, as images cannot always render everything that words do, at least not *as* words do. There are, nevertheless, cinematic techniques that cannot be employed or substituted in novels and herein lie both the challenge and the power of adaptation.

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