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Memory and Age in Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark*

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Dedications

This thesis is a heartfelt dedication to those who have shaped my journey:

To my mother, whose encouragement propelled me toward my chosen major. She has been my trusted confidante and a constant source of inspiration. Without her wisdom and teachings, I would not be the woman I am today.

To my father, whose nurturing care and unshakeable belief in me have been constants in my life. He has set a remarkable example that I aspire to follow.

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Abstract

Life unfolds as a panorama of memories, carefully collected with each passing year. In the later chapters of one's life, it becomes a solemn mission to sift through this trove, engaging in deep introspection. This theme finds resonance in Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark* (2008), where the protagonist, a seventy-two-year-old man, spends his sleepless nights weaving elaborate escapist fantasies to evade negative memories that relentlessly haunt him. Drifting from one narrative to another, one memory to the next, he confronts fundamental questions about the function of memory in old age. The persistence of memory proves to be an unexpected, yet formidable adversary for the aging protagonist, its tendrils laden with feelings of guilt and remorse. Emotions serve as fuel for memory's persistence, compelling the protagonist to revisit traumas he fervently wishes to forget. Upon the realization that these events cannot be altered, we are left wondering how to manage painful memories that persist despite one's wishes to forget, and how they shape our sense of self as we grow older.

Keywords: Memory, Age, Trauma, Persistence.

Résumé

La vie se déploie tel un panorama de souvenirs, minutieusement rassemblés année après année. Dans les derniers chapitres de notre existence, cette tâche devient une mission solennelle : trier ce trésor en s'immergeant dans une introspection profonde. Cet enjeu résonne dans "L'Homme dans le Noir" de Paul Auster (2008), où le protagoniste, un homme de soixante-douze ans, passe ses nuits sans sommeil à tisser des fantasmes d'évasion complexes pour échapper aux souvenirs négatifs qui le hantent sans relâche. Naviguant d'un récit à l'autre, d'un souvenir à l'autre, il se confronte à des interrogations fondamentales sur la fonction de la mémoire dans la vieillesse. La persistance des souvenirs se révèle être un adversaire inattendu mais redoutable pour le protagoniste vieillissant, ses ramifications chargées de sentiments de culpabilité et de remords. Les émotions alimentent cette persistance, poussant le protagoniste à revisiter des traumatismes qu'il aspire ardemment à oublier. Confrontés à l'implacable réalité que ces événements sont immuables, nous sommes amenés à réfléchir sur la manière de gérer les souvenirs douloureux qui persistent malgré notre volonté de les effacer, et comment ils façonnent notre identité au fil des ans.

Mots-clés : Mémoire, Âge, Traumatisme, Persistance.

ملخص

تتجلى الحياة كلوحة بانورامية من الذكريات، التي يتم جمعها بعناية مع مرور كل عام. في المراحل المتأخرة من حياة الإنسان، يصبح من الضروري تنقيح هذه الذكريات والانغماس في تأمل عميق. يتجلى هذا الموضوع في رواية بول أوستر "رجل في الظلام" (2008)، حيث يقضي بطل القصة، وهو رجل في الثانية والسبعين من عمره، لياليه المؤرقة في نسج خيالات معقدة للهروب من الذكريات السيئة التي تطارده باستمرار. ينتقل من قصة إلى أخرى، ومن ذكرى إلى التالية، ويواجه أسئلة جوهرية حول دور الذاكرة في الشيخوخة. يصبح إلحاح الذاكرة خصماً قوياً وغير متوقع للبطل المسن، حيث تتشابك مشاعره مع الذنب والندم. تغذي العواطف الذاكرة، مما يجبر البطل على مواجهة الصدمات التي يتمنى نسيانها بشدة. عند إدراكه أن هذه الأحداث لا يمكن تغييرها، نتساءل بدورنا عن كيفية التعامل مع الذكريات المؤلمة التي تستمر رغم رغبتنا في نسيانها، وكيف تشكل هذه الذكريات إحساسنا بذواتنا مع تقدم العمر.

كلمات مفتاحية: الذاكرة، العمر، الصدمة، الإلحاح.

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General Introduction

The portrayal of old age and memory has emerged as a prominent subject of inquiry in contemporary fiction. Owing to the rising number of seniors and their longevity, and the increasing developments in gerontology and studies in the aging process, many literary genres have evolved to account for the complexities of the final stages of life. Indeed, several contemporary authors such as Ian McEwan, Julian Barnes and Paul Auster have delved into the *Vollendungsroman*, a literary genre coined by critic Constance Rooke in 1992 to define “the novel of completion or winding up” (245).

Paul Benjamin Auster (born February 3, 1947, in Newark, New Jersey, US) is an American novelist renowned for his *New York Trilogy* (1987) and his simple, yet distinct writing style. His novels pose existential questions and preoccupations about the intricacies of human identity and often feature a touch of the Kafkaesque. Central to Auster's thematic repertoire are themes of love, guilt, death, fate, memory and age, which he integrates into his narratives with sincere sensitivity. Indeed, Auster's prowess in elucidating the nuances of memory and age is evident across his body of work, including titles such as *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006), *The Invention of Solitude* (1982) and even in his most recent novel *Baumgartner* (2023).

In Auster's *Man in the Dark* (2008), age is dealt with in association with grief, eschewing the conventional trope of memory's fallibility in favor of a narrative that grapples with its relentless persistence. Memory and age serve as pivotal components in shaping the protagonist's identity, as he navigates a solitary night plagued by recollections of his wife's passing and his granddaughter's tragic loss. Indeed, Auster's mastery of capturing the whimsical in the ordinary, along with his intriguing meditations on memory and age showcase his literary genius and compel any researcher to dive deeper into this topic.

Within the novella lies an array of thematic explorations that demand meticulous examination. Foremost among these is the theme of age, a relatively recent compelling

subject in literature that has garnered substantial attention from contemporary authors, with Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark* serving as a notable example. Through the protagonist, August Brill, Auster artfully portrays the challenges faced by the elderly, particularly Brill's insomnia-fueled contemplation of his past and the unanswerable questions it poses.

If the journey of age were to be considered a carriage ride, then memory would serve as its pulling horse. Across diverse fields of study, scholars have long grappled with the enigma of memory, heralding it as the cornerstone of human cognition. Literature, with its boundless flexibility, offers a fertile ground for the exploration of memory's complexities. Brill's journey through his memories, though nonlinear, reveals a deliberate curation process, shedding light on his perpetual entanglement with regret and remorse. This careful selection of memories offers fascinating insights into the psychological and emotional nuances of memory, enriching scholarly discourse.

In tandem with memory and age, remorse emerges as a salient thematic thread, as Brill confronts the ramifications of his past decisions during his sleepless nights. Additionally, escapism takes center stage with Auster deftly examining the human inclination to seek solace in imagination amid the harsh realities of life, prompting reflection on the nature of reality itself. Lastly, the novella delves into the theme of identity, probing how age and memory shape one's sense of self. Auster's narrative raises intriguing questions about the malleability of identity, challenging conventional notions of its permanence, particularly in old age.

The exploration of the complex relationship between memory and age and their nuanced impacts on individuals is the focal point of this research. Through a series of formulated questions, the aim is to delve into various dimensions of memory and its interaction with age:

- How does Paul Auster depict the management of difficult memories by older individuals?
- What impact do Brill's memories have on his sense of identity?
- How does Brill's method of coping with regretful moments differ from that of his granddaughter, and is this variance related to their ages?
- Why do certain memories persist in Brill's mind while others fade away?

Based on initial observations and theoretical frameworks, a few hypotheses have been formulated to guide the investigation:

- While conventional belief suggests that elderly individuals typically engage in introspection and confront their past, driven by a heightened awareness of mortality, Paul Auster offers an alternative perspective. He proposes that the elderly may instead seek to evade painful memories, spurred by the realization that they cannot alter the past. Consequently, they may resort to crafting alternate narratives as a means of psychological escapism, striving to distance themselves from their unalterable realities.
- It could be hypothesized that Brill's identity evolved over his lifetime, influenced significantly by his memories and experiences. As he nears the end of his life, the realization that these memories shape who he is as a person may have led him to disassociate from his true self, possibly resulting in the creation of an alternative persona in hopes of making better choices.
- Despite their age gap, Brill's avoidance and Katya's immersion in their pasts may be more tied to their individual personalities than their generational differences. This suggests that age alone may not dictate coping strategies, but rather personal disposition plays a significant role.

- Brill's careful selection of his memories may be due to the persistence of certain memories in comparison to others. It could be theorized that the deep emotional attachment that he feels towards a specific memory has a long-lasting impact on its clarity and longevity in his mind despite his old age, while other memories wither away due to their lack of emotional significance.

Addressing the questions and their corresponding hypotheses aligns with the overarching goal of this research paper: to meticulously dissect the relationship between memory and age, aiming to elucidate their impact on individual identity. Furthermore, the study seeks to ascertain whether the act of reminiscing on past experiences is solely associated with old age or is an intrinsic aspect of the human aging process, regardless of life stage. Additionally, this investigation endeavors to uncover the myriad factors that contribute to varying coping mechanisms in response to distressing memories.

As with any scholarly pursuit, it is imperative to delineate the motivations behind the selection of the topic at hand. The decision to focus on memory and age for this thesis is rooted in its novelty and burgeoning prominence within the literary realm. While achieving true originality in contemporary discourse poses a considerable challenge, the pursuit of innovative inquiry remains a fundamental aspiration.

Moreover, the inherent relatability of this topic highlighted by observations of aging within familial, academic and social spheres lends a compelling appeal to the study. Witnessing individuals navigate their past experiences, grapple with feelings of guilt and regret and reminisce about bygone eras has ignited a fervent curiosity to delve into this subject matter. Hence, a deeper examination of these themes proves to be essential for a nuanced understanding of interpersonal dynamics, human emotion and the formative influence of memory and age on individual development.

This research paper unfolds across three distinct chapters and follows the methodological guidelines of MLA 9th edition. The initial chapter delves into the theoretical framework, elucidating key concepts essential for the analysis. Following this, the second chapter meticulously analyzes the novel through the lens of the established theoretical constructs. Finally, the third and concluding chapter explores the novel's aesthetic and poetic dimensions, delving into Paul Auster's adept use of literary and narrative devices to enrich the narrative with depth and meaning.

This study, thus, represents a scholarly odyssey driven by the dual objectives of academic enrichment and intellectual engagement. As this intellectual voyage is embarked upon, the readers can immerse themselves in the narrative tapestry woven by the man in the dark, with the anticipation that its insights may linger in their memories long after the journey's end.

Chapter One

The Theories of Memory

and Age

Introduction

In the silent corridors of time, where memory intertwines with age, a rich tapestry is woven with threads of experience and failure. As the twilight years beckon, individuals are confronted with the labyrinthine complexities of memory's embrace, grappling with the inexorable passage of time and the enigmatic dance between remembrance and forgetfulness.

Within the shadowed recesses of aging, memory emerges as both a steadfast companion and an elusive specter, guiding individuals through the old passages of their past, while unveiling the new paths of their present. This chapter seeks to illuminate the nexus between memory and age, investigating how individuals embark on a journey of discovery, shaped by the unavoidable process of aging and the persistent nature of memory. In doing so, it confronts the various implications of memory's endurance, which may serve as both a source of comfort and a catalyst for introspection. Moreover, it delves into the intriguing study of how the elderly cope with the challenges of growing old, exploring the myriad sentiments evoked by the tandem of memory and age.

Central to this exploration is the 'Vollendungsroman,' a literary archetype that encapsulates the journey of completion and fulfillment, particularly in the later stages of life. Here, readers uncover the secrets of this genre and its significance as a beacon of hope amidst the shadows of old age, resonating with those who find solace and reflection in its narratives. Ultimately, within the pages of this chapter, readers are invited to step into the depths of memory and age, unraveling their mysteries and discovering their transformative power in the unending quest for ultimate truth, meaning and completion.

I. Dissecting the Intricacies of Memory and Age

Memory and age are integral components of human experience, exerting great influence on cognition, social relationships and identity. Their impact further extends to an individual's learning experiences, shaping the way they read, think, adapt and make decisions; thus, underscoring their dependence on them for fundamental functioning. Both memory and age have undergone meticulous research within the branch of psychology, emerging as prominent subjects in contemporary literature.

The inevitability of aging, a universal journey toward the narrowing path of mortality, renders the study of age and the aging process of paramount importance. While some may question the need to dive into the intricacies of a natural phenomenon that appears beyond our control, current demographic trends emphasize the significance of this subject. Recent data published by the United Nations in 2010 has revealed a striking shift: the number of individuals over the age of sixty-five is assumed to surpass those aged five and under globally by the year 2050 (qtd. in Pachana 27).

This demographic shift highlights the urgency and relevance of age as a compelling research topic in the present era, with the study of aging becoming not just relevant but imperative, further emphasizing the importance of Gerontology. Gerontology, a term coined by Professor Elie Metchnikoff in 1903, encompasses the study of the biological, psychological and social aspects of aging. Its purpose is to enhance the quality of life and mental well-being of individuals as they traverse the various stages of life (Birren).

Similarly, memory assumes a crucial role in every facet of human life and occupies a foundational position in the construction of identity through shaping an individual's sense of self by preserving and interpreting past experiences. Despite being extensively scrutinized, memory remains one of the most fascinating faculties of the human brain, giving rise to numerous unanswered questions. As posed by William James in his seminal work, *Principles*

of Psychology (1890): “why should this absolutely God-given faculty retain so much better the events of yesterday than those of last year, and, best of all, those of an hour ago? Why, again, in old age should its grasp of childhood's events seem firmest? ... Why should repeating an experience strengthen our recollection of it?” (2-3). Memory, therefore, unveils itself as a multifaceted phenomenon which becomes particularly interesting in association with age, inviting exploration from both scientific and psychological perspectives.

i. The Persistence of Memory

While memory is commonly understood as the process of retaining information over time, its capabilities extend beyond the mere recollection of previously encountered information. It serves as a mechanism through which humans draw upon past experiences to apply that information in the present. In essence, the experience of a past event often exerts an influence on an individual at a later time, shaping their behavior. Frequently, individuals are not consciously aware of these past events, yet they wield a direct impact on both their knowledge and behavior. This phenomenon is referred to as implicit memory.

According to Jonathan Foster in his book *Memory: A Very Short Introduction* (2009), implicit memory “refers to an influence on behavior, feelings, or thoughts as a result of prior experience, but which manifests without conscious recollection of the original events” (47). It is a type of long-term memory that is characterized by retention without conscious recollection, often evoking memories in the present that do not seem as part of the past.

This form of memory is frequently intertwined with trauma, particularly in individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In fact, traumatic memories often arise “because trauma floods our brain with cortisol, the stress hormone, which shuts down the part of our brain that encodes memories and makes them explicit” (Firestone). As such, implicit memories may manifest as flashbacks, triggering reactions that elude understanding and are often mistaken as original experiences. For instance, a war veteran may instinctively take

cover under a desk upon hearing a loud noise despite being safely at home. This underscores how implicit memory can prompt responses that appear disconnected from the current reality but are deeply rooted in past experiences.

When exploring the complex workings of human memory, it becomes paramount to examine its connection to trauma. From a scientific standpoint, traumatic events trigger a surge of adrenaline, etching the associated memories into the amygdala, a component of the limbic system responsible for storing emotional significance, alongside the intensity and impulse of emotions (McClelland and Gilyard). Nevertheless, this symbiotic relationship between trauma and memory is bidirectional. Memory can shape trauma, influencing its perception and impact. Notably, the selective encoding of memory often intertwines intense emotions, sensory details and perceived threats with specific recollections, a phenomenon known as “memory amplification” (Takarangi et al.). Tragically, this amplification bears tangible consequences, increasing the likelihood of experiencing symptoms akin to PTSD, such as intrusive thoughts and images.

As these haunting memories persist, individuals may find themselves questioning their very identity and worldview, confronting existential quandaries about suffering and life's purpose. Researcher Abu Shahid Abdullah aptly notes, “It is by reimagining and rewriting the past that we can come to terms with trauma and (re)form our identity” (11). This process often precipitates feelings of disorientation, confusion and existential crisis, as individuals endeavor to integrate their traumatic experiences into their sense of self.

Ultimately, individuals are compelled to confront the inevitability of coping with their traumatic memories. Some may resort to avoidance, suppressing their emotions until they reach a breaking point, resulting in a cascade of mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, addiction, eating disorders and suicidal ideation (Kensinger 214). Conversely, others choose to confront and integrate these memories into their lives, fostering mental resilience.

This interplay between memory and trauma underscores the formidable power of human memory, simultaneously daunting and enlightening in its implications.

Memory, with its myriad benefits, is crucial for our daily lives, shaping our past, present and future, as noted by Daniel Schacter, a renowned memory researcher at Harvard University. Schacter's exploration in his 2001 book, *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*, delves into the complex nature of memory, acknowledging its remarkable capabilities alongside its potential shortcomings (3). Through his insightful analysis, Schacter categorizes memory's flaws into seven distinct "sins," drawing parallels to the seven deadly sins of ancient lore. The first three sins, classified as "sins of omission," involve instances of forgetting, while the remaining four, categorized as "sins of commission," encompass distorted or unwanted recollections (Schacter 4).

Memory's seventh sin, persistence, delves into the repetition of disturbing events or experiences that linger in spite of one's wishes to forget. As elucidated by Schacter, this sin stands out as perhaps the most destructive, carrying the potential to inflict enduring stress and trauma (176). Individuals who have undergone traumatic experiences are particularly prone to the grip of persistence, marked by the unwelcome intrusion of repetitive recollections. The repercussions of persistent traumatic memories extend far beyond the act of remembering itself. They seep into the fabric of one's daily life, giving rise to chronic fears, phobias and functional impairments.

The persistence of troubling memories stemming from traumatic events is not always confined to individual experiences; they can also be collective in nature, exemplified by what psychologists term 'flashbulb memories.' These memories are characterized by their striking clarity, often recalling significant historical or public events. Originating from a seminal 1977 study by Roger Brown and James Kulik, conducted fourteen years following the assassination

of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the concept of flashbulb memories aimed to unravel the psychological reverberations of such cataclysmic incidents (Wisner).

Brown and Kulik posited three essential criteria for an event to be etched as a flashbulb memory: it must elicit surprise, hold substantial importance and evoke intense emotional reactions (qtd. in Wisner). This trifecta underscores the defining feature of these memories: their vivid recollection. Individuals often recount flashbulb memories with remarkable detail, recalling where they were when the event unfolded, and how they learned of it (Wisner). This level of clarity is attributed to the collective nature of these memories, shared among large groups of people. Additionally, the involvement of the amygdala in their recollection, as elucidated by Windy Wisner, further enhances their vividness. Thus, it becomes apparent that flashbulb memories serve as another tool wielded by the persistence of memory, inflicting anguish upon those who remember them.

In the quest for alleviation, an attempt was made through ‘Directed Forgetting’, a technique introduced by psychologist Robert Bjork in 1972. This method involved cueing patients to forget certain elements while remembering others (Bjork 218). Unfortunately, when applied to trauma patients, directed forgetting proved ineffective. This outcome signaled a concerning “loss of cognitive control over the encoding and retrieval processes linked to traumatic content” (Schacter 195), underscoring the formidable challenge posed by the sin of persistence in the domain of memory.

Persistence extends its influence beyond extreme cases like PTSD, permeating the daily lives of individuals who have undergone distressing experiences. Notably, even in less severe situations, the aftermath of negative events can cast a lasting shadow. Schacter points out that events evoking negative emotions, such as viewing pictures with negative content, tend to be remembered in greater detail than their positive counterparts (195). In fact, the complicated

interplay between mood and emotion exerts a significant impact on the persistence of memory.

Emotions experienced during an event not only impact the vividness of the memory of that particular moment but can also influence the recall of past emotions. Likewise, the current emotional state can distort recollections, heightening the accessibility of memories congruent with the prevailing mood. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in depressed individuals, who exhibit a tendency to remember negative events more vividly than positive ones.

To elaborate on the earlier assertion, Professor Elizabeth Kensinger suggests that each memory stored within an individual holds both intrinsic and extrinsic value, with the former closely tied to the thoughts and emotions evoked by the event (215). This intrinsic value aids in processing the emotional significance of the event, thereby enhancing memory retention for elements directly linked to the emotional experience. Conversely, negative emotions may not always enhance memory and could potentially hinder recollection of extrinsic details peripheral to the emotional event (Kensinger 217).

Kensinger further underscores the impact of intrinsic negative emotions by highlighting that contextual details reliably enhanced by negative events, such as spatial location or visual specifics, are intrinsic attributes of the emotional element itself (214). This elucidates that negative emotions prompt a more detailed processing of information, contrasting with positive emotions which may lead to broader processing, potentially overlooking finer details. This dynamic relation between emotional impact and memory processes emphasizes the complexity of memory accuracy.

ii. Coping with Old Age

Aging unfolds as a journey marked by both gains and losses across the expanse of one's lifespan. While these losses are predominantly manifested on a physical level, their impact

can also be psychological. The elderly encounter an array of losses, encompassing not only diminished strength and the inability to perform daily activities but also the impending departure of friends, family and loved ones. Inevitably intertwined with aging, loss ushers in a myriad of challenges that the elderly must confront.

Dr. Arbore, the director of the Center for Elderly Suicide Prevention at the Institute on Aging in San Francisco, aptly notes, “The psychological context of loss is different for the elderly, compared with that for younger people” (qtd. in Zoler 14). Loss, for the elderly, assumes diverse forms, ranging from the loss of health, memory and time to social connections. The cumulative weight of these losses can evolve into what Dr. Arbore terms “bereavement overload” (qtd. in Zoler 14). Over time, it has the potential to act as a catalyst for depression, a medical condition that significantly disrupts daily life and normal functioning.

Consequently, in the journey of aging, individuals often find themselves ensnared in a perpetual sense of mourning. If left unaddressed, this mourning can gradually evolve into a state of depression. Sigmund Freud, in his seminal 1917 paper “Mourning and Melancholia”, delineates two distinct psychological responses to loss: mourning and melancholia. While mourning represents a natural and transformative process of navigating grief, melancholia manifests as a persistent state characterized by intense pain and self-loathing (Freud 243).

For older individuals, striking a balance between these two responses can prove challenging, exacerbated by the accumulation of longing for the “lost object,” which Freud identifies as a person, task, idea or even the ego itself (245). Both mourning and melancholia entail a painful withdrawal from the ‘object,’ a process vehemently resisted by the ego. In its attempt to defy loss, the ego seeks to grasp onto substitute objects “whether real or imaginary, in fantasy or hallucination” (Carhart-Harris et al.). As a result, the lost object often persists in

the mourner's psyche through memories or fantasies, keeping it alive and prolonging the trauma.

For the elderly, the manifestations of loss are manifold and often simultaneous, rendering the grieving process even more arduous. These cumulative experiences cast a shadow over their mental well-being, blurring the line between mourning and depression and frequently plunging them into the abyss of loneliness.

As individuals age, the likelihood of living alone increases, accompanied by a decline in social engagement attributed to the loss of family connections and limited participation in social activities. This trajectory often culminates in the pervasive experience of loneliness among older adults. Indeed, studies indicate that loneliness and social isolation afflict approximately one-third or more of the elderly, with 5% reporting frequent or constant feelings of loneliness (qtd. in Berg-Weger and Morley). Notably, the manifestation of loneliness can take both short-term and long-term forms, but the elderly are particularly susceptible to the latter. Chronic loneliness becomes a concerning reality when older individuals struggle to establish social connections that meet their emotional needs, placing them at a heightened risk of developing depression.

Moreover, the deeply tied relationship between physical health and mental well-being among older individuals is undeniable. Aging constitutes a multifaceted journey marked by continuous transformations in physical, psychological and social dimensions, frequently entwined with challenges such as disability and frailty. As has been well-documented, the advancing years herald a decline in both physical health and psychological functioning, particularly accentuated in later stages when the emergence of chronic illnesses becomes an impending threat. The aging process entails transformations in muscles, organs, cells and sensory systems, potentially leading to sensory impairments like sight or hearing loss. These sensory declines not only hinder day-to-day activities but also jeopardize social connections

and the ability to sustain overall well-being (Pachana 64). The accumulation of chronic conditions, coupled with decreased physical functioning and heightened susceptibility to further health declines, renders older adults more vulnerable to frailty.

Frailty in later life, as elucidated by Nancy Pachana in her book *Ageing: A Very Short Introduction* (2016), encompasses a spectrum of symptoms, including reduced physical activity, muscle weakness, slowed cognitive and motor functions, fatigue and unintentional weight loss (65). Consequently, many older adults grappling with frailty find themselves reliant on assistance for basic activities such as dressing, eating and mobility, eroding their sense of independence and diminishing their quality of life, often making them feel burdensome.

Furthermore, the specter of waning sexuality looms large, particularly affecting aging men contending with issues like impotence and a diminished capacity for sexual performance compared to their youth. While the gradual decline in sexuality and intimacy may be regarded as a natural facet of the aging process, it remains a cornerstone of masculinity, intricately woven into how men perceive themselves, constituting a significant aspect of their identity that transcends mere chronological age.

The weight of these losses bears down heavily on the shoulders of older individuals, diminishing their ability to cope with the challenges of late life with resilience and robbing them of a sense of purpose. In the wake of such bereavement, many find themselves grappling with the creeping belief that their existence has become devoid of significance, reaching a point where they question the value of their existence, sometimes even harboring a wish for their own demise (Appel and van Wijngaarden). Various terms such as ‘completed life,’ ‘tiredness of life’ (ToL), or ‘life fatigue’ have emerged to describe this phenomenon, wherein older adults perceive their lives as fulfilled and express a readiness to embrace death.

To comprehend the depths of this complex emotional landscape, numerous studies have adopted an existential perspective, linking it to a deep sense of existential emptiness, experiences of solitude or the struggle to reconcile their evolving identity (Appel and Van Wijngaarden). According to a research conducted by Van Wijngaarden et al. in 2015, this phenomenon can be distilled as “a tangle of inability and unwillingness to connect to one's actual life” (4). In essence, older individuals find themselves adrift, feeling disconnected from their present reality and wrestling with an incompatibility between their current selves and their idealized past or future selves.

Furthermore, this dissonance often manifests in a myriad of distressing emotions, including loneliness, a sense of powerlessness, fears of dependency and a pervasive feeling of self-estrangement or alienation. As a coping mechanism for the adversities of aging, some may entertain thoughts of hastening their own demise, viewing it as a means to escape the burdens of their existence.

The findings of the study underscore a deep-seated desire among participants to preserve their autonomy and retain command over their own destinies. However, as they navigate the passage of time, a noticeable shift occurs in their perception, where time seems to stagnate, slowing to a crawl, leaving them mired in a sense of boredom. Frightening apprehensions about the uncertain future, coupled with nostalgic yearnings for days gone by, cast a shadow over their zest for life. The prospect of merely waiting for the inevitable end becomes an unbearable burden, as they grapple with pervasive feelings of loneliness, even in the presence of others, often perceiving themselves as burdens to their loved ones (Van Wijngaarden et al. 4).

For many older individuals, the inability to engage in activities that once defined their sense of self exacerbates their struggle, while others lament their inability to care for those they hold dear. Across the board, a prevailing sentiment of exhaustion—be it mental,

physical, social or existential—weighs heavily upon them. This fatigue, characterized by its multifaceted and overwhelming nature, frequently accompanies a sense of despondency, casting a pall over their days (Van Wijngaarden et al. 5). Moreover, the silent specters of emotional grief and past trauma, compounded by incessant rumination over missed opportunities and past regrets, further compound their distress, rendering the prospect of continued existence increasingly untenable.

As the inevitable path towards decline and dependence takes its toll, a profound aversion sets in, fueled by fear and shame, leaving scant reserves of enthusiasm. Ultimately, old age becomes synonymous with a numbing monotony, an interminable waiting game for the arrival of death. In a final bid to assert agency over their fate, many elderly individuals turn to assisted dying as a last resort—a desperate attempt to preempt further deterioration and loss, viewing it as a dignified escape from the indignities of prolonged suffering, a so-called “flight-forward” to wrest control from the clutches of decline (Van Wijngaarden et al. 4).

The act of self-directed death appears to serve a dual purpose for many individuals: not only does it offer a means to reclaim a sense of control over their destiny, but it also serves as a deliberate effort to craft a coherent conclusion to their life story. By declaring their existence as “fulfilled” and deeming it unworthy of continuation, they expedite the process of death as an alternative, less agonizing form of suicide—an avoidance strategy to cope with the challenges of old age.

iii. Memory and Age: An Unbreakable Nexus

Throughout life, a person amasses a trove of diverse emotions and experiences, ranging from the joy of delightful moments, accomplishments and relationships to feelings of despair, intense pain and loss. This collection of highs and lows is carefully stored in the recesses of their memory, a treasure chest waiting to be unlocked in the later stages of life. Old age

serves as the key that finally opens this box, laying bare a panorama of moments for reflection.

In a compelling TED conference in 2010, psychologist Daniel Kahneman challenges the conventional notion that past experiences directly influence future behaviors, contending instead that it is an individual's recollections of these experiences that hold sway over their decisions and actions. Distinguishing between "the experiencing self" and "the remembering self," Kahneman depicts the experiencing self as rooted in the present moment, while the remembering self emerges as the storyteller, crafting narratives defined by their conclusions, thus diverging in their relationship with time (00:02:40-03:35).

To illustrate, Kahneman presents the scenario of listening to a beautiful song that is interrupted by a jarring screech at the end (00:01:56-02:16). Despite experiencing several moments of bliss, the remembering self fixates on the unpleasant conclusion, potentially deterring future engagements with the symphony. His seminal insight can be encapsulated in his assertion that "[w]e actually don't choose between experiences, we choose between memories of experiences. And even when we think about the future, we don't think of our future normally as experiences. We think of our future as anticipated memories" (00:09:08-25). Thus, the crux of behavioral influence lies not in the raw experiences themselves but in the indelible imprints they leave on our memories, shaping our decisions and actions in times yet to unfold.

When considering the elderly, it becomes apparent that their lifetimes are rich reservoirs of memories and experiences, spanning across vast stretches of time. These experiences not only shape their behavior but also bestow upon them the invaluable gift of wisdom. However, as they enter advanced age, the constraints of physical limitations often diminish the opportunities for these memories to actively guide their actions (Torges et al.). Instead, the influence of memories subtly shifts, shaping their cognition and influencing how they reflect

upon and navigate their past experiences. Thus, rather than merely prompting them to engage or withdraw from particular activities, these memories become integral components of their thought processes, guiding their perspectives and coping mechanisms, ultimately serving as a pathway towards reflection.

The act of reflection in old age is a nuanced process. It can be affirming and pleasurable, allowing individuals to relish the richness of their life experiences. However, it can also be a harrowing journey, fraught with the weight of guilt and the burdens of the past. As the final chapters of life unfold, self-evaluation becomes a more frequent and complex task. The benefits of longevity are accompanied by the challenges of dying slowly, providing ample time for reflection without the prospect of redressing the harms and pain inflicted upon others over a lifetime. This contemplative period can be both constructive and destructive, shaping the narrative of one's life.

Gerontologist Malcolm Johnson introduces the term 'biographical pain' to encapsulate the psychological and spiritual anguish experienced by the elderly and frail. It involves the deep recollection and reliving of past wrongs, unfulfilled promises, and regrettable actions, as discussed in his book *Spiritual Dimensions of Ageing* (2016). Johnson emphasizes that "the older you are, the more you have to remember ... the less opportunity to fulfill your dreams and deal with the failings, fissures and hurts of the past" (224). This means that reminiscence evolves into the sole occupation for the elderly, as they find themselves repeatedly immersed in the vast sea of memory.

Nonetheless, recent research indicates that older adults exhibit a remarkable resilience in the face of regret, contrasting sharply with the more pronounced susceptibility observed in younger adults. A study conducted by Carstensen and Mikels (2005) finds that older individuals display a preference for positive information over negative, a phenomenon dubbed the "positivity effect" (218). This inclination towards positivity serves as a protective

mechanism, enabling older adults to maintain a sense of emotional well-being by prioritizing uplifting experiences.

This age-related positivity effect appears to play a pivotal role in dampening the experience of regret among older adults. By focusing on the positive aspects of life and minimizing the impact of negative emotions, including regret, older individuals are able to sustain a fulfilling emotional state. Additionally, perceptions of limited opportunities may motivate older adults to disengage from dwelling on their regrets. Studies report that older adults exhibit higher levels of disengagement from undoing commission regrets compared to their younger counterparts, suggesting a strategic approach to managing regret (Wrosch et al. 667). This aligns with previous findings which suggest that capacities for goal accommodation and emotion regulation typically improve with age.

Moreover, researcher Stefanie Brassen's insights suggest that disengaging from regret serves as “a protective strategy that kicks in sometime in old age, preventing the elderly—who do not have as much time or opportunity to make amends—from needlessly feeling sorry about things they cannot realistically change” (qtd. in Jabr). Consequently, while younger adults may be prone to cognitive immobility (i.e. fixating on their regrets), older adults may employ avoidance or escapism as temporary coping mechanisms, allowing them to focus on the present moment and cultivate a sense of peace and contentment in their later years.

Psychologists define escapism as a coping mechanism often observed in individuals, particularly older adults, when faced with disruptions to their sense of comfort or well-being. Initially regarded with skepticism, escapism is linked to activities deemed unproductive or even detrimental, such as excessive television watching, video gaming or gambling, all seen as means to avoid confronting psychological distress or dissatisfaction. However, emerging perspectives, like that of Professor Andrew Evans, present a nuanced view. Evans suggests a connection between escapism and the psychological state of ‘flow’, where individuals

immerse themselves in activities that provide a sense of pleasure and engagement, even if those activities exist in imaginary worlds (qtd. in Mičić and Musil 287).

Amid the relentless challenges of existence, older individuals often find consolation in what psychologists term ‘counterfactual thinking’, a cognitive process centered on pondering alternative outcomes to past events. This introspective practice involves contemplating “what ifs” and “if onlys”, envisioning how situations might have unfolded differently had different choices been made (Gould). Within this realm, upward counterfactuals emerge, characterized by attributions of blame, regret and remorse. Older adults may scrutinize past actions, assigning responsibility to themselves, others or circumstances, thus engaging in retrospective analysis of what could have transpired differently (Broomhall and Phillips 2). Despite its potential for fostering self-awareness, upward counterfactual thinking is cautioned against due to its propensity to exacerbate depressive tendencies.

Conversely, downward counterfactual thinking offers a more optimistic perspective, encouraging individuals to reflect on how circumstances could have been worse had alternative decisions been pursued. This cognitive approach often leads to a sense of gratitude for the present reality, viewed as preferable to imagined bleak alternatives (Bell). Moreover, downward counterfactual thinking serves as a motivational force, inspiring individuals to embrace their current circumstances and strive for future growth and fulfillment.

In essence, the manifestation of escapism constructs alternate realities, where actions eliciting remorse and regret are imbued with more favorable outcomes than their real-life counterparts. This strategic cognitive approach not only aids older individuals in navigating future decisions by creating alternative scenarios but also enhances their faculties of creativity and problem-solving. A person’s life story is a meticulously woven narrative, constructed from millions of recollections that shape their identity and personal biography. In the twilight of life, memory may falter, be purposefully repressed or reconstructed. Nonetheless, these

memories linger in the recesses of the mind, contributing to the complex trajectory of one's life.

II. Infiltrating the World of the Vollendungsroman

The portrayal of old age spans the entire history of fiction, going as far back as to the emergence of fairytales and myths. Yet, akin to gender, class and race, it also serves as a motive for discrimination. Indeed, elderly people frequently confront an array of negative stereotypes, crafting a distorted perception that paints them as irritable, evil or burdensome, thus resulting in what has been termed 'ageism'. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, ageism is defined as "prejudice or discrimination against a particular age-group and especially the elderly".

Gerontologist Robert Butler initially coined the term to account for discrimination against elderly people, with extensive research later revealing ageism as a prevalent issue in society, notably perpetuated through social media. In fact, a study published in *The Gerontologist* (2013) identified eighty-four Facebook groups, created by young individuals in order to criticize and advocate banning and restricting the daily activities of older people such as shopping and driving (Cherry).

Naturally, this phenomenon has seamlessly integrated into literature, where stereotypes about older people have transitioned from reality to fiction, often being used as devices to propel the young main character's journey. The elderly seldom occupied the central stage in fiction and were frequently confined to minor roles, either playing the mentor, imparting guidance and wisdom to the protagonist, or serving as the scary antagonist with nothing to lose.

As a possible reasoning for such a disregard for older characters, Simone de Beauvoir asserts in her book *The Coming of Age* (1972) that "if an old man is dealt with in his

subjective aspect he is not a good hero for a novel; he is finished, set, with no hope, no development to be looked for... nothing that can happen to him is of any importance” (210). Through this quote, an assumption can be inferred that an old person lacks the ability to grow, implying that there is no room for significant developments or events to impact his character. Consequently, his narrative becomes mundane and less engaging, rendering him a less compelling hero. Whether de Beauvoir’s statement reflects her personal beliefs or is merely a speculation on how authors perceive old age is open to interpretation, but it is evident that such a perspective is inherently problematic.

In recent years, the landscape has shifted significantly, with contemporary novels surprisingly featuring a wealth of older characters. Indeed, older people are now securing their fair share of the spotlight, often assuming major roles. This shift mirrors the increasing presence of older individuals in the world’s population, made possible by advancements in technology, medicine and gerontology which have facilitated leading longer and more comfortable lives. Consequently, the common perception of old age has undergone a remarkable transformation, dismantling prevalent stereotypes.

Additionally, the longevity that has been afforded by these advancements sparked a curiosity about old age, single-handedly transforming older people into intriguing and captivating main characters (Rooke 272). In fact, contemporary fiction specifically explores the subjective aspect of elderly characters in an attempt to unravel the mysteries that enrobe old age, ultimately revealing that an old person has a potential for growth, which goes in stark contrast with de Beauvoir’s contention. This growing interest in old age has given rise to a proliferation of novels dedicated to the subject, culminating in the emergence of a new literary genre coined by critic Constance Rooke in her essay “Old Age in Contemporary Fiction: A New Paradigm of Hope” known as the *Vollendungsroman*.

i. *The Vollendungsroman: Why the Elderly Need it*

Constance Rooke describes the *Vollendungsroman* as a literary genre that adopts the model of the *Bildungsroman* to closely trace the final development and character shaping in an old man's journey (275). Similar to the *Bildungsroman*, it delves into a critical phase in the life cycle, exploring identity and contemplating what lies ahead. Rooke further defines it as "the novel of completion and winding up", asserting that it is "complementary" to the *Bildungsroman* through its feature of an old protagonist reflecting on their life journey, engaging in deeply philosophical questions, and often pondering the meaning of life in order to come to terms with their disengagement from society (275).

The genre is rooted in the disengagement theory of aging, as proposed by Elaine Cummings and William Henry in their seminal work, *Growing Old* (1961). According to this theory, the natural progression of aging involves a gradual withdrawal from one's social environment and a deconstruction of the ego. The theory suggests that as people age, their physical and cognitive abilities decline, accompanied with a decrease in social activities and interactions (qtd. in Nickerson). This enables them to center their attention on personal reflection, delving into their past, examining the mistakes they have committed, the choices they have made and fully indulging in the "what-ifs" and "what could have beens". Furthermore, this introspective journey provides them with the space to reconcile feelings of loss and regret. Through a process of acceptance and closure, they can assess not only who they were but also contemplate the potential of who they could become.

While much of literature delves into the youth, exploring themes of love, marriage, and friendship, the subject of old age remains enigmatic. Negative stereotypes have cast a veil of mystery over this phase of life, limiting its exploration in literary discourse. In Simone de Beauvoir's work, *The Coming of Age*, she characterizes old age as society's secret shame (9), a phase often concealed from public view. Indeed, rather than being appreciated for the

wealth of wisdom and experience they embody, the elderly were often treated as a scientific puzzle to be unraveled and a uselessness to be discarded.

Likewise, in his book *On Aging: Revolt and Resignation* (1994), Jean Améry challenges the stereotypical narratives surrounding the later stages of life, seeking to breach the silence that shrouds the reality of old age within society: “When we have passed beyond the prime of life, society forbids us to continue to project ourselves into the future, and a culture becomes a burdensome culture that we no longer understand, that instead gives us to understand that, as scrap iron of the mind, we belong to the waste heaps of the epoch” (128). De Beauvoir and Améry both posit old age as a phase of life that struggles to attain a satisfying resolution, deeming it no longer interesting and presenting an elderly character as an unfit protagonist for a novel. This perspective, however, is strongly challenged by the *Vollendungsroman*.

At its core, the *Vollendungsroman* defies the common notion of literature depicting old age as morbid and depressing. Instead, it showcases that there is always more growth to be achieved, more experience to be acquired and a promising future to look forward to. Remarkably, the *Vollendungsroman* stands as the antithesis to the *Bildungsroman*, offering relatability and proving that much like the latter imparts wisdom to the young, guiding them through the journey to adulthood, the *Vollendungsroman* serves as a manual for the elderly—a beacon of hope.

The essence of the *vollendungsroman*, and literature as a whole, lies in highlighting the inherent value of life, regardless of its proximity to death. It serves as a glimmer, revealing aspects one may have overlooked or neglected and providing a chance for salvation (Rooke 278). In dispelling apprehensions surrounding old age, this genre extends a comforting hand to the elderly who may have been led to believe that their only course is to await an inevitable demise, showing that there is still much to be explored and embraced.

ii. *The Reconstruction of an Old Man's Identity*

For many years, the prevailing belief held that identity formation was a process confined to adolescence and resolved once and for all during that developmental stage. However, a counter perspective has emerged from the scope of psychoanalysis, where scholars challenge this notion, contending that identity is a dynamic entity that undergoes continuous changes throughout an individual's lifespan.

Renowned psychologist Erik Erikson's theory of psychological development has introduced a more nuanced perspective by dividing a person's life into eight distinct phases, each presenting specific challenges for identity construction. According to Erikson, the final stage unfolds around the age of sixty-five, serving as a pivotal period for an introspective reflection and life review, where individuals grapple with the task of making sense of their life journey (Cherry).

Erikson posits that those who successfully navigate this introspective process, overcoming any lingering regrets and achieving a sense of wholeness, attain what he terms 'Ego Integrity' (qtd. in Cherry). On the contrary, those who struggle to reconcile with their past, perceiving time to be insufficient for atonement, may reach a state of 'Despair'.

Erikson's model accentuates the significance of later life stages, particularly in the construction of identity and the resolution of existential questions that arise during the process of life reflection.

This process is closely mirrored in the *Vollendungsroman*, with its purpose being defined as uncovering "some kind of affirmation in the face of loss" for both the protagonist and the reader (Rooke 278). Indeed, old age frequently intertwines with various experiences of loss and regret, precipitating confusion and leading to a fragmented identity, which, in turn, prompts a profound reevaluation of the self. The *Vollendungsroman* distinguishes itself through its unique capacity to encompass the entire life history of its protagonist, providing

insights into each stage of their life. This reflective process allows the protagonist to deconstruct their present identity, meticulously examining the various phases that it has previously undergone. In this journey of self-rediscovery, avenues for atonement and redemption over past mistakes emerge.

Although the protagonist may come to recognize their errors, the narrative often highlights their inability to rectify these mistakes through tangible actions. However, it is their willingness to embrace change that elevates the aging character to the status of a hero, encapsulating the very essence of the genre (Rooke 280). Following the process of atonement, the narrative transitions into a phase of acceptance, wherein the protagonist attains a state of acknowledgment of their past self and a genuine readiness to move forward. This transition culminates in the pursuit of closure, marking the reconstruction of the protagonist's identity and the completion of their character arc.

In the world of the *Vollendungsroman*, the concept of “completion” is characterized with an intriguing complexity. It suggests that achieving “completion” is a somewhat arbitrary pursuit. The protagonist grapples with the realization that in the complex tapestry of human life, there will inevitably be loose threads. The narrative insightfully contends that “affirmation is not always dependent upon a sense of completion” (Rooke 281), proving that it is the celebration of life that stands at the heart of the genre.

iii. Memories as the Ultimate Fuel for the Vollendungsroman

In the *Vollendungsroman*, considerable focus is placed on the elderly character's self-reflection, often referred to as the life review. This concept was coined by gerontologist Robert Butler in his seminal article titled “The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged” (1963). Butler defines the life review as a phenomenon that unfolds in the later stages of one's life, involving a reassessment of negative past experiences and conflicts (qtd. in Westerhof and Bohlmeijer). In the final phase of life, memories of the

past become remarkably vivid, offering a platform for new insights into old issues or events.

This process can lead to resolutions and reconciliations with the past.

The life review may culminate in serenity and acceptance, providing the individual with a renewed understanding of what truly matters in life. Alternatively, some may choose to avoid this introspective journey due to the pain that past deeds may carry into the present. According to Butler, the act of reviewing one's life plays a crucial role in coming to terms with life's finitude, and it is through the lens of memory that this existential purpose can be fulfilled (qtd. in Westerhof and Bohlmeijer).

Memory plays an integral role in the *Vollendungsroman*, serving as the conduit through which the protagonist transcends time, embarking on a journey of growth and development. In the words of Rooke: "The protagonist is located within a present time frame, a few days or months perhaps of that character's old age, and then through memory, the character is transported into past time, often through a narrative voice that assesses past experiences in a new light" (283). The significance of memory extends beyond its mere function as a portal to the past; it also holds the power to shape the present. Whether linear or disruptive, memory allows the protagonist to glean fresh insights from past experiences, subsequently opening a space for character development in the present.

While it can be wielded as a means to escape the present realities of old age by reminiscing about youth—when the body was not so frail, and the mind not so clouded, a time when vigor and clarity were the norm—the *Vollendungsroman* employs memory strategically through flashbacks. These glimpses into the past add nuanced layers to the protagonist's character and introduce new dimensions to the plot. In doing so, memory becomes a dynamic force, contributing to the richness and complexity of the narrative. It emerges not as a passive recollection, but as a narrative tool that breathes life into the characters and infuses the *Vollendungsroman* with a sense of temporal malleability.

The *Vollendungsroman* boldly explores the often-overlooked terrain of old age, a subject that has not been explored in all its facets. Shrouded in apprehension and consigned to the shadows, old age has often been deemed too dark to unravel. This genre dares to venture into an unfamiliar world, where the elderly, relegated to the periphery, grapple with the impending specter of death, the indignities wrought by failing bodies, fading memories and the erosion of social power. In doing so, it dismantles the pervasive pessimism surrounding aging, revealing that a vibrant life persists beyond the looming shadow of death.

In the landscape of the *Vollendungsroman*, affirmation becomes the ultimate destination, and memory emerges as the driving force fueling the protagonist's transformative journey. This genre stands as a testament to the resilience of humanity, dispelling the darkness that has long enveloped the portrayal of old age and illuminating a path toward meaningful existence amid the challenges of growing old.

To embark on an exploration of the *vollendungsroman* genre is to acknowledge the undeniable influence of one of its enduring luminaries: Paul Auster. Revered for his distinct literary flair, Auster deftly blurs the lines between reality and fiction across a myriad of mediums, from novels to essays, poetry, screenplays and memoirs. Within his expansive body of work, he traverses themes of identity, existentialism, mystery and metafiction with remarkable finesse.

Auster's fascination with the intricacies of old age permeates many of his narratives, a testament to his great interest in the human condition. Through the lens of aging characters, he artfully explores the passage of time, memory, mortality and the evolving dynamics of relationships. Across numerous novels, Auster presents older protagonists grappling with existential quandaries, reflecting on their life choices and seeking meaning in the twilight years.

In his memoir *Winter Journals* (2012), Auster candidly explores themes of memory, identity, loss and resilience, as Jonathan Kirsch notes, “Auster is raging on against the dying of the light, and the sheer strength of his prose is the best evidence that he is still capable of feats of strength as a stylist and a storyteller.” Through introspective memoirs, intriguing narratives and poignant character studies, Auster's exploration of old age offers extensive insights into the human experience and the enduring truths that unite us all.

While his memoir stands as an undeniable literary masterpiece, Auster often opts for implicit expression in his writings. Within Auster's literary universe, both characters and the author himself undergo a natural process of aging that weaves its way through his works. The journey begins with *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), where Auster autobiographically reflects on his life at age thirty-five, grappling with the loss of his father. This theme of aging resonates throughout his subsequent novels, with characters like Marco Stanley Fogg in *Moon Palace* (1989), Aaron in *Leviathan* (1992), David Zimmer in *The Book of Illusions* (2002), Sidney Orr in *Oracle Night* (2003) and Nathan Glass in *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005), all sharing birth years with Auster—a deliberate alignment that underscores the interplay between fiction and reality in his storytelling (Thevenon 3-4).

The consistent aging of characters in Auster's works mirrors his own life trajectory, vividly illustrating how his personal experiences deeply influence his fictional creations. Intentionally crafting characters whose ages parallel his own, Auster infuses his narratives with authenticity and resonance, as evidenced by August Brill in his novella *Man in the Dark*. Brill serves as a conduit for Auster's own life experiences, navigating fascinating narratives surrounding grief, death, memory and the challenges of aging. In this way, Brill's journey mirrors that of his creator, as both character and author age in tandem. Forming a faithful manifestation of the *Vollendungsroman*, Brill's portrayal encapsulates the great consequences

of the aging process, proving to be another example of the thematic depth and resonance of Auster's narratives.

Conclusion

As this chapter draws to a close, it becomes evident that the preceding sections have laid a foundational exploration into the interconnected relationship between memory and aging, synthesizing a wealth of theoretical perspectives and empirical research. Through a thorough examination of existing literature and theoretical frameworks, several key insights have emerged, shedding light on the complex meshing of cognitive processes, neurological mechanisms and socio-cultural influences that shape memory function across the lifespan, including its impact on literature.

It is firmly established that the lifelong interaction between age and memory significantly impacts individuals throughout their lives. While memory proves invaluable in aiding daily activities, it is not flawless, often burdening individuals with persistent or negative memories, particularly those stemming from trauma, remorse or regret. The findings suggest that the detrimental effects of these memories intensify with age, prompting individuals to question past decisions, grapple with their identity and seek relief through various coping techniques. In their quest for consolation, older adults often turn to escapism as a temporary coping mechanism, enabling them to embrace the present moment and cultivate a sense of peace and contentment.

In the sphere of literary analysis, a discussion of age, memory, and coping mechanisms would be incomplete without addressing the *Vollendungsroman*. As elucidated in this chapter, the *Vollendungsroman* delves into the depths of old age, exploring themes of reflection, reconciliation and renewal. It defies conventional narratives of decline and despair, illustrating that growth and experience are not limited by age. Serving as a guide for the

elderly, the *Vollendungsroman* extends a comforting hand to those who may feel marginalized, revealing that there is still much to explore and embrace, regardless of one's proximity to death.

In sum, the exploration of memory and age is both fascinating and daunting, presenting a constant unequal battle, where individuals must either adapt or perish in the face of the challenges posed by the nexus of memory and age. This intersection has long captivated scholars across various disciplines, with literature yielding masterpieces that elaborately depict this inevitable relation.

Chapter Two

A Night with the Man in the Dark

Introduction

The endeavor of literature to unravel the complexities of memory and age has given rise to numerous works, yet few shine as brightly as Paul Auster's *Man in The Dark*. Here, the protagonist, August Brill, emerges as a significant embodiment of the human struggle with time's passage, memory's persistence and the quest for solace amid life's intricacies.

Confronting the twilight of his existence as an elderly man, Brill grapples with the weight of his past and the flaws inherent in his humanity, delving into introspection with great depth.

The narrative opens with Brill, amidst one of his sleepless nights, inviting readers into his world. He introduces his family and reveals his penchant for crafting stories as a means of distraction from the relentless pull of memory and remorse. On this particular night, Brill's tale ventures into a fictional dimension, focusing on Owen Brick, a magician thrust into a dystopian alternate reality, where the horrors of 9/11 are replaced by a second civil war.

As the narrative oscillates between Brick's tumultuous experiences and Brill's introspections, the story takes on a riveting pace. Brick's journey culminates in a tragic betrayal and demise, paralleling Brill's own confrontations with his past. With the conclusion of Brick's story, Brill finds himself stripped of the narrative shield that had buffered him from the relentless onslaught of memory. Trapped in his own past, he engages in a heartfelt dialogue with his granddaughter Katya, reflecting on his tumultuous relationship with his late wife, Sonia, and confronting long-buried regrets.

In an emotional exchange with his daughter Miriam, Brill finally confronts the harrowing truth of his involvement in his granddaughter's boyfriend's death in Iraq, finding consolation and acceptance in the face of his past transgressions. With this cathartic revelation, Brill embraces the dawn of a new day, finally succumbing to sleep as the first light

of morning pierces the darkness of his troubled soul, leaving behind a sense of closure and fulfillment.

Memory serves as a central motif in Auster's narrative, a source of both anguish and illumination for his characters. Brill navigates the labyrinth of his own recollections, confronting fragments of the past and the lingering questions they evoke through the lens of his aged perspective. Auster skillfully invites readers to contemplate the fluidity of memory and its enduring impact on identity, even in the twilight years.

Simultaneously, aging emerges as a pivotal theme, as characters confront the inexorable march toward mortality and the attendant physical and emotional trials it entails. Brill's reflections on his aging body and the ephemeral nature of human existence capture the essence of aging as a journey of both loss and revelation. As mortality looms, the main character wrestles with life's transience, acknowledging the fleeting nature of human experience.

Though the story is fictional, Brill stands as a vivid portrayal of the struggles faced by real-life individuals contending with aging and memory's grip. His quest for alleviation and his coping mechanisms mirror the universal human endeavor to confront and reconcile with the shadows of the past. Through Auster's narrative, readers gain insight into the nuanced ways in which individuals navigate old age, memories and traumas, offering a subtle comparison between the young and the old, and how they confront their pasts' echoes in the present.

Delving into *Man in the Dark* invites readers to share Auster's vision on life's complexities, exploring existential dilemmas and shared vulnerabilities. Indeed, Auster's novella not only captivates with its beauty but also transcends literary boundaries, exploring the intricate connection between age and memory with unparalleled depth and resonance, as this chapter shall vividly illustrate.

I. The Spiral of Brill's Memories

Paul Auster's novella *Man in the Dark* begins with a succinct yet profound statement, laying the foundation for the ensuing narrative: "I am alone in the dark, turning the world around in my head as I struggle through another bout of insomnia..." (Auster 10). In this opening line, Auster deftly introduces August Brill, the narrator and protagonist, a seventy-two-year-old retired author grappling with sleeplessness amidst the shadows of his existence. Sharing his home with a grieving daughter and granddaughter, Brill's nights are fraught with contemplation as he plunges into the depths of his past.

Auster imbues Brill's words with a palpable weight, interwoven with an underlying melancholy that cloaks him, hinting at a haunting presence within. Yet, the enigma surrounding Brill's affliction swiftly dissipates, as memory reveals itself as both the culprit and central theme of the narrative, with Brill implicitly confessing, "It's a house of grieving, wounded souls, and every night Brill lies awake in the dark, trying not to think about his past, making up stories about other worlds" (Auster 55).

Memory, with its haunting grip, becomes a relentless foe for Brill and his most formidable adversary, and his journey morphs into one of reckoning with his own history as he navigates the labyrinthine corridors of his mind. Through Brill's weary eyes, readers glimpse the toll of unresolved sorrow and the solace he seeks in crafting alternate realities. However, despite his efforts to evade the grasp of memory, its tendrils persist, weaving through the fabric of his consciousness.

His refuge in storytelling becomes a battleground against the encroaching darkness of memory, each narrative thread unraveling in tandem with his recollections. Auster masterfully guides readers through the fragmented terrain of memory and fiction, blurring the lines between reality and imagination. In this interaction of light and shadow, Brill's journey

becomes an immersive exploration of the human psyche, where the past is both refuge and tormentor, and the act of storytelling becomes a beacon of hope amidst the darkness.

i. Remembering the Bad; Forgetting the Good

In his novella, Auster crafts a nuanced and distinctive approach to memory, eschewing the conventional questioning of its reliability in favor of exploring its persistence. This departure from the norm, particularly in the context of aging, offers a fresh perspective on the theme. Indeed, the haunting persistence of memory shadows Brill from the onset of the narrative as he declares, “That's what I do when sleep refuses to come. I lie in bed and tell myself stories. They might not add up to much, but as long as I'm inside them, they prevent me from thinking about the things I would prefer to forget” (Auster 10-1).

This intriguingly diverges from conventional portrayals of older characters, where forgetfulness is often depicted as an inevitable consequence of aging, exemplified in works like Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* (2015), Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), and Emma Healey's *Elizabeth is Missing* (2014), which typically depict memory as a lost but cherished asset, one that these characters yearn to reclaim. However, Auster's narrative challenges this notion, unveiling persistence as memory's deadliest sin.

In Brill's tumultuous journey, forgetfulness becomes a coveted “asset”, an elusive state he yearns for but cannot grasp as the lingering remnants of trauma persistently invade his thoughts. He grapples with the haunting images of his granddaughter's boyfriend's brutal murder, a harrowing ordeal he struggles to suppress: “I think about Titus's death often, the horrifying story of that death, the images of that death, the pulverizing consequences of that death on my grieving granddaughter, but I don't want to go there now, I can't go there now, I have to push it as far away from me as possible” (Auster 10). Despite his efforts to bury these distressing recollections, they resurface with relentless intensity, disrupting the comforting refuge of his fictional narrative. Brill's struggle with memory becomes a ferocious battle

against the relentless tide of guilt as he finds himself engulfed in a sea of torment, desperately clawing for respite amidst the turbulent waves.

In fact, Titus's death, in particular, emerges as a persistent specter haunting Brill's psyche, with its fragments teasingly infiltrating his thoughts and serving as a constant reminder of its unwavering existence. Despite his efforts to resist its insistence, Brill eventually succumbs to its overpowering presence, describing the tape of the gruesome murder with such vivid detail that one could almost believe it was unfolding in real-time as he spoke:

Mercifully, there is no sound.

Mercifully, a hood has been placed over his head.

He is sitting in a chair with his hands tied behind him, motionless, making no attempt to break free. The four men from the previous video are standing around him, three holding rifles, the fourth with a hatchet in his right hand. Without any signal or gesture from the others, the fourth man suddenly brings the blade down on Titus's neck. Titus jerks to his right, his upper body squirms, and the blood starts seeping through the hood. Another blow from the hatchet, this one from behind. Titus's head lolls forwards, and by now blood is streaming down all over him. More blows: front and back, right and left, the dull blade chopping long past the moment of death. (Auster 124)

Brill's recounting of the events exhibits an acute clarity, a remarkable feat considering he had only viewed the tape once, over nine months prior (Auster 118). The incident looms large as an emotionally charged memory, etched deeply into Brill's consciousness as a distressing, scarring and utterly traumatic experience. Nonetheless, it is precisely these intense emotions that render the memory so vivid, enabling Brill to recall with stark precision minor details such as the number of assailants, their weapons, and even the specific hand with which the

murderer wielded the hatchet. This serves as an undeniable proof that negative memories possess a longevity far surpassing that of their positive counterparts.

Furthermore, Titus's tragic death serves as an indelible flashbulb memory for Brill, encapsulating a moment frozen in time. Indeed, the footage capturing Titus's assassination transcends individual recollection, becoming a collective memory ingrained not only in Brill's consciousness but broadcasted to a global audience. Through Brill's vivid retelling, it becomes apparent that the video is seared into his psyche as a haunting recollection, defined by its piercing clarity.

The shockwaves of this event rippled through all who witnessed the assassination, yet for Brill and his family, who shared a deep bond with Titus, the impact is particularly overwhelming. Compelled by a sense of obligation, they felt the need to bear witness to the tragedy, recognizing it as a solemn duty. As Brill himself reflects, "I still don't understand why the three of us felt driven to watch the tape—as if it were an obligation, a sacred duty. We all knew it would go on haunting us for the rest of our lives, and yet somehow, we felt we had to be there with Titus, to keep our eyes open to the horror for his sake, to breathe him into us and hold him there..." (Auster 124).

This shared experience not only endows the video with immense significance for Brill but also evokes a whirlwind of emotions ranging from terror to disbelief and empathy. The amalgamation of these intense sentiments further intensifies the vividness of the memory, solidifying its status as a flashbulb memory. Ultimately, the enduring clarity of this recollection stems from the trauma it inflicts, etching its image permanently into Brill's consciousness and ensuring its persistent presence.

However, Titus's demise is not the sole recollection Brill endeavors to suppress; he wrestles with a more overwhelming ailment: regret. Brill's anguish does not merely stem from what he has witnessed, but also from his own actions, as he candidly confesses, "I've done

such stupid things in my life. I didn't have the heart to live through them again” (Auster 94). His remorse gnaws at him relentlessly as the narrative unfolds, revealing regret to be the driving force propelling his reluctant journey into the recesses of memory, where he confronts truths he has long avoided. Foremost among these regrets is his betrayal of his late wife, Sonia, and the irreplaceable years squandered apart from her before cancer claimed her, a consequence of his inability to resist temptation and a decision he now desperately wishes to undo (Auster 110).

Brill's recollection of his infidelity, akin to Titus's murder, remains vivid, yet he steadfastly resists succumbing to the lure of reminiscence: “I shouldn't be doing this. I promised myself not to fall into the trap of Sonia-thoughts and Sonia-memories, not to let myself go. I can't afford to break down now and sink into a despond of grief and self-recrimination” (Auster 75). Despite his efforts to bury his feelings and occupy his mind, Brill's emotions persist, overshadowing his attempts to forget and compelling him to confront painful memories. Alone in his despair, enveloped by darkness and the clamor of his own thoughts, he grapples with the relentless echo of his inner turmoil, where the loudest voice prevails.

Ultimately, Brill finds himself inexorably drawn back to the painful echoes of his infidelity, haunted by vivid recollections of Sonia's reaction upon discovery—memories so starkly etched, fueled by the intense emotions of that particular moment. His narrative is vivid, painting a poignant portrait of Sonia's composed demeanor and measured response as he recalls, “The thing I remember best about that conversation was how composed she was—at least until the end, when she stopped talking. She didn't cry or shout, she didn't carry on, she didn't punch me or throw things across the room. You have to choose, she said (Auster 111). Amidst his lucid memories, Brill is plagued by confusion, struggling to comprehend

why these memories persist with such relentless fervor. In moments of distress, he voices his frustration with his own recollections, questioning:

Why am I doing this? Why do I persist in traveling down these old, tired paths; why this compulsion to pick at old wounds and make myself bleed again? It would be impossible to exaggerate the contempt I sometimes feel for myself. I was supposed to be looking at Miriam's manuscript, but here I am staring at the crack in the wall and dredging up remnants from the past, broken things that can never be repaired. Give me my little story... my little story to keep the ghosts away. (Auster 40)

The answer to his torment lies within the question itself; Brill's inability to alter the past amplifies its hold over him, particularly amidst his depressive environment, where memories intertwine with rumination, rendering them more accessible in accordance with his mood and creating a potent concoction of helplessness and anguish. In a quest for alleviation, Brill unconsciously employs 'Directed Forgetting', attempting to construct alternate realities and scenarios to shield himself from the weight of his past actions, yet finding this effort futile in the face of memory's relentless persistence, plunging him further into despair.

ii. *Who Am I? Brick vs. Brill*

As the burden of memory becomes too heavy to bear, Brill seeks comfort in the realm of fiction to appease his pain. He crafts an entirely fictional universe, where the protagonist, Owen Brick—whose name bears a striking resemblance to Brill's own—finds himself engulfed in a second American civil war, burdened with the task of ending it. Brill initiates Brick's journey by thrusting him into a deep, desolate hole, “nine or ten feet deep” (Auster11), a confinement mirroring Brill's own sense of entrapment within his memories.

Intriguingly, Brill bestows upon his character the very gift he himself longs for—memory loss—as the protagonist finds himself stripped of memory, rendering him unaware of his circumstances, location or origins. Yet, while amnesia may seem like a

blessing to Brill, for Brick, it proves to be a curse, instilling a sense of panic: “What am I doing here? Brick asks, trying to suppress the anguish in his voice” (Auster 14). As Brill unravels Brick's fate, it becomes evident that the protagonist serves as a parallel incarnation of his author in an alternate reality—a chance for redemption, an opportunity to rewrite past wrong and the tantalizing prospect of a fresh beginning.

As the story progresses, Brill introduces additional characters who appear to be echoes of individuals from his own life—such as Brick's wife, Flora, a parallel to Sonia, and Virginia Blaine, both Brick and Brill's first love interest. Notably, real-world events are altered, with America finding itself embroiled in an internal conflict rather than a war with Iraq (Auster 14). It seems as though Brill seeks to rewrite history, erasing the catalyst for Titus's death, suggesting that in a world without the Iraq war, this tragedy might have been averted. Although this alteration serves as a symbolic attempt to rewrite painful memories, it comes with its own consequences as the absence of one conflict merely begets another-- a fact that Brick himself recognizes, stating: “One nightmare replaces another” (Auster 29)—an allegory, perhaps, for Brill's perpetual struggle with his inner demons and the relentless cycle of emotional turmoil.

Indeed, Brill finds himself not only engaged in an internal “war” but also in the complexities of his own relationship, likening himself and his wife to “[t]wo veterans who'd fought in the same war, watching their child march off to a new war of her own” (Auster 113), underscoring the symbolic resonance between his personal experiences and the narrative's setting. The lines between Brill and his fictional counterpart, Brick, continue to blur, with Brill's choice of profession for Brick—a magician—taking on added significance as the story moves forward. Seemingly inconsequential at first, this detail gains relevance as Brill recounts the tale of his infidelity to his granddaughter, casting himself as “the master magician” (Auster 111), deftly navigating between two women without arousing suspicion.

Furthermore, Brill characterizes his mistress as “the second coming of Virginia Blaine” (Auster 110), a figure deeply significant to Brick, further intertwining Brill's personal history with the narrative he constructs.

The boundaries between reality and imagination blur as Brick's true objective is unveiled: to assassinate the creator of the war—Brill himself. He boldly asserts, “The story is about a man who must kill the person who created him, and why pretend that I am not that person? By putting myself into the story, the story becomes real” (Auster 75). It becomes apparent that Brill birthed Brick with the explicit intention of orchestrating his own demise, a testament to his troubled psyche and overpowering sense of guilt. In a desperate bid for redemption, Brill envisions Brick as his surrogate, hoping that through this indirect form of self-annihilation, he might find absolution.

However, fate intervenes, as Brill's past transgressions catch up with Brick, leading him down the same path of infidelity that Brill sought to avoid. This twist of events serves as a direct manifestation of Brill's implicit memory, wherein his subconscious draws upon past experiences and influences his creation, Brick, without his conscious awareness. Despite Brill's belief that Brick's narrative is entirely original, it becomes apparent that it heavily relies on Brill's own memories and experiences, shaping Brick's reactions, thoughts, and behavior without Brill's conscious recollection.

Brick's infidelity thus emerges as a mere reflection of Brill's past indiscretions, illustrating how deeply ingrained memories can influence creative endeavors without deliberate intent. Moreover, the similarities between Brill and Brick highlight how the latter's character is deeply intertwined with Brill's prior experiences, leading Brick to unwittingly reenact memories that Brill perceives as novel but are, in fact, deeply rooted in his own past.

In an attempt to rationalize betraying his wife with Virginia Blaine, Brick justifies his actions by acknowledging the uncertainty of his survival: “But Brick, who is nothing less than

a soldier now, justifies his infidelity by reminding himself that he could well be dead tomorrow” (Auster 82). This realization shatters Brill's illusion of control and redemption, extinguishing any hope of salvation. In a moment of stark clarity, Brill confronts the harsh reality that one cannot alter the course of destiny, resigning himself to the inevitability of his fate. In a final, desperate act of self-acceptance, Brill is left with no choice but to kill Brick, a swift but agonizing end to his futile pursuit of redemption through fiction.

II. Seventy and Counting...

Numerous scholars have noted Auster's growing inclination to depict characters in alignment with his own age, a trend that has become increasingly apparent in his recent works. In *Man in the Dark*, the protagonist, Brill, serves as the embodiment of this thematic exploration. Brill, an elderly man in his seventies, grapples not only with the physical realities of aging but also with the psychological implications it entails. The novella offers a nuanced examination of the multifaceted nature of aging, delving beyond mere physical impairment to explore the intriguing interplay between body and mind. Through Brill's fragile physique and troubled psyche, readers are confronted with the poignant reality of existence—marked by the inexorable passage of time and the gradual erosion of vitality.

Brill's journey unfolds against the backdrop of his debilitating leg injury, which he ruefully refers to as his “shattered leg” (Auster 44). Confined to a wheelchair, he becomes a symbol of both physical immobility and existential entrapment, his once-independent spirit now tethered to the confines of his own body. In mournful self-reflection, Brill laments his diminished capacities, describing himself as an “immobilized grandfather” (Auster 17) whose identity is overshadowed by the relentless march of time.

Yet, it is not merely the corporeal limitations that weigh heavily upon Brill's consciousness. His physical infirmity serves as a catalyst for the unraveling of his mental

well-being, intensifying the existential angst that pervades his existence. Confronted with the specter of mortality, Brill finds himself grappling with an overpowering sense of isolation, his memories becoming both solace and torment in equal measure. In this way, Auster masterfully intertwines the physical and metaphysical dimensions of aging, weaving a narrative blend that resonates with universal truths. Through Brill's journey, readers are invited to contemplate the intricacies of human experience—the resilience of humanity in the face of adversity, and the fragility of life itself.

i. Brill and the Stream of Age

As Brill's journey unfolds, delving deeper into his circumstances and unfortunate predicaments, it becomes evident that he embodies the struggles and contemplations often intertwined with old age. Readers come to understand that he is an elderly man recovering from a debilitating car accident, trapped in a sleepless existence within the confines of a solitary room. Left alone and immobilized, his only company the stark walls enclosing him, Brill wrestles with a deep sense of powerlessness. His physical confinement serves as a metaphor for the emotional entrapment that can accompany aging.

Compounding his isolation is the weight of guilt that hangs over Brill, a constant reminder of his past and present failures. This solitude and introspection, as Brill himself reflects, epitomize the loneliness that pervades the twilight years of life. “[T]he end of married life, the loneliness of it all...” he muses, encapsulating the sadness he feels (Auster 17).

Furthermore, Brill's chronic insomnia serves as a symbolic representation of the restless reflection that plagues individuals as they confront their mortality. Seven decades on this earth have rendered Brill's body weary and fragile, and his once formidable faculties now diminished. This decline manifests as frustration and despair as he grapples with the gradual loss of time, memory, and autonomy. Simple tasks become insurmountable challenges

amplifying his sense of helplessness: “But I can't climb up the stairs in a wheelchair, can I? And if I used my crutch, I would probably fall in the dark. Damn this idiot leg,” Brill laments, voicing his frustration (Auster 17).

His physical constraints extend to the most basic of bodily functions as his immobility forces him to confront indignities such as urinating in a bottle, serving as a reminder of the harsh realities of aging. Moreover, Brill's reflections transcend the physical domain to encompass an erosion of masculinity and sexual potency. He reflects on whether his “old comrade” will ever regain its former vigor, harboring doubts about the possibility of ever experiencing intimacy again (Auster 37). This introspection illuminates the broader existential questions that accompany aging, as Brill navigates the shifting prospect of his identity and comes to terms with the emasculating effects of old age.

However, Brill remains steadfast in the face of aging, driven by an unwavering determination to demonstrate his enduring capabilities. While his memory largely serves as the catalyst for his suffering, it paradoxically also offers a glimmer of hope, a tether to his past that asserts there is still more to him. Showcasing the vast reservoir of potential still within him, he candidly acknowledges, “Odd that those figures should have stuck, but with so many other things slipping away from me now, I cling to them as proof that I'm not quite finished” (Auster 61). Thus, memory becomes a source of both torment and affirmation for Brill, a testament to his enduring vitality amidst encroaching frailty.

Although he outwardly professes readiness for death through his literary creations as evidenced by one character's dialogue with Brick: “the old man invented you to kill him” (Auster 55), his actions belie this assertion. Notably, Brill opts to depict his fictional alter ego, Brick, as a man in his thirties. This deliberate choice is imbued with significance as Brick embodies many of Brill's latent desires, perhaps symbolizing his yearning to recapture the lost agility and exuberance of youth. Furthermore, Brick's age coincides with Brill's own during

the time of his greatest regret, his affair, underscoring his longing for redemption and a chance to rewrite the past, even if only in his imagination.

Additionally, Brick serves as Brill's avenue to reclaim control over his own mortality. Throughout the narrative, Brill articulates his acceptance of death and his inclination to utilize Brick as a means to orchestrate his own demise. As elucidated earlier, beset by the constraints of aging and its accompanying vulnerabilities, Brill perceives his existence as fulfilled with little left to attain. He laments the constant passage of time, grappling with the intangible slipping through his grasp.

The aging process unfolds as an inescapable journey marked by solitude, estrangement, and a deep sense of powerlessness—sentiments that Brill vehemently resists. In response, he engineers Brick, a manifestation of his defiance against the erosion of autonomy and agency. Brick's directive to terminate his own creator embodies Brill's escapist method of circumventing further decay and loss, epitomizing his personalized form of assisted dying.

Moreover, through this act of self-directed death, Brill seizes the opportunity to craft the denouement of his life narrative, sculpting it to reflect his perception of a fitting conclusion. This act represents not only a confrontation with mortality but also an assertion of authorship over his own life's trajectory, an endeavor to imbue his final moments with purpose and resolve.

While aging typically manifests through physical decline, Brill's most profound wound is not bodily but cognitive. His mental state is far from pristine, beset by personal traumas and national tragedies, with the specter of 9/11 interwoven with the haunting memory of Titus's demise. Delving into a variety of recollections, including the tragic loss of his sister and other harrowing tales, Brill finds himself ensnared in a labyrinth of anguish. His imprisonment within the confines of his own mind mirrors his physical incarceration, a self-imposed sentence within his “own interior world made up of memories, remorse, and philosophical

ideas” (qtd. in Rodríguez Arnaiz 25). This perpetual cycle of reminiscence serves as the manifestation of his trauma, with each replay of the past inflicting fresh wounds upon his psyche.

In line with Sigmund Freud's theory, the relentless onslaught of memories and emotions prolongs Brill's trauma by perpetuating the presence of the “lost object” (245). Thus, his advancing age becomes the crucible in which the anxieties stoked by his memories reach fever pitch, rendering him incapable of extricating himself from the clutches of the past. Despite his desperate attempts to bury the past, Brill remains tethered to its firm embrace, condemned to dwell within its shadowy recesses indefinitely.

ii. *Coping with Memories between the Old and the Young*

While Brill may hold the central position in the narrative spotlight, the echoes of the past reverberate throughout the entire household. Indeed, as one of Brill's fictional characters astutely observes, “It's a house of grieving, wounded souls” (Auster 55). Miriam, Brill's daughter, epitomizes this sentiment. She navigates her forties burdened by the weight of mourning for her departed mother and the shattered remnants of her marriage, torn asunder by her husband's infidelity with a younger woman. Miriam's world is an amalgamation of grief and loss, her heart a repository of unhealed wounds.

Similarly, Katya, Brill's granddaughter, finds herself at a crossroads in her early twenties, grappling with the agonizing void left by the loss of her boyfriend, Titus, a casualty of the Iraq war. Her youthful exuberance tempered by the weight of tragedy, Katya's journey is one fraught with sorrow and longing, her spirit tethered to the memory of her departed love.

Each member of the household bears the scars of their past traumas, yet their methods of coping diverge dramatically. Brill and Katya, in particular, share a common thread in their struggles: remorse. Despite the chasm of years that separates them, their generational disparity profoundly shapes their respective approaches to confronting their memories. As

previously elucidated, Brill employs a conscious effort to suppress his memories, retreating into the sanctuary of imagined narratives to shield himself from the relentless onslaught of the past. Conversely, Katya, though ostensibly engaged in a similar pursuit, finds herself unconsciously ensnared in the relentless cycle of her traumatic recollections. Her mind becomes a prison, each memory a shackle binding her to the haunting echoes of her past.

Despite her youth and the boundless horizon of possibilities stretching before her, Katya finds herself paralyzed by a psychological phenomenon known as “cognitive immobility”. This stark contrast with Brill's escapist tendencies underscores the divergence in their approaches to grappling with the burdens of their pasts fueled by their difference in age. While Brill seeks relief in the refuge of fiction, Katya remains enslaved by her own memories, her spirit adrift in a sea of sorrow and regret.

Brill swiftly establishes his preferred coping mechanism, opting to evade his past rather than confront it head-on. With the weight of his age and life experiences bearing down upon him, Brill has gleaned the wisdom that sometimes; it is wiser to turn a blind eye to reality than to remain stagnant, ensnared in the agonizing grip of regret. He acknowledges the futility of dwelling on “broken things that can never be repaired” (Auster 40), recognizing that, at his advanced age, the prospect of rectification is virtually nonexistent. Aware of his physical limitations and the finite nature of his existence, Brill resigns himself to the inevitability of death, refusing to waste precious time on remorse for past misdeeds.

In lieu of grappling with his reality, Brill derives comfort from the creation of a fictional realm, yearning for the peace of mind it promises. As he aptly articulates, “Give me my story. That's all I want now—my little story to keep the ghosts away” (Auster 40). Conversely, Katya, merely twenty three years old, initially appears to adopt a similar coping mechanism as she whiles away her days watching movies alongside her equally wounded grandfather: “For the past couple of months, Katya and I have spent our days watching

movies together. Side by side on the living room sofa, staring at the television set, knocking off two, three, even four films in a row” (Auster 17). However, their circumstances diverge significantly; unlike Brill, whose retirement affords him a sense of finality, Katya stands at the precipice of a life brimming with potential, tragically halted by the incident of her boyfriend’s death.

Abandoning her aspirations in film school and retreating into the confines of her room, Katya unwittingly immerses herself in a physical space saturated with reminders of her past, symbolizing her entrapment in its clutches. Her film selections, far from arbitrary, reflect her subconscious desire to grapple with the themes of war and grief that echo her own experiences. Burdened by the weight of remorse for her perceived role in Titus's demise, Katya attempts to blot out the harrowing images etched upon her mind, substituting them with cinematic fantasies. Yet, her efforts are in vain, for as Brill cautions:

I began to see this obsessive movie watching as a form of self-medication, a homeopathic drug to anesthetize herself against the need to think about her future.

Escaping into a film is not like escaping into a book. Books force you to give something back to them, to exercise your intelligence and imagination, whereas you can watch a film—and enjoy it—in a state of mindless passivity. (Auster 18)

As such, her chosen remedy only serves to prolong her suffering, trapping her in a state of perpetual grief and regret, for, Unlike Brill, who has weathered his share of regret, grief, and mourning, Katya's experiences are fresh wounds, magnified by their novelty. Unfamiliar with navigating such intense emotions, she succumbs to cognitive immobility, unable to break free from her regrets. Instead of confronting her pain, Katya retreats further into her memories, trapped in the torment of what could have been, as she concedes to her inability to erase the memory of Titus’s assassination: “it's the only thing I ever see. I can't get rid of it” (Auster 118).

As time inexorably marches on, Brill's journey leads him to confront the specter of his past, embracing it as an integral facet of his identity. In a gesture of empathy, he extends a guiding hand to Katya, urging her to follow suit: "You have to accept that, Katya. Accept it, and try to start living again" (Auster 118), he implores. Thus, Brill's escapism, once a temporary refuge, evolves into a conduit for healing and self-discovery.

Conversely, Katya remains obstinately rooted in the past, unwilling to confront the pain that threatens to engulf her. Brill's advancing age affords him the clarity to disengage from regret, recognizing the folly of dwelling on what cannot be changed. In contrast, Katya's youth, though brimming with potential, becomes ensnared in the tendrils of regret, rendering her immobile in a sea of sorrow. Despite the vast expanse of time ahead of her, she finds herself trapped in a perpetual cycle of mourning, inhibiting any semblance of progress.

III. The Completion of Brill's Character Arc

As Brill navigates the depths of the night, he traverses a panorama of recollections, each memory serving as a guiding light illuminating the path to a renewed understanding of his own identity. Like the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly, Brill undergoes a remarkable transformation, reshaping the very core of his being.

Despite the brevity of time afforded to Auster's protagonist and his initial skepticism regarding the potential for personal growth at his stage in life, Brill gradually confronts the essence of who he is and who he aspires to become. Yet, this evolution is not born of a sudden epiphany, but rather demands meticulous contemplation and reflection—a task for which Brill proves himself adept.

In his pursuit of closure, Brill traverses three distinct phases that are fundamental to the arc of every character. The initial phase marks the genesis, a period fraught with trials and tribulations where Brill grapples with adversity, often succumbing to missteps and moral

failings. It is during this phase that the foundation of Brill's identity is laid bare, exposing his flaws and foibles.

The middle phase, the crucible, represents the heart of Brill's journey, where he is tasked with dissecting his past actions, endeavoring to unravel the enigma of his own psyche in a quest for understanding and redemption. However, instead of confronting his past with candor and accountability, Brill's re-evaluation is hindered by denial, opting to dissociate from his identity and seek refuge in the world of fiction, thereby perpetuating the cycle of self-deception.

Finally, the third phase, the culmination, heralds the denouement of Brill's journey—a reckoning wherein he confronts his innermost truths and acknowledges the latent potential for change within himself. It is here that Brill achieves a state of profound acceptance and closure, emerging from the crucible of his own making, transformed and redefined, ready to embrace the boundless possibilities that lie ahead.

i. Towards Forging an Ultimate Identity

Brill's provoking opening line in the novella encapsulates the somber reflection of his mental state: "I am alone in the dark, turning the world around in my head..." (Auster 10). Confronting his seventies with a body rendered immobile by time's relentless march, Brill finds himself suspended in a state of existential limbo, resigned to the inevitability of death. Rather than confront the ghosts of his past, he seeks refuge in the labyrinth of his mind, a sanctuary from the persistent shadow of memory.

Paradoxically, it is the very weight of his age and the burdensome baggage of memories that compel Brill to engage in the introspective journey he so ardently seeks to evade. Like so many of us, Brill has traversed life's treacherous terrain, stumbling over obstacles and making decisions that linger like shadows, casting a pall over his present existence. The regrets and guilt he carries, intertwined with his grief, have become indelible threads woven into the

fabric of his very being. Yet, Brill remains ensnared by the illusion of perfection, stubbornly clinging to the belief that his actions define the entirety of his essence, immutable and unchangeable. Trapped in a prison of his own making, he resigns himself to the fatalistic notion that there is neither hope nor time left for redemption.

In stark contrast, Brill's daughter, Miriam, embodies “a fundamental conviction that people have the power to change”, a belief that, according to Brill, she inherits from her mother, Sonia (Auster 39). Brill attributes Miriam's inherent goodness solely to Sonia's influence, absolving himself of any contribution to her moral character.

It becomes painfully evident that Brill harbors an intense self-loathing, convinced of his inherent moral deficiency and the irreversibility of his perceived identity. He continues, “[B]ut brilliant as my daughter is, there's also something naïve and fragile about her, and I wish to God she would learn that the rotten acts human beings commit against one another are not just aberrations— they're an essential part of who we are” (Auster 39). In using the collective “we”, Brill implicates himself in the realm of moral turpitude, unable to absolve himself from the sins that stain his past. He laments the innate darkness within humanity, including his own transgressions against his late wife--actions he believes to be inextricably intertwined with his “ultimate identity”, beyond redemption or reconciliation.

Haunted by the specter of lost time and betrayed trust, Brill wrestles with an existential dread born from the realization that memories are the mirror reflecting his true self. In a desperate bid to circumvent this uncomfortable truth, he constructs the alter ego of Brick, a figment of his imagination tasked with rectifying his past misdeeds. However, reality stubbornly asserts itself as Brick inevitably treads the same path of moral ambiguity and regret as his creator.

Brill finds himself ensnared in a relentless cycle of self-confrontation; his mind a battlefield where the skirmishes of memory wage ceaseless war against his fragile psyche.

Despite his best efforts to outrun the march of time, Brill is forced to come to terms with the immutable truth that the past is an indelible part of who he is as his own mind becomes the relentless arbiter of his existential reckoning: “But how to stop the mind from charging off wherever it wants to go? The mind has a mind of its own,” Brill muses (Auster 65). In the end, Brill's journey is not one of redemption or resolution, but of acceptance—a testament to the enduring power of self-awareness and the transformative potential of confronting the truth within ourselves.

ii. *“As the Weird World Rolls on”*

As Brill himself astutely observes, the mind possesses a power that defies control, capable of revealing truths one may fervently try to suppress (Auster 65). Throughout the narrative, Brill finds himself ensnared in a relentless cycle of denial, acutely aware that delving into his memories risks laying bare the raw truth of his identity. However, it is Brick's ultimate betrayal that serves as the tipping point, compelling Brill to confront the demons he has long evaded. Thus, begins his transition from denial to a profound phase of reevaluation and eventual acceptance.

The pivotal moment in this metamorphosis occurs during an emotional exchange with his granddaughter, Katya, wherein Brill confronts the ghosts of his past with unwavering honesty. He delves into the depths of memory, recounting the intricacies of his life: the tender moments with his wife, the trials they weathered, his own regrettable indiscretions and the eventual reconciliation before her passing. Though revisiting these memories proves excruciating, it propels Brill closer to a place of reconciliation and self-understanding. Through this arduous journey of introspection and reflection, Brill begins to make sense of his life's trajectory, gaining the strength to confront his regrets and achieve a sense of inner wholeness. This newfound resolve motivates him to revisit the tragic event of Titus's death, a necessary step towards liberation from the shackles of his past.

In this process of self-rediscovery, Brill dismantles the constructs of his present identity, unearthing the myriad phases it has undergone, finding affirmation in the face of loss and adversity. Katya's vulnerable state serves as a catalyst for Brill's own catharsis as he imparts wisdom he himself needs to hear: "We'll never get rid of it. You have to accept that, Katya. Accept it, and try to start living again" (Auster 118). Through this exchange, Brill realizes that true progress lies not in erasing the past, but in embracing it and striving for personal growth.

In the wake of this soul-stirring odyssey, "As the weird world rolls on" becomes Brill's guiding mantra, drawn from an inspirational verse by Rose Hawthorne. Intriguingly, Brill's daughter, Miriam, delves into the life of Nathaniel Hawthorne's daughter, Rose, an "insignificant, unhappy person" whose transformative journey from despair to salvation resonates deeply with Brill's own narrative arc (Auster 38). Indeed, just as Rose found redemption through her spiritual awakening, Brill comes to understand that life's tapestry is woven with both tragedy and triumph. With this newfound understanding, Brill relinquishes the futile pursuit of "repairing" the irreparable and instead embraces the inevitability of change.

Upon awakening from his reverie, Brill finds his burdens assuaged, acknowledging the cyclical nature of existence. In this moment of clarity, he affirms the enduring truth encapsulated in the novella's closing phrase: "the weird world rolls on," symbolizing his acceptance of life's ceaseless flux and his resolve to navigate its currents with grace and fortitude (Auster 127). As Paul Auster himself aptly articulates:

'The weird world rolls on...' meaning that through all the ups and downs, all the travails that we go through, all the horrors, all the wars, all the deaths, all the cruelties, there's still something that keeps us wanting to wake up the next morning and go on

with our lives—to make children, to fall in love, to continue humanity. So it's both. Life is deeply tragic and also very comic at the same time. It's everything at once.

Brill's narrative serves as a poignant reminder that life is fraught with adversity and moments that temporarily halt our journey. Yet, despite the inevitable setbacks, we persevere, drawing lessons from our missteps, evolving, and seeking newfound purpose. Time inexorably marches forward, transforming our future into the present and our present into the past—a perpetual cycle that defines the human experience.

Brill's cathartic confession to Katya marks a pivotal step toward his future, offering him a semblance of relief as he finally succumbs to sleep. Through this introspective voyage, Brill emerges reborn, poised to forge ahead into the unknown. Ultimately, the disparity between the novella's inaugural and final lines stands as a testament to Brill's transformative odyssey—a metamorphosis from despair to acceptance, from fragmentation to wholeness. Through the crucible of introspection, Brill achieves the closure that eluded him for so long, marking the completion of his character arc with a newfound sense of peace and fulfillment.

Conclusion

As the sun finally rises, dispelling the darkness that cloaked the night spent with the man in the dark, readers find themselves enlightened on the themes of memory, old age, and the tangled exchange between them. This chapter serves as a meticulous dissection of Auster's portrayal of the aging process through the character Brill, revealing the universality of his narrative across generations: a story for the elderly to resonate with, offering solace in shared experiences and for the young to empathize with, gaining insight into the inevitable journey of human existence.

Auster's treatment of memory defies convention, offering a fresh perspective on aging characters and their struggles. Brill's tumultuous journey echoes with the haunting persistence

of memory, where forgetfulness becomes a coveted respite amidst the relentless onslaught of trauma and regret. Titus's death casts a shadow over Brill's psyche, while his remorse over betraying his late wife, Sonia, adds layers of emotional depth to his narrative. Despite his efforts to bury painful memories, they resurface with unwavering intensity, showcasing memory's dual nature as both ally and adversary in the aging process.

The analysis further unveils the significance of Owen Brick beyond mere literary device. Brill's creation of Brick as a fictional alter ego reflects his endeavor to grapple with past traumas and seek redemption through storytelling. Through Brick, Brill confronts his inner demons, reimagining pivotal moments from his life in alternate realities, where he can rewrite history and absolve himself of guilt. However, fate intervenes, leading Brick down a path mirroring Brill's own struggles, shattering his illusion of control and highlighting the futility of seeking absolution through fiction.

Brick's creation also underscores Brill's preferred coping mechanism in the face of memory and aging: escapism. Burdened by the weight of age and experience, Brill finds consolation in the creation of fictional dimensions, recognizing the futility of dwelling on irreparable past misdeeds. Consequently, Brill's journey represents a means through which Auster illustrates the transformative power of acceptance as a tool for healing and self-discovery.

In a masterful stroke of narrative juxtaposition, Auster intertwines Brill's narrative with that of Katya's, a young woman ensnared in the relentless grip of cognitive immobility, her past haunting her every step. Unlike Brill, who derives relief from introspection and the creation of fiction, Katya's refuge lies in the cinematic sphere, a fleeting escape that merely prolongs her anguish.

Ultimately, through Brill's one-night odyssey in *Man in the Dark*, Auster delves deep into the human psyche, unraveling the complexities of confronting the past while navigating

the present. In doing so, Auster not only fulfills his literary purpose but also sheds light on the challenges faced by the elderly, giving voice to the voiceless and fostering understanding across generations.

Chapter Three

Aesthetics and Poetics in

Man in the Dark

Introduction

Paul Auster's literary oeuvre transcends mere storytelling, delving into fields that extend beyond the boundaries of literature itself. In crafting his magnum opus, Auster employs a diverse array of strategies and techniques, each contributing to the rich tapestry of his narrative. In *Man in the Dark*, words act as conduits between worlds, and the exploration of space and time emerges as a pivotal element of his storytelling. Auster masterfully traverses the landscapes of imagination, weaving together worlds that defy the confines of physical reality. Within this ethereal domain, he breathes life into the poetics of space and time, beckoning readers on a transcendent journey through the myriad dimensions of human experience.

Simultaneously, Auster's utilization of metafiction introduces a captivating dimension to literary exploration, challenging conventional storytelling paradigms and blurring the dichotomy between reality and fiction. Through metafiction, Auster not only probes the intricacies of narrative structure but also prompts readers to question their perceptions of reality, fostering a dialogue that transcends conventional narrative constraints.

Furthermore, Auster employs the concept of “narrative mimesis of remembering,” delving into the essence of memory and its transformative potential. This captivating form of storytelling explores the intricacies of memory, evoking self-reflection as fragments of past experiences and emotions intertwine to shape the protagonist's journey.

In essence, this chapter embarks on a voyage through interconnected themes of space and time, embedded narratives and the mimesis of remembering. It elucidates how literature, exemplified by *Man in the Dark*, serves as a lens through which the complexities of human existence can be navigated. As subsequent pages unfold, these themes continue to unfurl, inviting readers on an immersive exploration of Auster's literary sphere.

I. Poetics of Space and Time in *Man in the Dark*

Paul Auster adeptly utilizes space in *Man in the Dark*, ensuring it attains its utmost literary excellence. To elucidate the significance of spatial elements within the novella, a comprehensive study is established, drawing from several insightful sources such as Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958), alongside other psychoanalytical and philosophical theories. Through this analytical framework, the novella's psychological layers can be explored, revealing how spaces and temporal constructs serve as conduits that further imbue the protagonist's narrative with meaning.

Darkness emerges as the primary spatial element in Auster's narrative, initiated by the evocative line: “I am alone in the dark, turning the world around in my head as I struggle through another bout of insomnia, another white night in the great American wilderness” (Auster 10). Within the pages of *Man in the Dark*, August Brill confronts the shadows of aging while navigating the depths of his own mind. He reminisces about loved ones who have passed away alongside the haunting specters of past mistakes and missed opportunities that linger within the recesses of his psyche, continuing to torment him in the present.

This observation aligns with Freudian theory, where darkness often serves as a symbolic representation of the unconscious mind—a realm fraught with repressed desires, fears, and unresolved conflicts. For Brill, darkness becomes a portal for the ghost of regret. Night after night, he grapples with remorse over his treatment of his wife, yearning for her presence while plagued by memories of their fractured relationship: “the ever-present absent one, as I sometimes call her now” (Auster 112). This poignant reflection by Brill corroborates Freud's assertion that the true fear lies not in the darkness itself, but in the absence it symbolizes—a sentiment echoed in Freud's own words: “what he was afraid of was not the dark, but the absence of someone he loved” (qtd. in Baldassaro 6). Darkness, thus, becomes a canvas upon which the absence of loved ones is starkly portrayed—a void that evokes acute

anxiety and remorse, which are particularly amplified when intertwined with the specter of regret.

Moreover, Gaston Bachelard's philosophy contends that darkness engenders an environment conducive to solitude, eliminating external stimuli and distractions. In this absence of light, individuals are liberated from the visual cues that tether them to the external world, transporting them to an imaginary world, "where the function of unreality comes to charm or to disturb-always to awaken-the sleeping being lost in its automatisms" (Bachelard 34). This conceptualization resonates deeply with the experiences of Brill in the novella as he finds himself enveloped in nocturnal darkness. Here, the absence of visual stimuli compels Brill to turn inward, delving into his innermost thoughts, emotions and memories. This retreat into the past becomes a recurrent phenomenon, blurring the boundaries of reality and prompting Brill to lose himself in its depths, relinquishing control to the allure of introspection:

The night is still young, and as I lie here in bed looking up into the darkness, a darkness so black that the ceiling is invisible, I begin to remember the story I started last night. That's what I do when sleep refuses to come. I lie in bed and tell myself stories. They might not add up to much, but as long as I'm inside them, they prevent me from thinking about the things I would prefer to forget. (Auster 10-1)

In this context, it can be inferred that darkness serves as a sanctuary from the demands and pressures of life, granting Brill the necessary space and freedom for profound introspection. Within this secluded zone, he confronts existential inquiries and delves into the intricacies of his psyche without external scrutiny or interruption. As Bachelard expresses, "All intimacy hides from view, and I recall that the late Joe Bousquet wrote: 'No one sees me changing. But who sees me? I am my own hiding-place'" (88). This sense of self-intimacy fosters a deeper comprehension and acceptance of one's inner workings. It is within the

solitude of darkness that individuals are encouraged to partake in reflective practices such as meditation, journaling or simply embracing quiet contemplation—attributes perfectly exemplified in Brill's journey throughout the novella.

As we dive deeper into the significance of darkness, another spatial dimension beckons our attention—the room where Brill and his memories reside. Indeed, Brill's room assumes substantial symbolic weight, evolving into a sanctuary dedicated to housing his imagination and preserving the fragments of his past. With the passage of time, the protagonist develops an increasingly intimate connection with the details of his room as articulated when he reflects, “Here I am staring at a crack in the wall and dredging up remnants from the past, broken things that can never be repaired” (Auster 40).

Within this confined space, Brill's room transcends mere physicality, serving as a conduit for introspection and reminiscence. Each object, each crack in the wall becomes a repository of his experiences, a tangible reminder of his journey through time and memory. Moreover, the room symbolizes a refuge from the tumultuous external world—a cocoon, where Brill can retreat, shielded from the chaos and uncertainties that besiege him. Amidst the quiet solitude of his chamber, he finds solace in the familiarity of his surroundings, seeking refuge in the comfort of his own thoughts.

In this manner, Brill's room serves not only as a physical setting but also as a metaphorical landscape—a canvas upon which his innermost fears, desires and regrets are painted. It is within these walls that Brill confronts the transient nature of existence, acknowledging the irreparable fractures that mark his journey through life. Thus, the room becomes a locus of existential reflection—a sacred space where Brill grapples with the enigma of his own existence, striving to reconcile the fragmented pieces of his identity. It is a testament to the power of memory and the enduring quest for meaning in a world shrouded in darkness.

Furthermore, Brill's house becomes more than mere shelter—it transforms into a vessel cradling his memories. Each room within the house becomes a spatial representation of different chapters in Brill's life, infused with its own unique memories and associations. As he traverses these spaces, he embarks on a journey of introspection and remembrance, delving into the depths of his memory to confront unresolved aspects of his personal history.

Bachelard's central concern revolves around viewing the house purely as a “felicitous space” or a cherished space, which increases the possibility of romanticizing the idea of “home” (Dion 46). This notion is exemplified in Auster's opening lines, where Brill's deep emotional bond with the rooms of his house is palpable. What was once a mere structure evolves into a vessel brimming with memories of love and loss:

Upstairs, my daughter and granddaughter are asleep in their bedrooms, each one alone as well, the forty-seven-year-old Miriam, my only child, who has slept alone for the past five years, and the twenty three- year-old Katya, Miriam’s only child, who used to sleep with a young man named Titus Small, but Titus is dead now, and Katya sleeps alone with her broken heart. (Auster 10)

In his writings, Freud often employed the metaphor of the house to elucidate the structure of the human psyche. Analogous to the compartments within a house serving distinct purposes, Freud posits that the mind comprises various psychological domains: the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. In the novella, Brill finds himself ensnared within the confines of the house, entwined with haunting memories and an imaginative realm, blurring the boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious, the tangible and the ethereal: “an image from the distant past, perhaps real, perhaps imagined, I can barely tell the difference anymore. The real and the imagined are one” (Auster 125). Within such a liminal space, the house metamorphoses into a canvas upon which Brill projects the visions of his mind, immersing himself in creative reveries and intellectual odysseys. As such, Brill's

experience within the confines of the house embodies a fusion of the conscious and the unconscious, highlighting the fluidity between what is physically tangible and what exists solely within the scope of imagination.

Despite the constraints imposed by his environment and his advancing age, Brill discovers a keen sense of liberation within the recesses of his mind. Within the confines of his room, he cultivates a safe place, where possibility and intellectual freedom abound, imbuing the house and its rooms with rich symbolic depth as they embody the convoluted dance between confinement and liberation. In this space, amidst the walls of his dwelling, Brill finds both refuge and a stage for artistic and existential exploration, offering him an avenue for expressive revelation (Kula 77).

Expanding to a broader canvas, Auster deftly employs urban spaces in his narrative, particularly in the transition from Brill to Brick. Author Mark Brown's discourse on realms depicted in various mediums, including films, dreams, and aspirations, introduces the notion of "no-places." These arenas, as Brown describes, are characterized by their unreal, untraceable nature, making them impossible to map (qtd. in Kula 80). Brown contends that these spaces serve as domains of the imagination, deliberately crafted by their creators to offer respite from the harsh realities of the external world. Thus, they can be perceived as utopian havens, providing refuge from life's hardships.

However, Brill's imagined rendition of New York diverges from this idyllic portrayal, reflecting the old man's inability to embrace positivity. Instead of crafting a utopian world, Brill's imagination conjures a dystopian landscape, denying him solace even in his flights of fancy as he vividly describes it, "[B]urned-out houses, collapsed food markets, a dead dog, several exploded cars" (Auster 24). Doctor Kula elucidates Brill's struggle to fashion a positive world, suggesting that his imaginary spaces are fraught with deep and unsettling significance within his narrative (81). While these imaginary dimensions offer a semblance of

escape from both physical and psychological anguish, they remain tainted by the lingering scars of Brill's trauma; haunting reminders of his suffering that undermine his attempts at salvation. Even in the twilight of his life, the specter of his past continues to cast a shadow over his imaginary constructs, stripping them of their intended comfort and imbuing them with the negative power of his unresolved trauma.

In tandem with the exploration of diverse physical spaces, the notion of time assumes great symbolic significance. Martin Heidegger, in his seminal work *Being and Time* (1927), asserts that “time must be brought to light—and genuinely conceived—as the horizon for all understanding of being and for any way of interpreting it” (39). He emphasizes the necessity of examining time and its influence on one's essence, bridging the gap between past and future to grasp the nature of existence.

In *Man in the Dark*, the narrative adopts a fragmented structure, echoing Brill's insomnia-induced nights filled with recollections and storytelling. This fragmentation mirrors the disjointed state of the protagonist's consciousness as he oscillates between memories of the past, anxieties of the present and speculations about the future. Brill articulates this temporal flux as he remarks, “[T]he past that lives on in the present, the past we carry with us into the future” (Auster 60).

Through Brill's experiences, Auster skillfully portrays time as a fluid and non-linear dimension, where the boundaries between past, present, and future dissolve, allowing for unexpected intersections and overlaps. This portrayal underscores the interconnectedness of temporal states, illuminating the complex liaison between memory, perception and anticipation in shaping human experience.

Moreover, in his exploration of human existence—referred to by Heidegger as *Dasein*—and its perplexing relationship with the concept of time, he posits that “the temporal interpretation of everyday *Dasein* must start with those structures in which disclosedness

constitutes itself: understanding, state-of-mind, falling, and discourse, and will give us a basis for defining the temporality of Being-in-the-world” (384). These four fundamental elements find resonance within Auster's novella through Brill's nocturnal odyssey.

Within Auster's novella, time intertwines seamlessly with the human psyche as characters grapple with understanding their own motivations, the actions of others and the unfolding events around them. Amidst the labyrinthine prose, characters navigate the shifting grounds of comprehension, their minds traversing the contours of memory and perception like intrepid explorers charting uncharted territories. Instances of questioning past actions and seeking understanding in the present abound as seen when Brill reflects on watching the video of Titus's assassination: “I still don't understand why the three of us felt driven to watch the tape—as if it were an obligation, a sacred duty” (Auster 124). Each emotional crest and valley becomes a pivotal point in their journey, shaping their interpretation of the world and illuminating the temporal dimensions of their existence.

Within Auster's narrative, characters transcend their roles as mere actors and become vessels through which the essence of being is distilled—a potent elixir of introspection and revelation. These characters undergo various states of mind over time, embarking on profound journeys of self-discovery, where they confront the depths of their consciousness, poised on the brink of comprehension as they grapple with the existential weight of their existence. Brill, Miriam, and Katya each navigate a tumultuous spectrum of emotions and internal conflicts throughout the novella, engaging in deep introspection as they reconcile their memories with their present realities. These moments serve as crucibles wherein the alchemy of state-of-mind unfolds, forging closely tied connections between past, present and future thereby shaping the very fabric of their being.

However, these shifts in states of mind often culminate in moments of vulnerability and fragility, where Auster's characters confront Heidegger's notion of “failing.” Like fallen

leaves swept up in the relentless currents of time, they are drawn into the depths of existential despair, grappling with the ephemeral nature of their own human frailty: “There’s nothing to be done. I fail again and again; fail more often than I succeed” (Auster 11). Amidst the debris of shattered illusions and dashed dreams, the concept of falling resonates deeply, serving as a reminder of the fragility inherent in the human condition, as well as its remarkable resilience.

The final aspect of being, according to Heidegger, discourse, may initially seem trivial or merely an aesthetic embellishment, yet its significance transcends superficial perceptions. Heidegger posits that “discourse helps to constitute the disclosedness of Being-in-the-world, and in its own structure it is modeled upon this basic state of Dasein” (205). In the novella, discourse serves as a binding force, weaving characters together in a shared tapestry of experience. Initially, Brill finds solace and purpose in his surroundings of books, movies and written reviews. Nonetheless, he engages in a second form of discourse—verbal communication—during his nightly conversations with his granddaughter Katya: “She came down a few hours ago, I whisper back to her. Another rough night, so we lay in the dark and talked” (Auster 126). Their dialogue helps resolve unresolved issues, fostering mutual understanding and acceptance of the past.

Moreover, Brill's escapades into storytelling represent a unique form of discourse, transcending individual limitations to explore the transformative power of language. As he navigates the line between truth and fiction, Brill discovers the profound impact of narrative on his understanding of self and the world. Hence, through its rich literary exploration of time and memory, the novella aligns with Heidegger's philosophical inquiries into the nature of human existence. In this way, it offers appreciable insights into the nature of being and its complicated relationship with time.

As the essence of existence unfolds through the varied experiences across time, a fundamental question arises: what comes after being? Heidegger's philosophy delves into the

notion of anticipatory resoluteness and its profound connection to authentic Dasein's acknowledgment of its own inevitable possibility, often construed as death or nothingness. Heidegger defines anticipatory resoluteness as Dasein's proactive commitment to confront and embrace this ultimate possibility, implying an active engagement rather than a passive resignation (qtd. in Gupta 175).

Throughout the narrative, Brill grapples with the looming shadow of mortality, a pervasive presence that permeates his every thought and action. He confronts his mortality head-on, his sleepless nights saturated with contemplations on death and loss, pondering: "If I should die before I wake. How fast it all goes. Yesterday a child, today an old man, and from then until now, how many beats of the heart, how many breaths, how many words spoken and heard?" (Auster 125). Each fleeting moment becomes charged with urgency as Brill traverses the temporal expanse of his own existence, keenly aware of life's finite nature.

Furthermore, Brill adeptly demonstrates a heightened level of temporal and existential awareness throughout the narrative, capturing the existential wrestle with the passage of time. As he reflects on his past, contemplates his present circumstances and envisions an uncertain future, he grapples with the implications of mortality on his sense of self. Brill's awareness of his age serves as a stark reminder of his position in the continuum of time: "After seventy-two years on this earth, who gives a damn if I write about myself or not?" (Auster 18). Thus, Time transcends its conventional measure of seconds and minutes, emerging as an existential force, shaping Brill's understanding of himself and the world around him.

The recognition and acceptance of one's life circumstances with the passage of time does not preclude contemplating future potentialities. Heidegger's philosophy contends that time transcends mere linear progression; it embodies the existential fabric of possibility (qtd. in Gupta 175). The future, in particular, is not merely a forthcoming moment in time but encompasses the potentiality and anticipation of what life could have in store. Anticipatory

resoluteness entails Dasein's active engagement with its future possibilities, underscoring the intimate connection between the existential concept of time and Dasein's mode of being. Brill epitomizes this engagement with future potentialities. Despite moments of resignation and even the creation of scenarios contemplating self-harm: “The old man invented you in order to kill him” (Auster 55), he maintains openness to more positive outcomes. This openness allows him to explore better potentials during his remaining time on earth before confronting life's inevitable end.

Ultimately, the nocturnal journey readers embark on with Brill transcends a mere experience of insomnia; it offers important insights into the essence of being. As demonstrated in this passage, Auster adeptly explores the philosophical concepts of space and time, employing seemingly ordinary spatial elements and dimensions to navigate the intriguing realm of human existence. Through Brill's journey, Auster invites readers to contemplate the intriguing implications of time and space on human experience, enriching their understanding of existence itself.

II. Embedded Narratives and Tellability in *Man in the Dark*

As the veil lifts on the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings within Paul Auster's narrative, it becomes imperative to recognize the literary craftsmanship that sculpted this novella into the masterpiece it is today. Among the techniques used, one shines conspicuously: metafiction. Metafiction, a literary device, where a work of fiction knowingly acknowledges its own existence as a product of imagination, transcends conventional storytelling by directly engaging with the reader and reflecting on its own fictional nature (Study Smarter). In her work *The Meaning of Metafiction* (1981), Inger Christensen posits that a metafictional novel serves as a conduit for the author's message rather than a mere

showcase of technical prowess (10). Thus, exploring Auster's metafiction and unraveling its mysteries becomes an intriguing endeavor.

In *Man in the Dark*, metafiction manifests primarily through the narrative-within-a-narrative technique, as August Brill constructs imaginary tales to alleviate his insomnia-induced restlessness. Within Brill's fabricated narratives, readers encounter characters and events that deviate from Brill's reality, often offering alternative perspectives on historical events or exploring divergent narrative paths.

Paul Auster's penchant for voicing his stance on political issues is evident as he candidly admits, "I can't keep quiet. It's too dangerous. It's too serious to stand back and watch the country melt" (qtd. in Thompson). In *Man in the Dark*, Auster ensures that his narrative serves as a platform for such expression. Within the novella, Brill constructs a fictional dimension set in an alternate America—a nation untouched by the tragic events of 9/11 but embroiled instead in a second civil war, where "[o]ne nightmare replaces another" (Auster 29).

Through Owen Brick's tale, readers traverse a dystopian terrain, where political authority wields centralized, oppressive control. Brick navigates a society under the thumb of totalitarian rule, evoking echoes of historical authoritarian regimes. This narrative canvas allows Auster to probe the ramifications of unchecked power and the erosion of individual liberties, encapsulated in Brill's conception of the "Independent States of America" (Auster 49). The birth of these states ignites the flames of civil strife, gaining global recognition: "The European Union recognizes the existence of the new country . . . diplomatic relations are established" (Auster 49), symbolizing the eagerness of foreign powers to exploit any chink in America's armor.

Moreover, within Brill's constructed universe, Auster adeptly scrutinizes America's ideological views. Auster's depiction of the totalitarian regime and its reliance on military

coercion can be construed as a commentary on America's proclivity for utilizing warfare as a tool for asserting dominance and preserving authority. A pivotal moment arises when Brill momentarily shifts from his reverie about his fabricated domain to make a subtle allusion to Nathaniel Hawthorne and the American Civil War:

Hawthorne didn't care. If South wanted to secede from the country, he said, let them go and good riddance. The weird world, the battered world, the weird world rolling on as wars flame around us: the chopped-off arms in Africa, the chopped-off heads in Iraq, and in my own head this other war, an imaginary war on home ground, America cracking apart, the noble experiment finally dead. (Auster 41)

This reference invoked by Brill indirectly delves into the ideological underpinnings of the United States, encapsulated by the concept of 'a city upon a hill'—an ambitious vision for a nation that, after an era of prolonged isolationism, became embroiled in numerous global military entanglements, particularly during the preceding century (Boylu 160). These interventions incurred substantial financial costs for America and resulted in destabilization, human rights violations and perpetuation of cycles of violence.

However, as Brill's alternative reality unfolds, readers anticipate a nation devoid of conflict, only to be met with disappointment: “America without war. It's hard to digest. You get so used to the fighting, it kind of creeps into your bones, and after a while, you can't imagine a world without it” (Auster 81). Indeed, the symbiotic relationship between America and warfare has become so deeply entrenched over time that envisioning one without the other seems almost inconceivable, as evidenced by Auster's metafictional narrative, where even in the absence of external conflicts, a civil war ensues, portraying “America ... fighting America” (Auster 14).

In Brick's rendition of America, the nation is entrenched in warfare, yet a fervent sense of nationalism and patriotism persists. Despite residing under a repressive regime, Brick

exhibits resilience and agency by actively resisting the status quo. Brick challenges authoritarian rule and advocates for transformative change through clandestine maneuvers and alliances with fellow dissidents. An illustrative instance occurs when he is tasked with assassinating Brill to precipitate an end to the conflict. Unlike his counterparts in the political sphere, Brick adamantly refuses to comply with the directive even at the potential cost of his own life and that of his wife: “We’re not killing anyone. Do you understand me?” (Auster 77). Given the pivotal nature of Brick’s decision, which could sway the fate of the entire nation, Brill portrays him as a symbol of individual agency in the face of manifold oppressions, a stark departure from Brill’s own passive demeanor.

Indeed, Brill’s alternative narrative underscores his yearning to transcend his historical passivity in response to political and social exigencies—a contrast to his previous inaction, wherein he refrained from participating in previous wars, could not confront a racist New Jersey Police Colonel and failed to aid his sister. Through Brick’s proactive agency, readers are prompted to contemplate the potential of ordinary individuals to affect social change and influence political trajectories even amidst the most oppressive circumstances. As such, Auster’s metafictional construct blurs the boundary between factual and fictional history, presenting a nuanced exploration of their interplay. This exploration, as posited by Heilmann and Llewellyn, offers invaluable insights for both historians and creative artists, inviting discourse on the nature of historical narrative and the discovery of alternative potentialities within history itself (4-5).

Brill endeavors to navigate his life vicariously through Brick, a narrative device that unveils his perpetual contemplation of rectifying past grievances. This exploration delves into the significant psychological implications of metafiction as a reflection of the human psyche's coping mechanisms, particularly in response to trauma, memories, grief and existential crises. In her discourse on national and personal traumas in literature, Professor Olena Boylu

contends that “postmodern authors, whose desire to demolish the metanarratives and their prolonged ideological supremacy, brought forward a considerable number of narratives that unveiled previously untold traumatic experiences of recent history” (156).

Boylu identifies “traumatic metafiction” as a salient narrative tool that offers insight into the enduring psychological repercussions of trauma on individuals, as exemplified in Auster’s novella. Initially, the narratives constructed by Brill serve as a conduit for processing and assimilating his traumatic recollections: “since the world explored by Owen is the mental creation of August Brill, the reader, through the numerous details, can easily analyze the traumatized subconscious of its creator” (Boylu 159).

Expanding upon this premise, Patricia Waugh asserts that “metafiction, by challenging not only the notion of the novelist as God through the flaunting of the author’s godlike role, but also the authority of consciousness and the mind, establishes the categorization of the world through the arbitrary system of language” (24-5). In this context, metafiction endows Brill with a semblance of omnipotence, enabling him to fashion an alternate reality diverging from his own. Through this narrative device, Brill endeavors to reshape his own story, seeking coherence and mastery in the face of turmoil.

Brill fabricates a fictional world untainted by the tragic events of 9/11 or the Iraq War; the latter intimately entwined with the traumatic loss of Titus: “I think about Titus’s death often, the horrifying story of that death, the images of that death, the pulverizing consequences of that death on my grieving granddaughter” (Auster 10). Auster’s utilization of the narrative-within-a-narrative technique masterfully illustrates Brill’s internal struggle within the alternative universe he constructs, adeptly portraying the enduring repercussions of war and trauma on individual psyches and societal structures (Boylu 163). This process aligns with psychological theories of trauma recovery, emphasizing the therapeutic value of constructing narratives to comprehend and reconcile with traumatic experiences. By engaging

in this narrative reconstruction, traumatized individuals can navigate the complexities of grief, finding consolation and clarity amidst tragedy.

Furthermore, in his analysis of metafiction, Professor Ronald Richardson delineates it as a paradoxical element with appreciable implications for self-awareness and existence. According to Richardson, metafiction is akin to a phoenix, perpetually rising from its own ashes: “Metafiction slays itself because it breaks the realism, the naturalism, the illusion of the story. Metafiction brings itself to life again because it shows the magic of the story transcends its own destruction.” Indeed, while the narrative dimension within a story may conclude, it simultaneously opens doors to new horizons for its creator. Richardson's perspective finds resonance in *Man in the Dark*, where through metafiction, Brill embarks on a transformative journey of self-discovery and existential exploration.

Brill's introspective musings prompt him to dissect the conventions of narrative and blur the lines between fiction and reality, thereby challenging his fundamental notions of selfhood and existence: “There’s no single reality, Corporal. There are many realities” (Auster 54). By crafting the Owen Brick narrative, Brill reintegrates the fragmented elements of storytelling into his own narrative, enriching his comprehension of self and existence by infusing elements of fiction and imagination into his personal reflections. Through this process, Brill undergoes a metaphorical rebirth, engendering new identities and realities that transcend the confines of his fictional persona.

As previously noted, metafiction also serves as a vehicle for self-negation as Brill grapples with the constructed nature of narrative and confronts the existential crisis triggered by the realization of his existence as a mere character within a story. Nonetheless, Brill ultimately discovers a revitalized sense of purpose and significance in storytelling, embracing the transformative power of narrative and asserting his agency within the narrative framework: “By putting myself into the story, the story becomes real” (Auster 75). Through

Brill's odyssey, Auster elucidates the transformative potential of metafiction to deconstruct and reconstruct the self, presenting readers with a profound meditation on the essence of storytelling and human existence.

Moreover, Brill's utilization of narrative as a coping mechanism underscores the intriguing ties between imagination, emotion and cognitive processing when confronted with life's adversities. Brill's immersion in his alternative narrative serves as an illustration of the resilience of the human psyche and the transformative potential of creative expression in navigating and transcending emotional turmoil. Indeed, while it prompts contemplation on the potential limitations of escapism as a coping strategy and the necessity of confronting and processing challenging emotions for genuine healing and personal growth, Brill's narrative immersion also embodies an overwhelming yearning for solace from the harsh realities of life. As Boylu aptly observes, “[T]he alternative America created by August Brill in his mind will not help him escape the realities of his real life” (159), thus highlighting the inherent limitations of his escapist endeavor.

Nonetheless, at Brill's advanced age and stage in life, with the specter of mortality looming on the horizon, his desire for respite from reality is palpable. He acknowledges that his narratives may not fundamentally alter his tangible life struggles, yet finds relief in their immersive embrace: “They might not add up to much, but as long as I’m inside them, they prevent me from thinking about the things I would prefer to forget” (Auster 10-1). Through his adept use of metafiction, Auster provides a nuanced response to whether escapism constitutes a blessing or a curse: whether Brill's escapist sphere serves as a punitive or redemptive force is immaterial. What ultimately matters is its capacity to shield him from the relentless onslaught of agonizing reality, transcending its inherent fictionality and temporality.

As Brill embarks on his imaginative odyssey, finding solace and a deeper understanding of his own existence, the impact of his journey extends far beyond personal introspection. Professors Mohammad-Javad Haj'jari and Nasser Maleki dive into the intersection of Sartrean existentialism and literature, particularly in their examination of metafictional narratives. Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist theory underscores the inherent freedom and responsibility of individuals to forge their own essence or identity through their actions and choices. Central to Sartre's philosophy is the concept of "existence precedes essence," positing that individuals are not born with predetermined purposes or meanings but instead define themselves through their conscious decisions and deeds (qtd. in Hajjari and Maleki 138).

In the novella, Brill's experiences resonate with key tenets of Sartrean existentialism, notably the notion of radical freedom and responsibility. Similar to Sartre's assertion that existence precedes essence, Brill grapples with the challenge of shaping his life in the absence of inherent meaning or direction. The Sartrean perspective maintains that "human beings literally have the power to choose from different possibilities of being so as to make differences in their lives insofar as they can imagine such possibilities and their consequences" (qtd. in Haj'jari and Maleki 145). The professors contend that Sartre's philosophy aligns seamlessly with metafiction as literature's narrative capacity allows readers to contemplate multiple potentialities and their implications, illustrating that present circumstances are perpetually subject to transformation and contradiction by alternate narratives.

Illustrating this synergy, Brill exercises full control over his imagination, exploring alternative paths and possibilities through the stories he constructs and the alternate world he navigates. Ultimately, readers discern that it is through the continual exploration of alternate realities that Brill attains a level of acceptance of his circumstances, affording him the agency

to effect change in his present reality. Embracing a more positive outlook, Brill suggests embarking on a family trip and collaborating with his granddaughter Katya on a film project, signaling his readiness to embrace life anew and encouraging his daughter and granddaughter to do the same: “You have to accept that, Katya. Accept it, and try to start living again” (Auster 118). In this manner, Brill's narrative realm unveils myriad realities before him, offering him the agency to choose his path forward as the weird world rolls on.

III. Narrative Mimesis of Remembering in *Man in the Dark*

Narrative, often regarded as the backbone of literary expression, serves as the fundamental vehicle through which stories unfold, worlds materialize and human experiences are explored. Aristotle has meticulously dissected the essence of narrative in his enduring treatise *Poetics*, defining it as the deliberate arrangement of events to evoke emotional resonance and facilitate catharsis among its audience (33). In his quest to unravel the anatomy of compelling storytelling, Aristotle underscores the paramount importance of unity, completeness, and coherence within the narrative framework, as he famously articulates, “... whole and complete, with a beginning, a middle, and an end.” (89). This classical delineation serves as a guiding principle, emphasizing the critical role of narrative cohesion and progression in captivating and engaging readers or spectators.

Expanding upon Aristotle's foundational insights, Mark Currie has delved into the complex web of narrative dynamics in *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998), offering a paradigm shift in understanding narrative form and function. Departing from the linear conventions of storytelling, Currie posits that narratives transcend mere chronological sequences, morphing into dynamic and fragmented entities that mirror the complexities of human experience. He provocatively asserts that narrative is no longer a stable, fixed form but an unstable, shifting construct (3), challenging entrenched notions of narrative stability and

coherence. Currie's perspective heralds the advent of postmodern narrative sensibilities, where fluidity, multiplicity and ambiguity reign supreme, inviting readers to navigate through labyrinthine narrative landscapes, where meaning is as elusive as it is abundant.

In recent years, there has been a burgeoning interest in capturing the convoluted nuances of the human experience through the lens of narrative structures, particularly in the endeavor to mirror the complex workings of memory. Throughout literary history, memory has held a prominent place as a thematic cornerstone, with countless works delving into the ways individuals recall their past and construct their identities based on these recollections. Indeed, numerous contemporary novels boldly navigate the reciprocity between past and present, elucidating their symbiotic relationship and the pivotal role of introspection and memory in shaping one's sense of self.

However, despite the proliferation of such narratives, a distinct genre designation had yet to be proposed for works that elaborately mirror the processes of remembering. It is only recently that literary critics have put forth the term 'fictions of memory,' which carries a dual connotation of fictionality. As articulated by Birgit Neuman in her illuminating chapter "The Literary Representation of Memory" (2008), this term, firstly, alludes to narratives that transcend mere reference to depict the labyrinthine workings of memory itself (334). Secondly, it encompasses the stories individuals weave about their pasts in an effort to comprehend their own identities and life trajectories (Neuman 334). Thus, "fictions of memory" encapsulates not only the artful portrayal of memory processes in fiction but also the existential quest for self-understanding through narrative reconstruction.

Within the scope of fictions of memory, the complex process of recollection is vividly brought to life through what literary critics have aptly labeled as the 'Mimesis of Memory' or 'Mimesis of Remembering.' This terminology encapsulates the diverse array of narrative forms and aesthetic techniques employed in literary works to mirror the obscure workings of

memory. As articulated by Neuman in her insightful analysis, this term encompasses “the ensemble of narrative forms and aesthetic techniques through which literary works stage and reflect the workings of memory” (334). Through a nuanced interplay of structure, language and imagery, literary texts have the capacity to engender memory-like effects, thereby immersing readers in the rich meld of recollection and introspection.

In their article “Mimesis of Remembering” (2022), Basseler and Birke assert that literature transcends mere replication of memory; instead, it deftly crafts an illusion of memory through various narrative devices (4). Authors employ a spectrum of narrative techniques to plumb the subjective depths of memory, exploring its nuances, fallibility and emotional significance. These techniques, including narrative mediation, focalization, unreliable narration and the nuanced representation of time and space, serve as conduits for unraveling the knotty threads of memory's transformative journey over time.

In narrative texts, the depiction of memory heavily relies on the viewpoint of a specific character or narrator. This subjective perspective significantly shapes how memories are presented and understood within the narrative, introducing layers of subjectivity and individual interpretation to the portrayal of memory. Indeed, narrative mimesis of memory typically features a reflective narrator or protagonist, who, from their current vantage point, looks back on their past experiences in an effort to find meaning in emerging memories (Neuman 335).

In Franz Karl Stanzel's seminal typological circle of narrative situations (1984), a fundamental distinction emerges among authorial, figural and first-person narrative forms (16). First-person narration is characterized by the narrator's immersion within the story's character world which serves as a defining feature of this narrative mode. Yet, this distinction prompts a probing inquiry: from which standpoint do the depicted events unfold – that of the narrating/remembering-I or the remembered/experiencing-I?

The disparity between the narrating-I (the storyteller recounting events) and the experiencing-I (the character living through events) holds considerable implications. Within narratives featuring first-person narrators, readers are thrust into a dynamic back and forth between these two perspectives. The narrating-I often wields an informational, moral and psychological advantage over the character-as-hero, offering insightful commentary and evaluating the character's perceptions (Brasseler and Birke 15). In other words, the narrating/remembering-I casts its gaze back upon the remembered self, framing the past as a realm of memory and the character as a remnant of recollection.

In Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark*, readers witness a perfect exemplification of this narrative dynamic. The protagonist seamlessly occupies both the roles of narrator and character, weaving a tale that unfolds entirely from his unique perspective. With each repetition of the phrase "I remember," the protagonist firmly grounds the narrative in the present moment, while simultaneously delving into the depths of his personal history. As Brill traverses the intriguing dimensions of past and present, a smooth transition between the experiencing-I and the narrating-I can be seen, particularly evident during moments of deep emotional resonance. A striking instance of this occurs when Brill shares the story of his courtship with his late wife with his granddaughter. In this intimate exchange, both characters engage in a poignant dialogue, intertwining thoughts, comments and reflections on Brill's cherished memories (Auster 98). Thus, a fluid oscillation between the remembering self and the experiencing self unfolds, carving out a space for the retrospective construction of meaning.

However, the act of remembering can also entail a deep emotional immersion into the past. There are instances where first-person narrators choose to relay past events from the perceptual horizon of the experiencing-I, thereby heightening the vividness or "presentification" of memories (Brasseler and Birke 16). This shift in focalization, from

narrator to character, enriches the text's mnemonic quality. As psychologist Endel Tulving suggests, remembering can be likened to a form of mental time travel—a uniquely human ability to relive past experiences in a different context and perhaps in a different form (qtd. in Brasseler and Birke 16).

Brill, in his narrative journey, grapples with an acute immersion into the past, a realization that compels him to push aside painful memories in a bid to avoid their haunting resurgence: “Why this compulsion to pick at old wounds and make myself bleed again?” (Auster 40). However, as he gradually confronts these memories, his narrative style masterfully captures the raw intensity of the events, almost as if they were unfolding in the present moment. This is particularly evident when Brill recounts the harrowing story of Titus's murder, vividly detailing the gruesome scene:

Blood is dripping everywhere. Titus is no longer quite human. He has become the idea of a person, a person and not a person, a dead bleeding thing: *une nature morte*.

The man holding the head backs away from the camera, and a fourth man approaches with a knife. One by one, working with great speed and precision, he stabs out the boy's eyes. The camera rolls for a few more seconds, and then the screen goes black. Impossible to know how long it has lasted. Fifteen minutes. A thousand years.

(Auster 124- 25)

Brill's narration is deeply immersive, heightened by his meticulous depiction of the event and its surroundings. The presentification of this memory is further accentuated through the use of the present tense, adding weight to the memory and mirroring the relentless persistence of traumatic recollections. By employing the present tense, Brill underscores the seamless connection between two temporal planes, suggesting that the sensations from the past are so vivid to the remembering self that they feel as if they are being experienced anew. In this

manner, the boundaries between past and present blur, merging the two time levels seamlessly.

Moreover, a common literary technique employed in representing memory is analepsis, more commonly known as flashback. Analepsis serves as a fundamental tool for orchestrating memory processes within a narrative. It entails the presentation of events that occurred earlier in the story's timeline but are narrated later in the text. Through analepses, readers are offered glimpses into the past, enabling them to witness characters engaging in moments of recollection or introspection. This technique is notably evident in *Man in the Dark*, where the protagonist embarks on a journey of self-discovery by exploring a myriad of memories, both consciously and subconsciously, in an attempt to reconstruct his identity. While the narrative primarily unfolds in the present, Brill frequently transports readers back in time through a series of flashbacks and recollections.

These memories hold varying degrees of emotional significance for the protagonist, particularly traumatic events he desperately wishes to erase from his mind, juxtaposed with seemingly mundane everyday occurrences. However, he recognizes the value of this journey into the past, allowing himself moments of introspection: "I need a few moments to reflect..." he acknowledges, before immersing himself in the recollection process (Auster 18). Through analepsis, the narrative seamlessly navigates between past and present, offering readers a rich panorama of memories that contribute to the protagonist's personal growth and self-awareness.

Furthermore, analeptic passages serve as more than mere glimpses into specific past events; they offer fascinating insights into the subjective nature of memory itself. Within these passages, memory is depicted as a dynamic and multilayered phenomenon, where past experiences are revisited, reinterpreted and sometimes reshaped by the remembering individual. For the protagonist, Brill, these excursions into the past occasionally prompt a

shift in perspective on particular events. For instance, when reflecting on his sister's marriage to her husband Gil, he candidly admits to a change in his viewpoint, musing, “[A] wise choice, I felt - or at least it looked that way at the time” (Auster 61).

Additionally, through the technique of analepsis, authors skillfully blur the boundaries between past and present, crafting a narrative that fluidly traverses time. This fluidity allows for the seamless interweaving of past and present instances, underscoring the interconnectedness of memory and lived experience. Moreover, the incorporation of multiple time levels within the narrative structure serves to represent memory in its diverse forms. Memories, by their very nature, are not always linear; they may be fragmented, disjointed or recalled out of sequence. By embracing multiple time levels, narratives can mirror the non-linear essence of memory, presenting past events alongside present experiences with nuance and depth.

In Brill's narrative, memories scatter like autumn leaves, and the protagonist finds himself leaping from one recollection to another, heedless of chronological order. Often, Brill interrupts the flow of his fictional tale to delve into a random memory plucked from the vast reservoir of his recollections. Sometimes, one memory seamlessly triggers another as demonstrated when he muses, “Widows. Women living alone.... Impossible not to think of my sister now—and the luckless hand she was dealt by marrying a man who died young” (Auster 60).

These analepses are meticulously arranged to portray the process of remembering as a journey through layers, a gradual unveiling of events that hold significance for Brill. Consequently, his life story emerges not as a linear progression of events and their repercussions, but rather as a puzzle painstakingly pieced together by Brill himself. This mosaic of memories gradually leads to the unwelcome recollections Brill has long sought to evade: Titus's demise and his own infidelity towards his late wife. This technique not only

captures the essence of remembering as more than a simple recollection of past events but also inextricably weaves together present and past experiences (Basseler and Birke 7). Through this seemingly random retrieval of memories, Brill navigates the labyrinth of his mind, gradually confronting painful truths. In this way, Brill's non-linear storytelling eloquently mirrors the fragmented and entangled nature of memory recall.

Conclusion

As the sun sets upon this chapter, a comprehensive elucidation of the strategies employed by Paul Auster in his literary corpus becomes manifest. Across the preceding sections, it becomes evident that Auster's oeuvre is underpinned by a multifaceted tapestry of theoretical and philosophical frameworks, which not only imbue his work with depth and complexity but also elevate it beyond the confines of literature to resonate across various academic domains.

Initially, this chapter explored the significance of spatial elements, drawing insights from Gaston Bachelard's seminal work, *The Poetics of Space*, alongside other philosophical inquiries into the notions of space and time within Auster's narrative framework. By transcending conventional interpretations of spatial dimensions such as darkness, domestic settings and the American territory, Auster invites readers to contemplate the existential implications of temporal and spatial constructs, particularly in association with memory and age.

The exploration of metafiction emerges as another salient focus in Auster's repertoire of literary strategies. As elucidated, metafiction serves as a conduit for exploring alternative narrative scenarios, affording characters like Brill the opportunity to revisit past actions, envisage alternative trajectories and ultimately reconcile with their personal histories. Beyond

its function as a mere literary device, metafiction proves to be a potent vehicle through which authors articulate their beliefs, critiques and ideological stances.

Lastly, the narrative mimesis of remembering unveils the intrinsic ability of literature to evoke memories and elicit emotional responses. This section delved into the nuanced dynamics of memory retrieval within Auster's narrative, deftly navigating the interchange between the narrator and the character's recollections. By seamlessly weaving non-linear narrative structures and fluid transitions between past and present, Auster mirrors the intricacies of real-life memory retrieval processes.

Ultimately, as this final chapter draws to a close, it does so with an optimistic aspiration that readers will come to recognize the prominent capacity of literature to illuminate the comprehension of memory, age and their intricate connections to storytelling. Within the domain of fiction, where words spring forth from the fertile soil of imagination, and narratives intertwine with the reverberations of history, lies the enduring legacy of literature. Here, literature serves as a vessel—a conduit—for the exploration, contemplation, and ultimate understanding of life itself.

General Conclusion

Upon the completion of this study, a comprehensive exploration of the intriguing relationship between memory and age, as depicted within the literary scope of Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark*, has been revealed. At the core of this investigation was the endeavor to understand how memory and age intersect to shape individuals' experiences and identities, both in reality and within the realm of literature. This study aimed to illuminate the nuanced dynamics of memory function and its evolution across the lifespan, examining its dual role as both a boon and a burden in individuals' lives. Additionally, it sought to delve into the ways in which literature, particularly exemplified by Auster's work, serves as a reflective mirror of the complexities of memory and age, offering interesting insights into the human condition across generations.

The methodology employed in this study is grounded in interdisciplinary inquiry, drawing upon insights from psychology, neuroscience, literary theory and philosophy to elucidate the complex interplay between memory and age as portrayed in Auster's novella. Through a meticulous examination of primary texts, scholarly articles, and theoretical frameworks, a robust analytical foundation was constructed, capable of capturing the subtleties of Auster's narrative craftsmanship while situating it within broader theoretical discourses on memory and age.

Utilizing a qualitative research design, a plethora of theoretical perspectives and empirical research were synthesized to unravel the involute dynamics shaping memory function across the lifespan. By adopting a hermeneutic approach to literary analysis, this study ventured beyond surface-level interpretations, uncovering layers of meaning embedded within Auster's text and elucidating the existential implications of memory, age and identity.

The initial phase of this exploration began with a foundational inquiry into the nexus of memory and aging, traversing the diverse spheres of cognitive psychology, gerontology, and

sociocultural studies. It becomes indisputably evident that memory, while serving as a vital tool for navigating the complexities of daily life, carries within it the weight of accumulated experiences and negative recollections, whose resonance deepens in later stages of life. This amplification engenders introspection among individuals, prompting them to confront the shadows of past traumas, grapple with the fluidity of their identities and seek solace through diverse coping mechanisms, chief among them being escapism, which constitutes a prevalent refuge, particularly among older adults.

Central to this research was the exploration of Auster's narrative craftsmanship, notably exemplified through the prism of the *Vollendungsroman*—an archetypal narrative form that delves into the depths of old age, encapsulating themes of reflection, reconciliation and renewal. Through meticulous literary analysis of the character Brill, the protagonist of *Man in the Dark*, the universal resonance of Auster's portrayal of aging can be discerned, offering readers of all ages a provoking reflection on life. Brill's tumultuous journey, deeply intertwined with the creation of Owen Brick as a fictional alter ego, emerges as a compelling microcosm of the intricate dance between memory and aging. Through his narrative arc, readers bear witness to the transformative power of acceptance and storytelling as potent instruments for navigating the inner-workings of memory and self-discovery amidst the aging process.

Furthermore, this exploration extends beyond character analysis to encompass a rigorous examination of the strategic literary devices employed by Auster. From the symbolic darkness cloaking Brill's nocturnal odyssey to the domestic settings that serve as vessels for memory retrieval, Auster invites readers to contemplate the existential implications of temporal and spatial dimensions, particularly in relation to memory and age. The exploration of metafictional techniques unveils Auster's mastery in blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality, showcasing its potency as a conduit for revisiting past actions, envisaging

alternative trajectories and reconciling with personal histories. Additionally, the research delves into the narrative mimesis of remembering, wherein Auster seamlessly navigates between non-linear narrative structures and fluid transitions between past and present, mirroring the intricacies of real-life memory retrieval processes.

Moreover, the study's findings offer valuable insights into the hypothesized connection between memory, age and coping mechanisms as portrayed in Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark*, effectively addressing the primary research questions formulated at the study's outset.

Firstly, the study supports the hypothesis suggesting that elderly individuals, according to Auster's perspective, may lean towards avoiding direct confrontation with their past, often resorting to crafting alternative narratives as a form of psychological escape. This assertion finds substantial support in the character of Brill, an elderly individual, who indeed seeks solace in escapism and the construction of fictional worlds to navigate his regretful past. Such behavior implies that older individuals, acknowledging the inability to alter their past, may opt to sidestep it altogether, seeking solace in alternative realities as portrayed by Auster.

Secondly, while the hypothesis proposing that Brill's identity evolves throughout his lifespan due to the influence of memories is partially validated, its interpretation reveals nuances. Brill's identity undeniably bears the imprint of his past experiences; however, rather than dissociating from his true self, his coping mechanism involves embracing storytelling as a means of self-exploration. The creation of fictional alter egos, exemplified by Owen Brick, serves as a tool for him to delve into various aspects of his identity and seek redemption, thereby enriching rather than eroding his true self.

Thirdly, the study partially supports the hypothesis suggesting that coping mechanisms are more shaped by personality than age alone. While personality certainly plays a significant role, age and life experience also exert considerable influence. Brill's preference for escapism and Katya's inclination to dwell on her memories are demonstrably influenced by their

respective life stages. Brill, possessing the wisdom of age, has honed coping mechanisms over a lifetime, whereas Katya, still in the throes of youth, grapples with finding effective coping strategies, leading her to linger in the past.

Lastly, the hypothesis positing that Brill's selective retention of memories is guided by emotional significance receives validation through the study's findings. Brill's discerning memory retention aligns with the idea that emotional attachment greatly impacts memory preservation. Memories laden with emotional weight tend to endure, while others lacking such significance may fade into obscurity over time. This underscores the pivotal role of emotional attachment in determining the persistence of memories, influencing their longevity and clarity in consciousness.

While this research has gleaned considerable insights, the present exploration of memory, aging and literature merely scratches the surface of a vast and multifaceted terrain. Indeed, numerous avenues beckon for further investigation and discovery. Future research endeavors could delve deeper into the nuanced psychological mechanisms underlying memory function in aging populations, paying special attention to the influence of cultural contexts on coping strategies.

Additionally, there is a compelling imperative to explore the therapeutic potential of literature, particularly in its capacity to alleviate the burdens of persistent memories. By analyzing how literary narratives provide solace and foster healing, valuable insights into the intersection of literature with our lived experiences can be gained.

Moreover, comparative analyses across a diverse spectrum of literary works and cultural contexts hold great promise in revealing the universality of human experiences. Such inquiries can deepen our understanding of how literature not only mirrors but also shapes our perceptions of memory and age, transcending geographical and temporal boundaries to offer interesting reflections on human behavior and growth.

As we stand on the threshold of this voyage's end, we are reminded of the capacity of literature to illuminate the essence of human existence in all its complexity. In the pages of Auster's masterpiece, we find not mere stories but profound meditations on the nature of existence, memory and the passage of time. This study has been a testament to the enduring power of literature to provoke thought, evoke emotion and foster understanding across the boundaries of age and experience.

In sum, the current exploration of memory and age within the context of Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark* has been a quest for discovery—a journey that has deepened our appreciation for the complex connection between past and present, self and other, fiction and reality. As the sun sets on this inquiry, we are left with an overwhelming sense of awe and wonder at the boundless possibilities of the human imagination and the enduring legacy of storytelling in shaping our understanding of what it means to be human.

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