

## Post-Traumatic People in Paul Auster's *The Book of Illusions* from Cathy Caruth's and Michelle Balaev's Perspectives

Samira Sasani<sup>1</sup>, Diba Arjmandi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Shiraz University, IRAN

e-mails: <sup>1</sup>sa.sasani21@yahoo.com; <sup>2</sup>diba.arjmandi@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

In his novel *The Book of Illusions*, Paul Auster displays his knowledge not only as a writer, but also as a talented critic of cinema, painting and world literature. Opening up the question of identity after the loss, Auster presents the reader with the traumatic form of grief over the dead ones. The trauma which is portrayed in *The Book of Illusions* is the direct experience with death, with those who are left behind and for those who find death as the only solution for being forgiven. Strangely enough, while the main theme is death, Auster portrays the ways of resistance and the power of love to shape the process of post-traumatic identification. Precisely the aim here is to analyze Auster's novel with the help of new theories that are introduced recently into the realm of literary criticism and trauma studies by Cathy Caruth and Michelle Balaev. By studying different opinions about loss and trauma and applying new perspectives, this research scrutinizes Austerian characters. Therefore there is a survey, a study of trauma from vantage points of traditional model theoreticians like Caruth and also pluralistic model argument represented by Balaev.

Keywords: Paul Auster; *The Book of Illusions*; Trauma Theory; Cathy Caruth; Michelle Balaev.

### INTRODUCTION

Since we are the spectators of the era in which all psychological complexities have found their way to almost every aspect of art, including literature, we are frequently confronted to the variety of texts, the blank tablets which are filled with different presentations of traumatic preoccupations. Many literary works reflect loss, and although they have gone through the long path of author's imagination, they are still the mirror in which we stare and we recognize our hidden rooted desires. Paul Auster, the American postmodern novelist is a careful observer of man in this condition. His portrayal of modern life in American society opens up the questions about identity in a country where people are gathered to fulfill their wishes. But the consequence of such a quest for happiness is not particularly fulfilled. The traumatizing events are part of the history of every man's life. So what we see as a result is the shocking state the sufferer goes through after the happening of the unpredictable painful event. In the history of civilization, the inevitable conflict among humans has led us to confront striking traumatic consequences that are unforgettable for many of people. The Syrian and Afghan refugees, children who have seen severe violence, Nepal and Bam survivors of the deadly earthquakes, Iranian soldiers after eight years of enforced battle, Hiroshima

and Nagasaki survivors of atomic war, women and children under harsh domestic violence, American and Vietnamese soldiers after the battle, the sufferers of sexual or domestic violence harassment or even the survivors and observers of a train collision in India or "black box" obsession that follows each air-plane crash - the wish ... to witness the last moments, especially the moment that reveals the certainty of death entering the pilot's consciousness" are all victims, signs, observers and desires that are related to traumatic incidents (Berger, 1997, p. 571). What Auster exposes to the reader in this book is the bitterness of the unpredictable events which happen in the time that no one is ready to embrace new incidents.

### TRAUMA THEORY: SIGMUND FREUD, CATHY CARUTH AND MICHELLE BALAEV

To comprehend the concept of trauma thoroughly, one must begin with the theories of Sigmund Freud since "love him or hate him, Sigmund Freud is the grandfather theoretician of counseling and psychotherapy" (Spiers, 2001, p. 9). During the last twenty years theoretical approaches concerning trauma and its origins have been altered by the new explorations and arguments of recent critics. Theoreticians like Balaev and Caruth, for instance, have expanded our

vantage point towards trauma theory by linking literary contents and psychoanalysis. Thus, apart from the sexual disorders, abuse and perverse, there is a diversity of reasons like “a sort of fate” or the incidents which are “entirely outside [the] wish or control” which can disturb the mentally normal person and affects one in a permanent way (Caruth, 1996, p. 2).

Although the struggle to get control of life and its unpredictable crises never ceases to astound human, either by pleasure of unknown or by the shock of unwanted, the main aim will remain as the fulfillment of compromise among instinctual conflicts. The intriguing paradox about Freud’s idea of connectivity between life’s aim and death drive is that “the living organism struggles most energetically against events (dangers, in fact)” to help the organic living retain their “earlier state of things which the living entity has obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces” while in another part of his article he argues that “the aim of life is death” (Freud, 2003, pp. 30, 32, 33). Freud’s argument about the final aim needs this clarification that we all need satisfaction and tranquility in the end and death is the final though “self-destructive” point which fulfills the desires as “it promises the ultimate and complete calm” (Thurschwell, 2000, p. 88). Here raises the question about the possible relation between death and trauma. To answer it, one might go back to the primary definition of traumatic accident which is “the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmare, and other repetitive phenomena” (Caruth, 1996, p. 91).

Not every accident is supposed to lead to trauma. There must exist the violence of the incident, the shock of which the mind breaks into a repulsive state. For Freud, it is the external factor, the “stimuli” that invades the victim as the traumatic event and “break[es] through” the consciousness and makes the victim shocked due to unpreparedness (Freud, 2003, p. 21). The breaking through, or as Caruth’s definition “the breach in the mind- the conscious awareness of the threat of life” because of its belatedness leads to traumatic experience (Caruth, 1996, p. 62). What Caruth asserts here is that while we are unaware of the crisis and trauma at the moment of its happening, a moment later after its happening, when we are struck by the shock and cannot grasp it, we come to realize that what has happened was out of our control and through suddenness and loss, our psyche might become traumatized. If this realization of traumatic event does not integrate in the victim, one is

threatened to repeat the incident as it is known as the compulsion to repeat. The reason of this repetition is due to the postponement that consciousness experiences after the realization of traumatic incident. The victim, later experiences the belatedness in understanding the event which leads to traumatic survival, although the origins of the incident is never clear to him. In this vantage point towards trauma, the victim becomes dissociated since trauma has hit the individual’s consciousness without its imminence.

Michelle Balaev, another theorist who has worked on both psychological models of trauma and its relation to literature, concentrates on new aspect of models of trauma and its sources instead of focusing on the traditional trauma theories. According to Balaev “literary trauma theory is a burgeoning discipline that examines extreme emotional states and profound changes of perception” with the help of “psychological theories of trauma and memory” (2012, p. 3). Unlike the traditional model which is “restricted to the discourse of unrepresentable”, Balaev suggests “a pluralistic model” in which the approach towards trauma is multifunctional and are gathered “from multiple sources” (Balaev, 2012, p. xiii). Balaev’s argument begins with the explanation of traumatic event within the framework of pluralistic model by defining that “in the pluralistic model, the meaning of a traumatic experience can be determined by a remembering process that is open to alteration over time by the individual who continuously revises memories, including those of traumatic experiences, in each moment of remembrance” (2012, p. xiv). Of course the process of reformation can be inevitable, for the victim might not be aware of the contextual factors like “individual, social, and cultural” ones which can change the process of “remembrance” broadly (Balaev, 2012, p. 10).

### **THE BOOK OF ILLUSIONS AND THE SURVIVAL OF THE TRAUMATIZED VICTIMS**

*The Book of Illusions* is published sixteen years after *The New York Trilogy* and exactly a year after the September Eleven attacks. In one point it is interesting that Auster’s motive for death has not changed completely, for it is another accident, like the one that happened in *City of Glass*. Fate plays its cruel role and then leaves the protagonist miserable to rectify the situation. *The Book of Illusions* begins with the anticipation of death. Characters are destined to experience death in any possible plot Auster delineates for them. Jonathan Dollimore who is one of Freud’s interpreters, describes the obsession with death and its emergence in art as a notion rooted and “endemic in Western culture” (2001, p. 182). David

Zimmer, the protagonist of *the Book of Illusions*, is a writer and teacher in the university. The story begins with his deep state of despair and his helplessness after the death of his wife and his two sons which has happened in the airplane crash. The following destructive isolation makes him quit his job and in that matter he accidentally comes across Hector Mann's films which were produced during 20s. His obsession with Mann's works changes his life drastically and that is when his traumatic involvement takes different form in appearance. David, still a young man to be faced with such a disaster, drowns himself in the grief he faces after the death of his family.

Based on Caruth's explanation, David, who was not involved in the immediacy of the event, goes through traumatic experience of remembering which he "never seemed to tire walking down those same dead-end roads" to "torture myself [himself] with" (Auster, 2002, p. 6). David's process of mourning over the dead ones makes him immerse himself in the objects and memories he still finds enchanting to cling to. As a matter of fact, since David was not present in the moment of accident, his struggle to create a sham intimacy with the place that his family where once living in, is a sign of the trauma he is left to fight. In this matter, Caruth and Balaev's theory overlaps each other. Since David finds it irresistible to go back to his memories, he summons up the memories through objects and places and conjures the dead recollections.

But there is also silence, since David cannot communicate with anyone after the crash. In Balaev's argument which is in contrast to Caruth's idea, David's silence creates "greater suspense and repulsion because it allows the reader to imagine her or his own worst fears of abuse and violation" (2008, p. 158). While Caruth asserts that silence is the post-traumatic sign of fragmentation and unrepresentability, Balaev's argument highlights the condition in which silence is chosen by the writer as the sign of trauma in American society. In fact, it is a way the narrative affirms and highlights the atmosphere and incident. Thus silence is not only a symptom, but also a way of narrative representation chosen by Auster. The cultural motives and facets of American society after the September Eleven attacks make Auster adopts a flowing still detailed narrative of David's post-traumatic life that remarkably is the representative of the life of many American individuals who have suffered the loss after the crisis.

In contrast to other Auster's protagonists, David appears to be very conscious about his state of trauma. Even in comparison to the narrator of *The Locked Room* who could realize at some points that he is

trapped in such a condition, David's awareness goes beyond him and shapes into a strong self-analytical position. In the first traumatic incident that David confronts in the course of the novel, his reaction is to mourn over the loss. Nevertheless David does not give up self-destruction. He tries "to master this awakening to life that the [death] drive ultimately defines its historical structure" (Caruth, 1996, p. 65). How does this process of awakening take place for David?

*The Book of Illusions* is David's memoir written in the form of confessions and revelations of his own post-traumatic struggles and his accidental encounter with Hector Mann's real life. It was "the pressure" that David needed in the beginning to push him into a new way that if he did not pass, he "would fall apart ... and never able to put myself [himself] together again" (Auster, 2002, p. 25).

In explanation of exploring a reason to cling to and be survived from trauma, Shostak argues that Auster's protagonists:

In seeking the other, they experience the historical loss of their objects but not an internalized, transhistorical absence. When they accept the contingency of experience and engage in the working-through that permits them to gain distance on their own trauma, they make the past. (2009, p. 69)

Precisely, this justifies David's motivation to be rid of trauma, when he finds new motivation to follow Mann's movies. And it is his difference with other Auster's characters that David does not pursue post-traumatic self-destruction when he says that "what matters is not how well you can avoid trouble, but how you cope with trouble when it comes" (Auster, 2002, p. 34). The objects he finds to "make the past *past*" are silent movies that bring the secrets of Mann's disappearance to him.

While he travels to different cities to watch Mann's films, a wanderer who is searching for a lost treasure, David achieves a certain image in Mann's films. Mann's preoccupation is with the position of a young immigrant in American society. He, with his attractive handsome expression, portrays an honest, hardworking, newcomer who finishes "overcoming the odds and winning a place for himself in American jungle" (Auster, 2002, p. 35). In his roles, Hector Mann depicts a society in which the opportunities are infinite and by sticking to morality and believing in goodness one can fulfill the impossible dreams and wins the beloved's heart. Here rests the paradoxical part of the book in myriad aspects. First, the title of

the book conveys a sense of unreality, that what we perceive might not be true. In fact the whole success and all achievements are the illusions in the society that cannot grant wishes. The second part lies in the place that inflames traumatic events. It should not be forgotten that it is a shattered broken society, a “jungle” after the attack that has led Auster choose many of his motives and themes in the novel. The last proof of the failed American dream is the revelations of the real life of Hector Mann.

The chase after the object deprives the character of his identity and turns him into a new man who is sometimes a stranger to the real one when he becomes involved and “often reduce[s] their [his] life to an absolute minimum” (Lyčková, 2009, p. 17). But it can also serve for the best and make the character divert his thoughts from the trauma which is true in David’s case. The resurgence of the problem of identification happens in Hector’s films and later on in his private life. In description of Hector’s character in the movies, David explains that Hector’s dilemma is that of “double or nothing” since “he confront[s] the fact of his own annihilation” (Auster, 2002, p. 53). Hector’s inclination towards death and self-destruction signifies his lack of accordance with a place he is living in. As an immigrant he was not accepted easily in the American society and he has to do mundane low-pay jobs before being acknowledged as an artist. As Deshmukh explains in her argument “the experience of solitude for the Austerian character is a spatial experience – an experience of seclusion” (2014, p. 164). Auster’s emphasis on place and the traumatic elements it holds and conveys, highlights Balaev’s argument that despite what theoreticians of traditional model suggest, writer’s narrative and the elements they illustrate, is very much connected to the representation of trauma (2012, p. 20). When David has his mission of searching and watching Hector’s films accomplished, he buys a house near the place he used to settle with his family before. The new house acts as “a hospital for the living dead” where David finds himself separated from any friends and acquaintances, secluded by the mountains and his own psyche (Auster, 2002, p. 57).

Balaev’s argument about “the role of place in remembering” focuses on trauma “consists of specific losses situated within a particular cultural context and physical environment” (2012, p. 43). The “physical” surrounding of David is the place he hates everything about except its seclusion from the crowd. The house gives him the chance he seeks to avoid meeting people and be seen and sympathized by them. Martin believes that in many ways, Auster’s representation of isolation and loneliness, his “psychological inves-

tigation” shares similarity with that “undertaken by many modernist” since “solitude is employed in order to enhance personal development” (2008, p. 20). But what is still important to be considered is that Auster’s protagonists do not have any other choice, since it is the striking poignant play of fate that has let them be left by their own.

Hector’s movies provide the chance for escape, a way of resistance towards the trauma he was trapped in. In her detailed analysis, Deshmukh clarifies David’s situation and states:

Solitude, in this case, is a creative force, and the room becomes the spatial metaphor for solitude – its embodiment. The room also evokes the image of the womb where the fiction of the self develops. Writing about the self then becomes synonymous with giving birth to the self. (2014, p. 170)

By seclusion in a room, David finds this opportunity to not only “giving birth to the self”, but also to an artistic work. In fact through writing in a room and involvement in the mysterious life of Hector Mann, David explores himself to “erase an absence aims towards uncovering secrets” (Shostak, 2009, p. 67).

By watching and writing about him, David comes to acknowledge the moments of crisis that he could not control, but sees how Hector reacts to the trauma he encounters. The distance that David imposes between the work of art and his real life becomes a way of healing, although a difficult one, in the course of the novel. In the beginning, Hector’s silent comedies act like an obsession for David, like “he only performs for me [David]” (Auster, 2002, p. 64). The struggle David goes through to be one with the lost ones and to gain the new object he longs for make him “attempt[ ] reinvention of the past” that in many aspects develops “greater ambivalence about remembering and forgetting” (Balaev, 2012, p. 48). Another artistic involvement that helps David envision the condition he holds at the moment, is the translation of *Mémoires d’Outre-Tombe*, written by the French writer Chateaubriand whose life is an intense tragic instance of loss and who is “encountered only silence and memories” (Auster, 2002, p. 67). He puts all his efforts to write a magnum opus, a life diary that depicts all his thoughts to the end and has to sell it at last for the sake of money. In a long part, Auster goes to represent Chateaubriand with the picture of death and silence. The French writer recites that “I prefer to speak from the depths of my tomb . . . perhaps death will suit me better” (Auster, 2002, p. 67). Caruth asserts that the “narrative of remembering and forgetting” is a significant element in analyzing trauma

(1996, p. 37). In agreement with Freud, she clarifies that “it is traumatic repetition . . . that defines the shape of individual lives” (Caruth, 1996, p. 59). Auster’s metafiction and his creation of stories within stories, conveys a sense of prevailing death and silence in this novel.

By delving deep into the translation which explores death and loss, David’s memory becomes engaged to another source which although signifies his compulsion to repeat and his inclination to be with his lost family; it also justifies his resistant part of psyche that wants to divert his attention from trauma. Berge suggests that “what helps Zimmer out of his grief is discovering the narrative of a man who has suffered and experienced similar losses, in addition to creating a mysterious image of himself, that takes quite a bit of detective work to explore” (2005, p. 115). Therefore the post-traumatic experience that David goes through involves his resistance and also his surrender which unwillingly happens in some aspects, like the violence and callous behavior shown to his friends. What he shares with Hector later, is the sense of loss they have both experienced by the sudden death of beloved ones, which makes them both hunted with the past. By David’s involvement in the translation of Chateaubriand’s autobiography and his obsession with Hector’s works, Auster creates a set of stories within stories that discloses different identification in various traumatic conditions and also David’s reaction and his place in the center of all happenings. In all respects “the unity of self is determined by the unity of its narrative” and through fragmented narrative and several immersions in different settings the character who tries to find unity, pursue it in writing (Berge, 2005, p. 104).

The story takes its turning point with the arrival of a young woman, called Alma Grund, the friend of the Manns who has come to meet David to take him to Hector who is terribly sick and is foreseen to be dead soon. Alma Grund who “as her name implies”, is considered to be “the soul of *The Book of Illusions*” brings a new theme in Auster’s novel which has not been presented in *The New York Trilogy* (Auster, 2002, p. 57). Alma’s presence in David’s life brings back the emotions that provoke a resurrection in David. In the book that is replete with death and loss, Alma’s arrival changes the notion of trauma and the way David faces it. With her presence, Alma fills the void David has felt since the death of his family with love and assurance of a lasting relationship. Deep down in his depression, David resists any kind of change suggested by anyone in the circle of his friends. David reacts violently towards Alma, when she decides to take him out of his comfort zone and

hermetic cave which is called his home. David describes his traumatized identity when he confesses “the only person I knew how to be with now was myself—but I wasn’t really anyone, and I wasn’t really alive” (Auster, 2002, p. 102).

The post-traumatic life has made David conceive himself as a dead man who is incapable of communicating with other people and that is why when he finds Alma waiting for him, he considers it as a violation of his privacy. Shostak believes that trauma and fear of loss are interwoven in the Austerian novels which represent American society since she explains that “*The Book of Illusions* . . . expose[s] the randomness of the violence that is woven into the discourse of American freedom, seeing in such violence the source of the trauma that endangers the very freedom it purports to protect” (2009, p. 73). He is afraid that his small cycle of life becomes vaster to include any new incident and that is why he shows resistance to Alma’s request for the new quest. By resisting new chances, he tries to control over the life he has once lost. But Alma changes David’s hermetic discipline of life. She brings back the gone breath to a dead soul when she makes him accompany her at last and step out his unruly fears. In her article about Auster’s traumatic narrative, Shostak asserts that “the human need to exercise control over the unpredictability of loss is of considerable significance, especially given Auster’s concern with the chance nature of events” (2009, p. 68).

When Alma threatens David that she will shoot if he does not go with her to meet Hector, he comes to sense a new feeling, the closeness of death he has never experienced before, which he is bestowed unknowingly by Alma. David comments on the intense close experience to death as “the most sublimely exhilarating moment of my life” while still shocked, he reveals that “it was the first time a gun had ever been pointed at me . . . one wrong move, one wrong word, and I could die for no reason at all” (Auster, 2002, p. 108). Whereas he is confronted to the most irreversible experience he could go through without any control over the action, he feels that his grief is replaced with realization, a moment he grasps that death is not far from him even if he chooses to find shelter in his house in the mountains. It can be suggested that the reaction he shows to Alma when challenges her invitingly and ardently to shoot him, is a sort of control over the crisis he has lost his power once. In the unknown side of death, David finds a man “free of yourself, free of your life, free of your death, free of everything that belonged to you” (Auster, 2002, p. 109). In this passage, David reveals how willingly he has tried to forget and repressed his

internal fears and conflicts and how failed he is in this process. As Dollimore asserts there is a “connection” between “mutability, the pain of melancholic desire rooted in loss and the pool of death” (2001, p. 182). Because David has craved to be free from the trauma he has fought since the death of his family, he imagines that death is the remedy that gives him the key of his self-imprisonment.

To consider David at the moment of crisis is to pay attention to the atmosphere in full range. The man who has lost his family is asking a new comer to shoot him while he feels he is becoming one with the house and is witnessing his body becomes melted and one with space, a traumatic reactions towards crisis similar to Quinn’s. Balaev explains about the importance of the role of place in understanding trauma since place “examine[s] the complex social relations that influence the experience and narration of loss” (2008, p. 164). In analysis of the process of remembering, Balaev states that “the moment of remembrance is an active formulation of how to imagine one’s origins in order to define one’s identity in a new nation” (2012, p. 44). The new nation is not only referring to a new culture but also to a new place. That is how Balaev emphasizes the role of cultural and spatial elements in trauma. While David is threatened to be shot, he begins remembering the past months, analyzing if death is what he truly is pursuing. The depiction of David’s state of terror and excitement and at the same time Alma’s pointing the gun at him creates another setting in Auster’s traumatic narrative which explains that although David has found a shelter to resist the world’s crisis and be away from the flow of accidental incidents, he has to confront the fate which holds the power in any state. Martin describes David’s connection to the place and his state of life as relative elements while “very little distinction is drawn between the solitary individual and his room, the inner sanctum of his thought process” (2008, p. 19). There must be harmony and compromise between the place and the culture someone embraces and the process of identification that happens afterwards. David shows a stronger sense of consciousness towards the trauma he is captured in. Shulga asserts that “The traumatised person can thus relive the trauma but not engage with it; it is both known and unknown to the person” (2013, p. 33). With considering this fact, David who was once the victim of trauma, separates himself from the crisis and begins recovery out of his solitary existence.

Since there is no flawless character in Auster’s works and the main goal is to convey a social loss, all will suffer; but for different reasons and with different

reactions. In this aspect Balaev’s new interpretation of trauma and Freud and Caruth’s understanding of the same notion share similar aspects, since they all emphasize the role of memory. In her article, Shostak states that in “the Freudian scheme, memory is crucial as the means both to bring back and to let go” (2009, p. 71). While in traditional model theoreticians believe that “the traumatic experience is not properly registered in memory”, Balaev’s argument focuses on “different narrative techniques” that lead to a better understanding of “memory and identity” (Balaev, 2012, pp. xiii, xvi). The narrative technique Auster applies in writing *The Book of Illusions* is replete with fragmentations. David’s quest is to “reconstruct the story of his subject secondhand, from fragments, hearsay, and invention” (Shostak, 2009, p. 85). Therefore Alma is represented as an aid to David’s memory to heal and bind his shattered identity by highlighting the fact that he can still create new images and search for new objects of desire that are not lost and that is what makes him identify himself as a man who feels alive.

The emotional connection to Alma leads David to find a new string attached to life, a whisper of hope to make him walk a new path with her. He asserts that “in eight short days, she has brought me back from the dead” (Auster, 2002, p. 316). With Alma’s presence, David finds the trauma of his dead family tolerable, since there is a new love, a new object of desire to cling to in order to subdue the harshness of loss and past memories. Alma holds the key of David’s memory and let him become free of his repressed obsession with the dead ones. But this is *The Book of Illusions* and forgetting the crisis is only an illusion, a desire that can never be fulfilled since “nothing that happens to us is ever lost” (Auster, 2002, p. 271). However, David’s decisions carry him into a new realm that Auster defines with only one possibility and that is to face loss again. Since David accepts to step out of the safe zone of his hermetic life, literally he is taking the chance to meet his fate while by knowing that Auster never lets his characters win the game, it is not difficult to forebode the ending of David’s story.

When David finds himself next to Alma, traveling with the airplane, facing one of his biggest fears and also the memory of his gone family in the airplane crash, he exposes himself to the compulsion to repeat. With this regard, Balaev’s understanding of trauma and its relation to memory clarify the condition, for despite what theoreticians of traditional model of trauma argue, she states that by encountering a special situation or being set in a specific place, the memory will come back and cause alteration. At first, David’s

recollection of the memory of airplane's crash fills him with the feeling of death and decay. Explained and clarified by Freud, Lacan and later on by Caruth, "consciousness itself... is tied to a death from which it turns away" (1996, p. 97). Through finding himself in the airport next to Alma, he evaluates the condition as a:

devised form of punishment, as if the gods had decided that I [David] wouldn't be allowed to have a future until I [he] returned to the past. Justice therefore dictated that I [David] should spend my first morning with Alma in the same way I [David] had spent my last morning with Helen. (Auster, 2002, pp. 117,118)

While he goes through the corrupting thoughts of the past that have poisoned his mind for a long time, David's feeling for Alma and his sense of challenge to prove himself of being able to go through the process of identification, make his traumatic shield of resistance fall. In this matter based on Freud's opinion there can be "a direct transformation of hate into love which is purely internal and not dependent upon other meditations" (Dollimore, 2001, p. 189). With considering the presence of Alma, he tries to challenge himself into facing what he was afraid of, into the process of new identification in which the memory and consciousness of the traumatized victim does not restrict his new-found will to act.

What is intriguing in this matter and needs clarification, is that the demystification of Hector's life happens in a place that David expects the least to be enlightened and set free of destructive obsessions. It is in the airplane, the most feared position for David, that he faces the reality behind Hector's disappearance and his pretended death. Remarkably suggested by Balaev, there can be positive aspects in analyzing trauma in a pluralistic model by focusing on the "reconfiguration of the self" which is linked to the "role of place" (2008, p. 149). By confronting his fear and resisting the death drive to overshadow his consciousness, he is rewarded with the reality he was seeking for.

The most important element in traumatic experiences, especially Hector's encounter with the gunshot in the bank to save Frieda, is the role of remembering. Shulga clarifies the process of grasping the unfathomable moments of crisis in traditional model of trauma by stating:

knowing and not knowing trauma is central in the sense that the individual cannot truly comprehend the experience and verbalise it in order to bear witness to the event, sometimes not even to him/herself. This division of the self into

a known and unknown part cuts to the very core of the person's self-understanding and identity. (Shulga, 2013, p. 33).

But it still can be discussed that while the trauma is not registered perfectly in the psyche, it still provokes action that in an occasion might release the tension of the past.

In her argument, Shostak explains that Hector "learns that his sense of freedom when faced by the gun is itself an illusion; chance alone determined whether he would live or die" (2009, p. 79). By his confessions and his closest approach to death, Hector becomes forgiven by the love of Frieda. She tells Hector that "the bullets absolves you... you gave my life back to me, now I'm giving your life back to you" (Auster, 2002, p. 199). What is aimed here is to represent the duality of representation of death in *The Book of Illusions*. Although the traditional model theoreticians all emphasize the negative and dysfunctional aspect of traumatic experience, it can be argued that there are moments of release and freedom, even if they are short and are considered to be illusions. Even though critics like Shostak focuses on the lack and void in Auster's traumatic narrative and his representation of traumatic experience, it can be suggested that there are moments in the novel that characters find positive reasons to survive and to find new hopes. And the impermanent release is only achieved through art or death which in many regards portrays Auster as a romantic writer.

Two examples are embedded in the story, which prove Austerian characters and their struggle to find meaning in dual representation of art and the release from trauma. The first deals with Hector's creation of movies, after his marriage to Frieda, the films that are aimed to be produced but not to be seen and are promised to be burnt after his death. Although the movies are no longer silent, they are created only for the aim of satisfaction and also Hector's revenge of the fate that played wickedly with him. Shostak describes Hector's artistic creation as a "nihilistic project", believing that it is also another representation of Hector's traumatic experience of O'Fallon's death, since he might experience a kind of "artistic freedom" that depict his sense of revenge, but "it is the freedom only of a confirmed absence" (2009, p. 78). The second example illuminates the notion of love and the way it opens to the traumatized victim to be free from the trap. *The Inner life of Martin Frost*, the only movie that David had the chance to watch of Hector's archive after his marriage, portrays the story of a writer, Martin and a philosophy student called Claire who love each other but are doomed to be separate by

mysteries. The end of the movie is both tragic and melodramatic. Martin has to burn all the pages of his work that he loved very much to bring back life to Claire. Regarding the fact that Martin has saved Claire and has destroyed his art, it can be interpreted that although he was finding his release in art, but still art itself is a delusive representation and not real. Thus the whole story represents a sheer illusion of a traumatized man who has lost his past and also his future. Love might help the traumatized victims for a short time to survive. But there is still the stronger element in life as fate that make the man fall. Thus the fulfilled happiness is only a sham idea, an interval that fate rewards, but takes back at last.

In one standpoint Hector, from the early stages of life, is doomed to annihilation. He cannot find any way out except sacrificing his self and his identity to escape from the unfortunate murder of his mistress. The death Hector witnesses makes him chained to a life he has escaped in the beginning, taking him back to being no one again. Martin suggests that “Auster recognizes his own mortality, and appears attuned to the precarious nature of contemporary life, with death considered the only definitive certainty” (2008, p. 110). In this matter Hector has to “choose” his own “poison” while “there was no right decision to be made” (Auster, 2002, p. 140). The only option for traumatized Hector is to disappear. By witnessing a death, similar to the father of the burning child, Hector struggles to be away from the incident he does not have any control over. Again this is the case of dissociation, the uncontrollable moment of trauma that has hit Hector while he was not prepared. There is a negativity in Auster’s vantage point towards fulfilling wishes in a traumatic society like America after the September Eleven attack.

Hector’s life becomes infectious with irresistible destruction. He bases his future on the thought that “*if I mean to save my life, then I have to come within an inch of destroying it*” (Auster, 2002, p. 154). He has to embrace a new identity to go on with his post traumatic life. O’Donnell believes that “for Auster, character is a cipher and a process of deciphering” and regarding the fact that Hector’s life is devoid of dreams anymore, death forces Hector into grasping a new aspect of his identity (2010, p. 85). By struggling in the “process of deciphering”, Hector decides to change his name for the second time in his life. Once to be accepted in American society and the second time to escape from the same people. His choice is “Herman Loesser. Some would pronounce it *Lesser*, and others would read it as *Loser*. Either way, Hector figured that he had found the name he deserved” (Auster, 2002, p. 144). Even by his name, Hector

represents a loser, lesser than the one he expects, but still he finds as a fair game by life since he is an outcast escapee who has run away from the death replete with guilt.

Indeed the fragments of Hector’s life could never find unification, representing Hector’s history who leaves his identity in Argentina as a boy, in Hollywood as a director and lived a post-traumatic life as “*Mr. Nobody*”. It is David who gives Hector a posthumous life with his writing while revealing the buried realities after years. As Berge states Hector “is recreated through his narrative in the book Zimmer writes, but only after everybody involved, who could verify the story of his life, is dead” (2005, p. 115). The interesting point about the people who are involved in Hector’s life is that they are all destined to be ruined in the same way he once witnessed the death of O’Fallon. His wife was accidentally killed by Alma and her beloved Alma who was like his own daughter, commits suicide, another character who goes through self-destruction.

It is only David who gains back his identity and recovers from the chained traumatic experience of death that follows him from the beginning. While one expects another traumatic reaction shown by David to the death of his beloved Alma, she/he might feel quite shocked to see that David does not go through the same repressed mourning he once experienced for his family. He explains that “I had planning to fall apart, to slip into my old routine of hapless sorrow and alcoholic ruin, but in the light of that summer morning in Vermont, something in me resisted the urge to destroy myself” (Auster, 2002, p. 314). Whereas Auster, implicitly highlights his view towards traumatic reaction as an “urge” or what might be called the need for compulsion to repeat, it can be considered that David does not have enough memory of Alma or in a more positive way, he has been poisoned enough by the earlier traumatic incidents that by being recovered, he has the ability to show resistance towards the urge he feels inside. Shostak asserts that David’s “recovery is fulfilled when, even after Alma’s tragic death, he chooses to write Hector’s story, exposing his secrets and . . . releasing him from silence” (2009, p. 79).

Once more emphasized by Auster, by writing, the traumatized victim has found a release and a way to recreate the story he could not fully grasp at the moment of happening. It can be concluded that Auster, in the end, creates a character who comes to find survival more assuring rather than being drown in trauma. Convincingly Auster concludes that there are ways to survive and by struggle it is at least



possible to continue to meet some chances. At the end of the story, one comes to face that the whole book is a memoir of a man on the verge of death, who is recollecting his memories to write a work to disclose Hector Mann's life and more than that to give Hector the identity he was pursuing all his life. But above all it is a book about a man who needs writing to feel alive before death.

## CONCLUSION

What has been studied and analyzed in this work is the representation of trauma through two traditional and pluralistic models to open up a new vantage point towards the reaction that is shown to traumatic moments and loss. While the question of identity, individuals' relation to urban setting and cultural notion of immigrant and an outcast have been analyzed in connection with trauma, Auster still focuses on the concept of writer-narrative relation and how it leads the artist to whether survive from crisis or destroy his being. In the end, Auster's work portrays a world, in which trauma is an unavoidable hit on life while there is still hope to survive the roughness of the incidents.

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