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SUMMARY

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**CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY IN PAUL AUSTER’S AND
JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER’S METAFICTION**

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Key-words: identity theory, social identity theory, individual vs. group identity, salience hierarchy, role identity, metafiction, self-reflexivity, intermediality, direct definition, indirect presentation.

Abstract

The present PhD thesis, entitled *Constructions of Identity in Paul Auster's and Jonathan Safran Foer's Metafiction*, has set out to investigate some of the special fictional situations and interactions involving the characters inhabiting the novels by the two American Jewish authors that have been chosen here, the roles they perform, the groups and communities they belong to, while following the development of the characters and their related challenging and changing identities.

In the overall context of the exploration of identity construction in Paul Auster's and Jonathan Safran Foer's work, the use of some major theoretical concepts has been instrumental in the interpretation of the structure of Auster's and Foer's fictional worlds, autobiographical, as well as metafictional. In this endeavor, brief definitions and comments on such terms as postmodernism, metafiction, identity, identification, language (as part of the discursive, metafictional endeavor, the primary tools and raw materials that abstract the story and weave the plot) cannot be avoided, as these terms provide the framework for a better understanding of contemporary fiction at large, more specifically of the two authors' narrative strategies. Other important identity parameters that will be considered in this dissertation are memory and loss, which are both connected to the cultural ethnic heritage of the authors, both of them having inescapable links with their Jewish background.

The thesis will focus on specific contexts and interactional situations that are expected to reveal important aspects of personal and group identity. Moreover, in analyzing these literary contexts, I have been interested in finding out to what extent these situations and interactions illuminate the imagined and imaginary world of the metafictions belonging to the two American Jewish authors.

I have chosen the work of two educated cosmopolitan American Jews as a field for investigations of identity and metafictional literary constructions. Paul Auster and his younger fellow novelist Jonathan Safran Foer live in a multicultural age, and it is worth trying to find out to what extent being special, different, a member of a limited

community of a minority ethnic group may appear to be important for a major American/Jewish-American/American-Jewish writer. Equally interesting it is to see whether the two have preserved significant ties to traditions of their ethnic community, both in the US and abroad. Are they trying to recover ties to roots of their community's identity, their cultural heritage, and how challenging is such a task for them? Are they recovering or making things up? In this context, (of making things up, of "creating" or "constructing" an interesting narrative), I have chosen to investigate what is the place of the "metafictional games" the two authors may play.

The "seriousness" of realist fiction (the serious attempt to create the illusion that the fictional world is a faithful replica of the real world) and the playfulness of metafiction, one of the defining modes of postmodernist literature, are the two different, yet complementary artistic resources employed by both Auster and Foer in the construction of their own fictional worlds. The special ways in which the two authors, and other significant contemporary writers, engage with the conventions of realism and metafiction to create special artistic effects may be put in connection with what Barry Lewis identifies as a characteristic of postmodernism: "dissidence and the deviant language games of postmodernist American fiction."

In addition to concepts employed in literary studies seen in a very strict sense, elements of social psychology, coming from the works of well-known specialists, such as Stets and Burke, having to do with identity theory and social identity theory, have been found useful in the investigation of what may be seen as "deviant word games," "postmodernist language games," stories invented by authors to engage contemporary literary audiences. However, these tools, applied to the fictional world, may say a lot about ourselves as readers, as individuals and members of "interpretive communities," about the world surrounding the composition, publication and reception of these "word games."

In my research, I chose eight books in which the construction/deconstruction of identity is the main theme – more precisely, the protagonists are characterized by their constant preoccupation to affirm, hide or reject their identity at the same time. The eight volumes chosen are: Paul Auster's *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), *The New York Trilogy*, made up of *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986), *The Locked Room* (1986), followed by *The Book of Illusions* (2002), *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005), *Man in the Dark* (2008), *Invisible* (2009), as well as *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002) and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) written by Jonathan Safran Foer. The

novels were completed over a time span of almost thirty years and will be analyzed both individually and comparatively. Identity is one of the central issues they deal with, while the protagonists engage in identity quests, they are fictional representations of people who create or fall prey to turning-point events that considerably change their lives. Another common trait of these novels is that they employ several metafictional techniques in revealing and hiding at the same time the literary features that seem to define the protagonists, through intense self-reflexivity and parodic intertexts.

In analyzing how identity within the social context, but also within the contemporary narrative, highly metafictional framework, is constructed, important tools have been provided by social identity theorists, such as Jan Stets, Peter Burke, Sheldon Stryker, as well as postmodern theoreticians of metafictional writing, such as Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh. The perspectives they offered will provide a comprehensive approach to the research. Of no secondary importance have proved to be the narrative studies belonging to Jonathan Culler and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, which supplied very fruitful information in exploring ways in which identity of the fictional characters is revealed to us as readers.

Social identity studies offer an essential tool in understanding human interaction and, eventually, in understanding ourselves. In this way, starting from Peter Burke and Jan Stets's statement (Stets & Burke 112), according to which identity is conveyed by the assumption of roles (*role identity*), the belonging to groups, and the forging of unique configurations of identities that contribute to individual identity constructions, I will analyze the ways in which the roles imposed by society, the self negotiated and perceived by the individual, contribute to the construction of the identity of the protagonists, while also throwing light on the identities of the authors themselves. One defines oneself, to a large extent, by what one does, and for writers that mainly means the books they create, which, especially in metafiction, may contain (distorted) images of themselves, as they would like to be ... or not to be.

The main developers of identity theory, such as Sheldon Stryker, Peter J. Burke and McCall & Simmons, have in common a shared view of the individual as a reflection of society – considering that the “self reflects society” (Stets & Burke 37), and this applies in our case to the authors and to the creation of their imaginations, which are in a certain relationship with both the fictional and the real world. Sheldon Stryker stresses the hierarchical dimension of the roles that co-exist within an individual and their connection to the social structure. Stryker acknowledges the multiplicity of the roles

one has and their organization in a “salience hierarchy” (Stets & Burke 46) according to the importance and the identity’s “probability of being activated across different situations” (Stets & Burke 48). This “salience hierarchy” is particularly of use when one reads the critical scenes in a novel in which a character has to make dramatic options, to choose which of his or her identities is of utmost importance at that moment.

Peter Burke is assigning a central role in identity theory to the concept of “meaning.” An identity becomes meaningful to the extent to which a person becomes aware of his/her meaning within an interaction process. More precisely, “tied to each identity is a set of meanings that persons attribute to themselves when they are playing out or claim an identity” (Stets & Burke 49).

Very much like social psychologists focusing on social identity theory today, Linda Hutcheon considers, in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, in relation to the postmodern representation of the self, that “subjectivity is represented as something in process, never as fixed and never as autonomous, outside history. It is always a gendered subjectivity, rooted also in class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation” (Hutcheon, 37). This goes on to show that, contrary to views that postmodern theory is relativistic and nihilistic, that anything goes and everything is relative, identity, even in informed postmodern views, is not something impossible to fathom, confusingly protean, but a work-in-progress, a continuous exchange between the self and the environment/history. This is particularly visible in textualized situations, when it becomes obvious that identity is mainly to be seen as a narrative unfolding in the process of narration rather than as a stable, unchanging entity.

Metafiction, as it is well-known, is not a postmodernist invention, but a mode of writing whose coordinates have existed in literature from its beginnings, although in realist fiction the author tries hard to delete the most obvious traces of the artifice of art. One of the permanent preoccupations of someone reading Auster’s work may well be to see how a number of realist and modernist conventions and genres are used in his own postmodernist artistic formula. As it will become apparent, in this approach to Foer’s and Auster’s fiction, the special connections between the particularly strong metafictional dimension of the two authors’ work and a permanent preoccupation with issues of identity will acquire a central position.

In the overall quest for discovery of one’s inner self, the prevailing concern in Auster’s and Foer’s novels appears to be how to deal with loss: loss of family, loss of identity and selfhood. Faced with loss of family members, the protagonists are actually

facing their loneliness and lack of a coherent role to play and that is why they are aimlessly searching for a purpose in life, after experiencing confusing feelings of isolation and estrangement. In assessing such themes as identity within/outside social context, one has to employ theories belonging to social psychology, but also to literary studies in a balanced way, so as to present how the identity of the characters in Auster's and Foer's novels works and is eventually perceived by the reader. In a continuously reshaped context, identity, in the postmodern acceptance (as well as in "less postmodern" approaches, such as social identity theory) is a construct, the result of a fine "negotiation" between the text, its weaving, and the readers and their world. The readers are able to account for its meaningfulness, interpreting it according to the life experience, to their own set of rules, to their 'identity standard' (Stets & Burke 31) and within their conceptual frameworks, which may vary across cultures and time.

In *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, Linda Hutcheon assimilates postmodernism in fiction to metafictional writing – the text echoes other texts and contexts of the past, into a Bakhtin-like dialogue: "Metafiction, as it has now been named, is fiction about fiction - that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity" (Hutcheon, 1980: 1). For Hutcheon, postmodernism is a return to self-conscious writing and the novel is a mere picture of this trait. Historiographic metafiction is Hutcheon's label either for "narrative fiction with several points of view" or for "fiction with a single point of view" that has control over the narration of history, a history that is legitimized by the act of writing. Just to mention John Barth, who "rewrites history, taking considerable liberty – sometimes inventing characters and events, sometimes parodically inverting the tone and the modes of his intertexts" (Cuddon 734), just as Auster and Foer do in their illusory quests for identity within the playfulness of their metafictions.

Even if Auster makes few allusions to the ethnic group with which he cannot help being identified, his cultural Jewish heritage is traceable in the tackling of certain themes that pertain to his cultural background. Conversely, Foer does not hide his cultural background; what is more, it stands as a testimony in many of his novels, and the attempts to recreate, to reinvent the mythical past of his relatives should be worth considering.

One might assume that, in that vast melting pot which is New York, members of the Jewish ethnic group will be naturally assimilated, and J.D. Salinger might be a good case in point. The grandson of a rabbi, the son of a prosperous Jewish merchant,

Salinger had seen both action in the Second World War (he had taken part in the historic Allied landing in Normandy in 1944 and had accompanied the US armed forces all the way to Germany) and the consequences of the Holocaust (the concentration camps). Is the fact of his complete avoidance of Jewish identity issues, what is more, avoidance of his witnessing the horrors of the Jewish persecution by the Nazis proof that he has “forgotten his Jewish identity roots,” so to speak? In his 1994 book on the Holocaust and its representation, Dominick LaCapra develops his own version of trauma theory, incorporating Sigmund Freud’s distinction between melancholia (in LaCapra, “acting out”) and mourning (in LaCapra, “working through”) in order to describe distinct responses to trauma (LaCapra 9). Trauma theory may apply to representations of trauma-related phenomena, of which one can distinguish between “acting out,” as the avoidance, the repression of traumatic memories, and “working through,” the attempt to make sense of them, to give them shape.

In this context, we can say that what J.D. Salinger does in his post-World War II literary career (especially in his *The Catcher in the Rye*) would illustrate “acting out,” or melancholia, while Foer’s and Auster’s individual reactions will be dealt with in the following chapters. From the outset, though, it is obvious that, had the two contemporary authors “acted out” in the current cultural environment in multi-ethnic, multi-cultural America, their literary echoes would have been smaller, the interest in such an investigation would have been considerably diminished.

What is more, although very much remote from the trauma and suffering of important chapters in the history of their ethnic group, Foer and Auster, not personally traumatized by specific events that affected them, or their dear ones, directly, by stories that they know and relate to, deal with aspects of collective, historic trauma that define their belonging to one distinct community. Martin S. Bergman and Milton E. Jucovy, in the preface to the book they edited on the generations of the Holocaust, define international Jews both as a “socioreligious group” and as a group “united by common trauma” (Bergman & Jucovy 5). Auster and Foer have to acknowledge a certain indebtedness to their ethnic origins and identity, so this “union by common trauma” cannot be dismissed.

This general definition (i.e., “Jews united by common trauma”) may be of some use. However, as already sketched above, how individual responses to individual and collective trauma turn into important identity markers is also influenced by the literary and cultural context in which new waves of writers appear and gain prominence. J.D.

Salinger, along with Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth are seen as part of a distinct group emerging in the 1950s, part of the so-called “coming of age in the literary mainstream,” less affected by this trauma, although historically closer to the Holocaust, while a more distinct Jewish note can be perceived by the authors of the *Encyclopedia of Jewish-American Literature* from the 1980s onward, under the label of “the Jewish-American literary resurgence” (Cronin and Berger xxii).

The first chapter of the dissertation, *Identity, Memory, Metafiction and the “Room of the Book”: Auster’s Early Work*, is further structured into four subchapters, each of them having at its core the analysis of the recurrent paradigms and patterns along the path of identity construction within the metafictional world of Auster’s first prose writings, i.e. his first autobiographical writing, the memoir *The Invention of Solitude* (1982) and his first novels gathered in *The New York Trilogy*. The first subchapter, *The Invention of Solitude or how to get out of, and into, the “room that is the book”* dwells on the father-son relation, which Auster depicts in his first memoir writing. It shows the complexity of this identity stance, in which the son tries to define himself in relation to his father, the invisible, inescapable *other* that will generate constant quests for the self and its related definitions. A special tool, which will be later adopted in his fiction writings, is the switch in narrative voice – from first person to third person narration that reflects a distancing of the subject from the self and its related perception as object, the narrators’ awareness of “the doubleness of the self, as both “narrator and narrated” (Hutcheon, 2001:38), very much like the Lacanian “mirror-stage.”

The following three subchapters (*City of Glass: writing as identity formation; Writing and seclusion: invisible selves in Ghosts; The Locked Room mystery and Pirandellian reflections of a late other*) deal with the various identity games, role-plays and interactional situations in the three novellas of *The New York Trilogy*, meta-detective stories that follow the protagonists’ identity quests in the process of self-definition. Also, they focus on the importance of intertextual play, self-referentiality and *otherness* in the complex process of self-construction. The starting point of the discussion is represented by Auster’s self-defining interview at the New York public library in which he defines himself through an enumeration of various self-definitory roles “American, New Yorker, wanderer, father, husband, writer, troublemaker” (Holdengräber). The same roles will be subsequently assumed, afterwards eluded, by

his protagonists, themselves nothing more than “troublemakers” in the complex identity patterns in which their creator casts them.

Both *The Invention of Solitude* and *The New York Trilogy* are memorable accounts of the writer’s endeavor to come to terms with his disquieted self/selves that will be continuously mirrored and multiplied in endless identity pursuits. Both writings reveal a constant preoccupation with the realm of *otherness* and the individual’s self-reflexive emphasis of the role of the *other* in asserting one’s identity. As it is claimed in both identity theory and in literary studies, the primary identity shaper is the context, the environment in which the individual interacts and particularly the interactional situation in which one is placed represents the primary tool in the molding of one’s self.

The second chapter, (*Identity and Otherness in Paul Auster’s Identity Metafiction*), additionally divided into four subchapters, explores Auster’s more recent fiction writings (*The Book of Illusions*, *Man in the Dark*, *Invisible*, *The Brooklyn Follies*). In the first subchapter, *Identity Games in Paul Auster’s The Book of Illusions*, the self-concept is instrumental in following the patterns of direct definition and indirect presentation and in revealing the character traits that make up the protagonists. First-person narrator David Zimmer is the one in charge with “characterization” of the other protagonists and his assessments of the stories in which he, Hector Mann (a long disappeared silent comedian) and Alma Grund feature as main characters. Hector Mann, the main character of the novel, is made up of a collage of press articles, films and stories told by the female character Alma that intersects for a short while with the narrator’s life. Thus, Hector features as a palimpsest-like self (Muşat 331) who is not directly involved in interactional situations, but is the “agent” of several stories told by other characters, more or less reliable. He is also subject to trauma and loss, which determines his hiding from public life and leading a life in seclusion, an invisible existence that will be unveiled by the I-narrator in his acts of legitimization of the silent actor.

The second subchapter, *Identity, Human Pathos and Metafiction*, brings into discussion various interactional situations of the narrator, Nathaniel Glass, for whom the decision to move in to Brooklyn while “searching for a quiet place to die” amounts to a change in “luck” and old and new acquaintances are to bring into foreground the protagonist’s features, through direct definition, but also indirect presentation. Also, the change in scenery brought a change in roles, thus the narrator abandons his previous “father” and “husband” roles and enters in new ones, that of uncle to his nephew, Tom,

and to his niece, Lucy. Within the various scenes depicted in the novel, one of Tom's friends, Harry Brightman, also his boss, comes up with an interesting method of escaping from one's daily mishaps into the "Hotel Existence," a safe place where one can retreat and find comfort in the realm of fantasy.

Having as a point of departure a certain *mal de vivre* in contemporary America, the primary concern of the third subchapter entitled *Fictions that Kill in Man in the Dark* is to render the entanglements of August Brill and his imaginary hyperreal worlds he projects as a surrogate to the unbearable everyday life, in which, together with his daughter and granddaughter, the protagonist is trapped in the sense of failure and anguish, after experiencing the loss of the dear ones (August just lost his wife, his daughter was deserted by her husband and Katya, Brill's granddaughter, lost her boyfriend in the Iraq war) and after experiencing physical wounding (August lost his leg in a car accident) which turns into an existential wound. By "working through" their traumas (through film watching and story-telling), the characters manage to "break the nutshell" of their solitude in which they were previously confined and assert their agency and selfhood.

The fourth subchapter – *The Visibility of Paul Auster's Identity Metafiction in Invisible* - highlights the powerful autobiographical elements transposed in scenes in which indirect presentation plays a great part in foregrounding the protagonists' identity, but also interactional situations and direct presentations made by first-person narrations reveal the great human potential one has. It is particularly the event in which Rudolf Born, the dark *other*, stabs an Afro-American which supposedly wanted to rob him and Adam Walker, the hero of the novel, that will turn the latter from following his student dream of becoming a writer, thus in affirming his individual identity as an artist, into an activist for social rights, thus identifying with the group and casting off his egocentric initial beliefs. Eventually, the protagonist of the novel vanishes and the other narrator-characters are to account for his untruthfulness and imagined interactions, which turns into question Adam's reliability and his constructed identity as a whole.

In the third chapter, dedicated to the younger novelist, Jonathan Safran Foer, the two subchapters of which it is made will attempt to tackle the two novels – *Everything is Illuminated* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* – with two distinct approaches of trauma-related events – one obliquely evokes the Holocaust, the other – the 9/11 attack on the WTC twin towers. One might expect sorrowful disasters and deep bemoaning attached to the protagonists. Of course, part of the mourning cannot be

avoided, and it is reflected at the meta-linguistic level, through gaps, silences and palimpsestic narration, but the games, the never-ending inventions the protagonists come with – both Alex Perchov, in *Everything is Illuminated*, through his funny, very idiosyncratic English, and Oskar Schell, the young boy who, in his autistic-like manner, defines himself as inventor, amateur entomologist, collector of curious things (“rare coins,” “butterflies that died natural deaths,” among others), transfer the seriousness of the context to another level. The serious investigations, as it will be shown, are “muffled” by the comic inventions, by the child’s naïve style, by his idealism, in Oskar’s detective-like quest for the key that does not open any door, on the one hand, while in *Everything is Illuminated* it is camouflaged by Alex’s creative mix of high and low English, in his pursuit for the vanished Jewish community of Trachimbrod, along his Jewish friend, Jonathan Safran Foer. The smaller scope of the investigation of his work is largely due to the fact that, although already an established literary author, he still has half a lifetime to catch up with Auster, a novelist with a long writing career.

Both Auster and Foer are indebted to their ethnic heritage, which is neither masked nor rejected, as other American writers of Jewish origin did some decades before them. Instead, as it will be shown, they present it as an asset in a multicultural America, where one’s being different is not to be blamed or discriminated against in any mode. The Jewish culture serves as a background against which the filmic narratives unfold, as both authors have a special technique of depicting facts accurately and creating the “illusion” that the film unfolds before our eyes. A challenging tool consists in the cast of intermedial features – photographs, film descriptions, stage directions, which also feature as consistent tools in revealing the identity/identities of the characters. As it will be shown, along with intertextuality and increased self-reflexivity, the two cosmopolitan artists give preference to imaginative language games and comic interludes, combining realist documentation with magic realist, experimental exuberance. The suffering and its attending trauma will be there all right, but especially in the gaps, the significant losses and silences, and the final attitudes and gestures of such characters as Alexander Perchov’s grandfather, himself not a Jew, but part of a complex story of complicity and guilt. Both Auster and Foer approach their ethnic heritage with the same tool – narrative language – and they integrate in their writings different facets of their ethnic experience, asserting but at the same time eluding the “Jewish label,” despite evident features of the Holocaust trauma their characters exhibit, but rejoicing the universality of their experiences.

While examining the various patterns of construction of identity within Foer's and Auster's metafiction, important theories from identity theory & social identity theory, postmodernist theory, as well as narrative studies have been found useful in assessing what has been identified as the dual structure of the two authors' identity metafictions, responding to emerging ethnic identity compulsions in multicultural America, combining strong autobiographical influences with metafictional playfulness and experiment.

The Jewish ethnic background, a common feature of the two authors, has been widely exploited in their metafictional stories. I have discovered that it is particularly by means of mythology or mythotherapy that they are trying to recover bonds to their ethnic roots, as part of their belonging to "the Jewish American literary resurgence." The loss and the attending trauma related to the Holocaust memory cannot be eluded. Of course, the traumatic background is just a pretext for the exploration of the two authors' ethnic heritage, reinterpreted and redesigned in a typical postmodern way, mixing magic realism (in Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, a highly misleading title for a novel about the incursion of a young Jewish-American in search of his family roots back in Western Ukraine) with metafictional games (both in *The New York Trilogy*, in which Paul Auster, the author, steps into the novel and becomes a mere character, in typical metafictional fashion, as well as in *The Book of Illusions*, in which the narrator as monstrator, by means of "showing," reveals significant elements of the plot that make it highly reliable, just to be subverted subsequently by unveiling the very relativity of what has been previously stated).

The novels, as it has been shown throughout this thesis, center on the problematic issues of the individual and group identity within the challenging background provided by the American melting pot, but also by the metafictional frame, on the limits, but also endless possibilities of what has been defined as "identity metafiction," a common feature, a label that could be assigned to all the books analyzed. Metafiction, as conceived by Patricia Waugh, but also by Linda Hutcheon, is a highly challenging pattern of writing that dwells a lot on its own process of making, manifesting a high degree of self-reflexivity, in an intense endeavor of the narrator-as-author to claim the works' authenticity. In most novels, identity quests are central. Identity is, in the postmodernist interpretation that has been largely exposed in the introductory chapter, a palimpsest of several identities, an overlapping of roles, of selves that converge to the eventual unique individual that is liable to permanent

fragmentation, dissociation, just to become whole again and again, to the reader's delight as well as challenge in the act of interpretation. Identity within metafiction is, apparently, a fragile, yet definable topic, shaped around the playful discourse at times mirroring reality, other times, fiction. The protagonists of the metafictional writings that make the subject matter of this thesis are, by no means, aware of their feeble condition, of being mere objects of a fictional world that is, nonetheless, as reliably as possible rendered within the metafictional realm of the book. It is indeed the permanent transgression of barriers, of realms, that makes the very discontinuity of the text particularly the mirage within which the characters "float."

The individual and comparative analysis of the two authors revealed a particular common feature, though the two writers are divided by exactly thirty years, nevertheless both bearing strong influences of the postmodernist/post-postmodernist discourse. Intermediality, the fusion of several media within one artistic product, as well as several cross-medial creative artifacts, has been found suitable to explore the complex meta-detective identity pursuits in which the protagonists, postmodern wandering Jews, engage in. By fusing media transposition, intermedial reference and media combinations (in a narrow classification made by Irina Rajewsky) within their artistic products they actually re-write complex stories following their protagonists in Quixotic quests in search of life's aim. Despite the apparent aimless pursuits, in most of the novels the end brings a positive return, the protagonists overcome their sense of helplessness and existential traumas, "working through" the losses incurred. They all experience some sort of traumatic event in their lives (death of some relative, divorce, loss of the job, identity loss) that makes them reconsider their priorities. Most of them change their "superficial, surface-based existences" and self-reflexively turn inwardly, so that by self-analyzing themselves and the others they would find the internal resorts to continue their ephemeral existences with a positive turn.

The losses incurred by the protagonists determine, from a psychological point of view, also the loss of the role attached to each identity – thus the loss of the wife, the child, or the parent induces a destabilization in one of the social roles the individual plays as well as in the identity standard, subsequently developing difficulties in relating to the new situation and the loss of the role of husband, parent or child, respectively. The primary means of coping or "working through" the traumas the protagonists employ are basically common in Auster's and Foer's novels and they are presented as intermedial intrusions, but also in social activities, or so: books or letter writing,

storytelling, film watching/making/analyzing, wandering through the streets of the city, lying and inventing, making up stories in order to put away dealing with, confronting directly their own traumas; the above mentioned “coping strategies” are epitomes of media combinations, media references as well as media transpositions.

While analyzing the various patterns employed by the two authors within their identity metafictions, an important tool has been found, along intertextuality and self-reflexivity, in intermediality, which is greatly employed by the two “troublemakers” in artistic manifestations that combine intermedial reference with transmediality, media combinations and media transpositions. In Auster’s, as well as in Foer’s metafictions, as already mentioned in the chapters dealing with the individual analysis of the novels of the two authors, intertermedial - as well as intertextual - disruptions serve as a necessary playful “treatment” for the alienated protagonists in search of identity. Nathan Glass, the protagonist in Auster’s *The Brooklyn Follies*, is at a loss, without hope to live much more than within the end of the year, distressed as he is after his divorce and going through the physical pain caused by his lung cancer. Following his daughter’s advice, to find something to keep himself going, “to get involved in something, to invent a project to myself” (BF 2), despite his initial rejection of all that was female advice (a reflection of the trauma caused by his divorce), Nathan admits to himself that inventing a project (*The Book of Human Folly*) alongside escape in social gatherings will help him get through his initial sense of helplessness.

Both Auster’s and Foer’s identity metafictions are intertextual, palimpsestic artifacts, fusing various media in order to convey an eclectic, yet balanced image of how their protagonists interact in various situations, be they traumatic or not. Both are preoccupied with turning their works into films, thus turning the scriptic discourse into visual and acoustic rendering. Moreover, they both engage with intermedial reference processes in order to present how their protagonists “work through” their traumatic events – by getting them to engage in film watching, book reading or writing, letter-writing or mere walking in the city, the protagonists are made to interact with one another and share important ideas that affect their salience hierarchy processes, often affirming their humanity and dignity, as well as life’s worth. In the complex process of identity definition and representation, the metafictional realm induces the hybrid, multifaceted, palimpsestic character to identity which is perceived as a work-in-progress that has to be understood diachronically, in the process of continuous becoming, a permanent exchange between the self and the environment. The characters’

and authors' identities, against the metafictional, self-referential background, are a conjunction of salient features, role negotiation, depersonalization and self-verification processes, the intersection of various narrative "brushes" that "paint" the protagonists and eventually the reader is in charge of reconstructing the character, out of the raw content of the fictionalized world of words, but, equally importantly, in a vast process of contextualizing it in relation to the real world of the authors and readers, engaged in the process of literary communication.

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