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"Shipwreck in the Heart of the City". Robinson Crusoe in Paul Auster's Early Prose

Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, first published in 1985, is usually read as a postmodern detective novel. Its protagonist, Daniel Quinn, has been hired to tail a certain Peter Stillman Sr. who has been convicted for conducting a cruel experiment with his son, Peter Stillman Jr., but is now released from prison and suspected to take revenge on him. The experiment consisted in isolating his son from human contact in order to find out what 'natural' language the child would develop on its own. However, Quinn soon loses sight of Stillman Sr.; instead, the case leads him to rediscover his own identity, history and relation to language. As it turns out, he himself once had a son who died in infancy and the idea of Peter Stillman Jr.'s isolation reminds him of his little coffin. Later on, while doggedly observing the entrance of Stillman Sr.'s apartment building, Quinn himself becomes more and more isolated from mankind. In the end, he returns into Stillman Jr.'s room, where he spends his days writing in his notebook and creating a new language. When the last pages are filled, he vanishes without a trace, leaving only his red notebook behind. Quinn's case thus evolves into an inquiry into language and the novel abounds in references to language philosophy in general and religious interpretation in particular. The text's meta-literary level is furthermore reinforced by the fact that Quinn himself has been a writer of mystery novels and accepts the case under the name of Paul Auster, PI.

As a postmodern detective novel, the text circles around its genre, deconstructing topical notions such as the 'case' and citing the commonplace language of hardboiled detectives as well as Poe's archetypical Dupin. Furthermore, the novel also refers to completely different texts and genres: Milton's Christian epic *Paradise Lost*, for example, is allotted an important position in the 6th chapter with its speculations about a regaining of the Adamic language. The allusions to the puritan poet Milton exemplifies how Auster synthesizes a postmodern inquiry into genre and language with references to "premodern

moral questions"[1], highlighting interesting analogies between post- and premodern practices of reading and writing. Thus, Milton's reading and rewriting of the Bible is mirrored in Stillman Sr.'s treatise on the myths of Paradise and of Babel. An even more astonishing example are the subtle references to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the best-selling puritan "spiritual autobiography" about the survival of a castaway on a remote Caribbean island, which have not yet been accorded scholarly attention. Although they don't seem to be of much significance at first sight, they, too, build on the relationship between puritan and postmodern reading and writing. In this paper, I will unfold the many parallels between Auster's and Defoe's first novels and show how Auster reads *Robinson Crusoe* as an exemplary figure for existential solitude and artistic creativity. His postmodern view on Defoe's novel also helps to highlight fissures in Robinson's seemingly complete "self-composure" via autobiography, while the colonial aspects of Defoe's novel resonate with Auster's postcolonial critique of America's puritan origins. I will conclude with a glance at Auster's references to *Robinson Crusoe* in his other early works, especially his autofictional text *Invention of Solitude*, in which he depicts the artist as "shipwreck[ed] in the heart of the city" (74) and uses *Robinson Crusoe* to construct a biographical mythology aiming at creative authorship.

1. *Robinson Crusoe* and *City of Glass*

The two explicit references to *Robinson Crusoe* punctuate the beginning and ending of *City of Glass*. In chapter 4, Quinn's earlier research about experiments with children is recapitulated. Already Herodotus narrates anecdotes about children who are raised in isolation in order to detect their "natural language" (33). From these cases, Quinns reflections turn to "cases of accidental isolation" as "sailors marooned on islands" (34)–– people like Alexander Selkirk "who had lived for four years alone on an island off the coast of Chile and who, according to the ship captain who rescued him in 1708, 'had so much

[1] Dennis Barone: Introduction: Paul Auster and the postmodern novel. In: Barone (ed.): Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1995, pp. 1-27, p. 7.

forgot his language for want of use, that we could scarce understand him.'"[2] Like any decent literary scholar, Quinn also knows that Selkirk is thought "to be the model for Robinson Crusoe." In Defoe's novel, however, the protagonist and narrator is far from losing his capability of speech. Quite on the contrary, he maintains his power of reasoning and is able to compose his life story as a meaningful whole. At least on surface level the novel upholds Robinson's ability to remain civilized against all odds, even in a scenario that comes close to an uncivilized 'state of nature.'[3]

The second reference to *Robinson Crusoe* occurs near the novel's end. Having observed the entrance to Stillman's apartment continuously for months while hiding in an alleyway, Quinn's being is reduced to its existential minimum. His hair is uncut, his clothes are disheveled, and his body reeks. Also, he has learned to live on a minimum of food and sleep so as to leave his post as little as possible. When he has to go to the bank in order to cash a check, he catches his reflection in a shop mirror. It takes a moment before he recognizes himself. Accepting that it was "more than likely that this was Quinn," he studies his appearance: "More than anything else, he reminded himself of Robinson Crusoe, and he marveled at how quickly these changes had taken place in him" (NY 117f.). Again, the reference is quite understandable, but not convincing in the end, for the same reasons mentioned above: While it is true that Robinson ridicules his strange appearance, he learns how to make clothes from goatskin (including a hat and an umbrella; RC 97-99; 108f.). He is far from having "turned into a bum," as Quinn has (NY 117), as he struggles to uphold the distinction between nature and civilization. Quinn, on the other hand, reacts to his appearance with indifference: "He looked at this new Quinn and shrugged. It did not really matter" (118).

Thus, the contrast between Defoe's and Auster's Robinson couldn't be sharper. In fact, the first reference alludes to this fact by quoting one of the many circulating reports on castaways who lost their language, identity and (civilized) humanity. In addition to having lost his language, Alexander Selkirk appears as a "Man cloth'd in Goat-Skins" and "look'd

[2] The quote is from Woodes Rogers account in *A Cruising Voyage round the World* (London 1712), abridged in Defoe 1994, pp. 230-235, here p. 234. In ambivalent cases, I mark quotes from *Robinson Crusoe* with the key "RC" and quotes from *The New York Trilogy* with the key "NY."

[3] Cf. the illuminating comparison between Selkirk and Crusoe in Alexander Kling: Unter Wölfen. Geschichten der Zivilisation und der Souveränität vom 30-jährigen Krieg bis zur Französischen Revolution. [Among Wolves. Histories of Civilization and Sovereignty from the Thirty Years' War to the French Revolution.] Freiburg i. Br.: Rombach 2019, pp. 313-322, especially p. 321.

wilder than the first Owners of them"[4]. Defoe, however, manipulates these reports in order to portray Robinson as a proto-capitalist individual who is even more successful in his isolation. But the "economic individualism"[5] of Defoe's prospering protagonist also has a back side, namely, the hero's profound loneliness, his inability to knit social ties and his restless nomadism. Building on Robinson's statement that his story has a historical and an allegorical meaning[6], Watt reads it as an allegorical portrayal of its historical author. The isolation on the "isle of despair" then appears as an image for the existential solitude coming with the rise of capitalistic economy. Thus, he quotes the first essay of the *Serious Reflections* (1720), where Robinson meditates precisely on solitude and isolation: "Man may be properly said to be *alone* in the Midst of the Crowds […] our Passions are all exercised in Retirement; we love, we hate, we covet, we enjoy, all in Privacy and Solitude," without being able to truly communicate with others: "'tis for our selves we enjoy, and for our selves we suffer" (58). Understanding Robinson as Defoe's mouthpiece, Watt reads the essay as Defoe's description of his own loneliness, universalized into the assertion that man is an "island of despair." While proudly fostering civilization and economic success, then, Robinson is marked by a fundamental lack that turns him into a "universal individual."

The theme of isolation and loneliness connects *City of Glass* and Auster's poetics with *Robinson Crusoe* on a deeper level than the explicit references to the novel. Quinn has lost both wife and son––and from the very beginning of the novel, he is in the process of losing himself, too. This experience of loss cuts him off from any meaningful social relations, while the two families that he gets acquainted with––the Stillmans and the Austers–– appear as mirror-images of his own lost family. New York, the "City of Glass," is a hall of mirrors in which the isolated individual is reflected everywhere without meeting anyone else [7]. In this sense, Quinn is right if he identifies himself with Robinson Crusoe, who according to Watt represents the modern individual in his restless loneliness. On a more general level, Auster comments upon the notion of solitude in similar words as Robinson,

[4] Rogers in Daniel Defoes *Robinson Crusoe* (1994), p. 231.
[5] Ian Watt: The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. London: Chatto & Windus, 1963, p. 67.
[6] Robinson in his preface to *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1720). Edited by George Alexander Starr, Pickering & Chatto, London, 2008.*, also in Defoe 1994, p. 240.
[7] Norma Rowen: The Detective in Search of the Lost Tongue of Adam: Paul Auster's City Of Glass. Critique 32.4, 1991, p. 224-235, p. 227.

describing it as "one of the conditions of being human:" "even if we're surrounded by others, we essentially live our lives alone." [8] Auster understands solitude not as a consequence of capitalism, but as an existential fact: As a self-conscious being, man is always detached from the social reality he lives in. Identity is constructed in an "endless monologue" of the self––a continuous narration that "takes place in absolute solitude."

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Beyond solitude, narration is another trait that connects Quinn to Robinson, for both are persons who have written their lives, albeit in different ways. As the full title of *Robinson Crusoe* claims, the report of the castaway's "strange adventures" was "written by himself" and thus is a (fictional) autobiography; insofar as it proves his being a self-made man, Robinson can claim to be his own author.[9] Still, his report is full of contradictions and inconsistencies that can be read as traces of the process of self-composition in hindsight. The first example that comes to mind are the multiple versions of his shipwreck: Robinson first narrates his arrival on the island in retrospect; then he imagines what he would have written had he kept a diary from the first day on; and finally he presents the report he wrote some weeks after his arrival. Hulme accordingly reads the countless inconsistencies between the versions as proof of the "desperate difficulties […] in composing Crusoe's self" (193). But also the diary itself––a fictional testimony embedded in a fictional testimony––abounds in grammatical traces that reveal its manufacturing after the fact. Several diary entries, for example, are grammatically connected to each other and form a narration that can only have been told in retrospect. Swenson understands these inconsistencies as deliberate traces of the writing process in which Robinson struggles to construct himself as a homogenous identity[10]. As the text bears traces of different storytellers (young Crusoe vs. hindsight Crusoe), questioning the fictional status of the experiencing and/or writing subjects leads into a logical maëlstrom comparable to Quinn's acting as Paul Auster, PI.

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[8] Interview, p. 307.

[9] Robinson's life story begins with his departure from his parents. On the island, his parrot echoes his name as "Robin," as if to suppress his genealogical descent from his parents (103f.). As "governor" of his island, Robinson conceives himself as father of his subjects, especially of Friday. The father-son-relationship is also central to Auster, who states that his literary authorship began with the loss of his father. This theme recurs in all novels of the *Trilogy.*

[10] Cf. Rivka Swenson: Robinson Crusoe and the Form of the New Novel, in: The Cambridge Companion to Robinson Crusoe. Edited by John Richetti, Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2018, pp. 16-31, p. 21.

In *City of* Glass, the relationship between self and story is even more complex. Quinn is a formerly ambitious young poet who has given up writing poetry after the death of his wife and son. Now he sells cheap detective novels under the pseudonym William Wilson. Doubting his own existence, feeling insecure and wounded, Quinn lives in the persona of his hardboiled detective Max Work. "He had, of course, long ago stopped thinking of himself as real. If he lived now in the world at all, it was only at one remove, through the imaginary person of Max Work" (9). In the following story, instead of imagining another case, Quinn acts as a private detective under the pseudonym Paul Auster––his fictions have become real. He takes detailed notes while on the job and even keeps a journal in which he scrutinizes his identity (40). This notebook forms the groundwork of the novel as a fictional biography––or so the anonymous narrator claims in his epilogue: "I have followed the red notebook as closely as I could […] There were moments when the text was difficult to decipher, but I have done my best with it and have refrained from any interpretation" (130). Both *Robinson Crusoe* and *City of Glass* can thus be considered as dealing with fictional life-writing. In the following paragraphs, I will explore this analogy further by focusing on puritan practices of reading and writing in both novels.

One of the books that Robinson salvages from the ship is a Bible. Although he is not religious, he starts reading in it when he becomes seriously sick for the first time. The way Robinson reads the Bible is significant: In a common form of bibliomancy, he opens the book at random and reads the first line that meets his eye. In this case, it is Psalm 50:15: "Call on me in the Day of Trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify me" (69). Instead of reading on, Robinson stays with this line that seemed "very apt to my Case," although he hasn't been delivered yet. During his recovery, he repeatedly returns to this line and unfolds its different levels of meaning. First, he understands the line as a promise of deliverance that he prays God to keep in the future (70); then he sees his recovery as deliverance from sickness and understands that God already held his promise, while he, Robinson, failed to thank him for it (70). In his final reading, Robinson turns to the spiritual level of the phrase. What God promises is not rescuing him from the island, but to deliver him from his past sinful life and to give him repentance (71). Thus, Robinson reads the Bible as a text that is addressed directly to him and whose meaning unfolds in the process of living. Stunned by the psalm's reference to his biography, Robinson accepts God's promise and asks him for forgiveness––a scene that literary scholars call 'conversion,' although Robinson is not altogether steadfast in his beliefs. What may at first

seem mere coincidence thus becomes providence in retrospect as the Biblical text reaches into Robinson's life and rewrites it. Although this reading practice has a long history in general––one thinks of Augustine's famous conversion by a haphazard line of St Paul's––, it is connected to puritanic religiosity more particularly.

As Hunter has shown, Robinson exhibits in his report various traits of puritan religiosity. The most important one in the present context is the scrupulous accounting of every day's work and experiences. Keeping a detailed diary is the precondition for scrutinizing one's biography for traces of divine providence. Robinson has a whole theory about divine "secret Hint[s]" and "secret Intimations of Providence" (127). The problem is how to identify and interpret them. One strategy would be to compare events of one's life with the stories and parables of the testaments. That conforms with conventional typological interpretation, but modifies it insofar as it employs derived forms of analogy and strengthens a subjective element. While conventional typology establishes intra-biblical correspondences in order to prove Jesus the fulfillment of the Old Testament's allegorical promise, puritan reading transcends salvific history and extends into profane individual biography. This heightens the level of subjectivity, since the reading subject simultaneously is the object of interpretation and its product.[11]

According to Hunter, *Robinson Crusoe* and the modern fictional novel spring from this paradoxical tension of puritan reading. The prolific genres of spiritual biography and autobiography strengthen the impression that in the end, typological analogies always depend on rhetoric. Hence, precisely the struggle to recreate a divine framework for one's life leads to the awareness that in the end, the signs of divine providence are just as arbitrary as any other: they, too, have to be interpreted by humans and in human language. As *Robinson Crusoe* clearly cites genres of spiritual biography and confessional writing, one of its roots reaches into this gap between divine signs and human understanding. The traces of rewriting that I have mentioned above then indicate the novel's awareness of this productive linguistic discrepancy.

On a personal level, Robinson draws parallels between himself and various Biblical figures such as Jonah and the prodigal son. But Puritans also applied typology on a national level, identifying themselves with the people of Israel, their emigration with the Exodus and America with the promised land. Here, typology legitimizes the colonization

[11] Cf. Paul Hunter: The Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe's Emblematic Method and Quest for Form in Robinson Crusoe, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1966, Chapter 5.

of the New World and its native people. However, while *Robinson Crusoe* certainly is part of the colonial discourse, it does not openly employ typology to justify Crusoe's occupation of the island. As the island is uninhabited, there is no legal need to back Robinson's claim of possession. Still, as Robinson stages himself as absolute sovereign, he draws on biblical material. His description of the site where he will later establish his 'summer residence,' for example, draws a comparison with the garden of Eden: Standing upon a hill, close to a "little Spring of fresh water," Robinson oversees "the Country [that] appear'd so fresh, so green, so flourishing […] that it looked like a planted Garden" (73). Not only does Robinson cite Genesis 2:8, he also stages himself as Milton's Adam who stands on the "verdurous wall of Paradise" to survey "his nether empire neighbouring round"[12]. Building on the parallel between Robinson and Adam, the ensuing claim of possession––"that I was King and Lord of all this Country indefeasibly, and had a right of possession; and if I could convey it, I might have it in Inheritance" (73)––recalls Robert Filmer's grounding of legitimate government not on consent but on God's gift to Adam of total dominion.[13] In a similar vein, also Rousseau draws a parallel between Adam and Robinson as absolute sovereigns––'absolute' in the literal sense that they are each the sole inhabitant of their kingdom.[14] While *Robinson Crusoe* certainly doesn't develop a consistent theory of government, passages like this one blend the island's 'state of nature' with a political paradise and thus recall the puritan hope to regain it in the New World.

This is another point where *Robinson Crusoe* and *City of Glass* intersect. In chapter six, Quinn reads a treatise by Stillman Sr. on the myths of paradise and of Babel. Stillman contends "that the first men to visit America believed they had accidentally found paradise" (41), while some hoped "that America would become an ideal theocratic state, a veritable City of God" (42). This passage obviously quotes Augustine's famous treatise, but it also resonates with the novel's title, "City of Glass" being an attribute for the heavenly Jerusalem in *Revelation* 21. Furthermore, the passage also recalls the puritan hope to build a "city upon a hill" in Massachusetts. The phrase refers to Jesus's Sermon on

[12] Paradise Lost 4.143, John Milton: Paradise Lost. Edited by John Leonard. New York: Penguin 2000, p. 145; cf. Rebecca Bullard: "Politics, History, and the Robinson Crusoe Story", The Cambridge Companion to Robinson Crusoe. Edited by John Richetti, Cambridge UP, 2018, pp. 84-96, p. 87.
[13] Bullard: Politics, p. 88.
[14] Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Du contrat social ou Principes du droit politique. [On the Social Contract; or, Principles of Political Rights.] Œuvres complètes. Edited by Bernard Gagnebin. Vol. 3. Paris: Gallimard 1964, 1,2; p. 354.

the Mount, in which he tells his audience that they are "the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Mt 5:14). The phrase's first political usage is attributed to John Winthrop who employed it in a sermon before puritan colonists to settle the area of Boston, which was called Trimountaine at the time, referring to the 'three mountains' of the region. In applying Jesus's words to his congregation, Winthrop reminds them to build an exemplary society on those mountains, but he also draws a typological analogy between Jesus's sermon and his own. Both aspects contribute to the phrase's popularity in contemporary Republican and Democratic political discourse. Having been forgotten for centuries, Winthrop's sermon resurfaces during the Cold War and is retrospectively credited as the foundational document of the idea of American exceptionalism.[15]

Reading on in Stillman's treatise, Quinn learns about the fall from grace and its linguistic consequence, the loss of the Adamitic language. As a proof, Stillman refers to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, claiming that every keyword of this epic has both a pre- and a postlapsarian meaning. If one were to regain the unambiguous Adamitic language, Stillman speculates, one could hope to reenter paradise as well. At this point, Stillman introduces an obscure text by a person called Henry Dark who supposedly was Milton's secretary and emigrated to the New World after his employer's death. Dark employs and radicalizes puritan typological reading strategies while writing "in bold, Miltonic prose." He reads the story of Babel as a historical account of the Old Testament that points towards a fulfillment in the future. For in Dark's mind, the first tower of Babel had to be destroyed and the people had to be dispersed because God's order to populate the whole world had not been fulfilled yet. Now that the whole world was discovered, this would soon no longer be true and a new tower could be built. If the construction of the first was followed by the confusion of language, the second would lead to a unification of languages and peoples. Like Noah's ark, the tower would provide a cell for every individual; whoever spent forty nights in its darkness would be reborn and speak the prelapsarian language. Needless to say, Henry Dark identifies Boston as the site for the new tower. As to the chronology, he calculates that construction work will begin in 1960, for then 340 years will have passed after the arrival of the Mayflower at Plymouth––just as many as have passed between the Flood and the building of the first tower. "For surely it was the

[15] Cf. Christopher Leise: The Story upon a Hill. Tuscaloosa, U of Alabama P, 2017, 8f.; Sylvia Söderlind: Humpty Dumpty in New York: Language and Regime Change in Paul Auster's City of Glass. MFS 57.1, 2011, pp. 1-16, p. 8; p. 14.

Puritans, God's newly chosen people, who held the destiny of mankind in their hands. Unlike the Hebrews, who had failed God by refusing to accept his son, these transplanted Englishmen would write the final chapter of history before heaven and earth were joined at last" (48).

In radicalizing typological reading strategies––projecting Biblical events into an 'antitypical' future, treating antitheses as analogies, combining fragments of different stories, and constructing chronological correspondences––, Henry Dark lets us feel their ultimate arbitrariness. Furthermore, the problem of human language interpreting divine scripture is sharpened by Dark's notion that paradise has to be built by human hands (46). However, Dark's calculations are also very close to Robinson Crusoe who notes a "strange Concurrence of Days in the various Providences which befel me" (RC 97), having been born on the same day that he arrived on his island. Does this mean that his shipwreck actually is a rebirth? His 'conversion' would certainly have one think so. In any case, Henry Dark's life exhibits 'strange concurrences,' too, since he is born "on the day of Charles I's execution" (45) and wrote his treatise in the year 1690, a chronological mirror-type of 1960, the promised year of the new tower. Dark's prophecy thus extends into the novel's present, for it is in 1960 that Stillman Sr. imprisoned his son in the dark cell of his room.

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It is only later that Quinn, talking to Stillman in the Mayflower Café, learns about the real identity of Henry Dark. For Stillman admits that he invented both name and person in order to put his own ideas forward. Instead of reading Dark's typologic speculations, he wrote them himself––an inversion that can be read as a stab at typology's belatedness: "In typology, the copy actually produces and thus precedes the model".[16]

A similar entanglement of reading and writing occurs in Quinn's life. In the traditional detective novel, the mystery is solved by reading the traces correctly. Thus, the criminal can be equated to the author, whereas the detective mirrors the reader. In Auster, on the contrary, the detective and his work are compared to the writer: "In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable" (8). If the detective takes the position of the criminal or author, however, he risks to embroil himself in a self-made mystery. This is precisely what happens to Quinn while working on Stillman's case: Instead of reading the mystery, he ends up writing it.

[16] Leise: The Story upon a Hill, p. 135.

Quinn reads Stillman's treatise in order to become like him, for as a reader of Poe's he knows that the solution lies in "an identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent" (40). One can read one's antagonist best if one knows how he thinks. The only problem is that in Quinn's case, the reading involves writing: Following Stillman on his way through the city, Quinn logs everything he sees Stillman do, hoping to discover "a coherence, an order, a source of motivation" beneath "the infinite facade of gestures, tics, and silences" (66). But Stillman's actions don't seem to make sense: He wanders aimlessly through New York, collecting abject things and jotting down notes. It is only after some days, rereading his notes and retracing Stillman's path on a city map, that Quinn discovers some sense in it: Each day's path resembles alphabetic characters that hover between letter and image. Poring over his drawings, Quinn can't be sure whether he was "scribbling nonsense" (68) or reading a secret message (70f.). By way of conjecture he makes out that the 'letters' may read "OWEROFBAB" and that they can be read as "THE TOWER OF BABEL," but "this implied only one thing:" "that […] he wanted there to be a sense to [Stillman's actions], no matter how obscure" (68). His reading of Stillman has become a writing, steered by his desire to make sense of his findings. In any case, Quinn responds to this close engagement with his antagonist by unconsciously identifying with him: "In his dream, which he later forgot, he found himself in the town dump of his childhood, sifting through a mountain of rubbish" (71).

Afterwards, in his conversation with Stillman in the Mayflower Café, Quinn learns that Stillman sees himself as Adam in a fallen Eden. His job is to invent a new language, words that would finally correspond to "the broken people, to the broken things, the broken thoughts" (77). Therefore, he roams the streets, collects garbage, and invents new names for the things he picks up. After having lost sight of Stillman, Quinn similarly wanders through the streets of New York and studies the "broken people" (77)––the outcasts of society ranging "from the merely destitute to the wretchedly broken" (106). Afterwards he reflects about them in his notebook, trying to find a language for those who have no voice of their own. But in dealing with the homeless and poor, he also deals with himself, as the man denying the death of a relative (108) and Quinn's sudden urge to lose himself in the music of a clarinetist suggest (106). Also, a few pages later, Quinn becomes one of those he studied, as he lives in a dumpster opposite of Stillman's apartment and transforms into Robinson Crusoe, the castaway.

This juxtaposition of Quinn and Robinson, the outcast and the castaway, underlines a difference between Auster and Defoe that I mentioned earlier: Robinson takes pride in his cultural knowledge, he is not a liminal figure like the homeless people in Auster. This position is rather filled by the 'cannibals' and 'barbarians' whom Robinson meets in the second part of the novel. As eaters of human flesh, the cannibals seem to be inhuman, and Robinson's first impulse is to kill them all like beasts (122). In the colonial discourse, the 'cannibals' of the Caribbean are proof that the inhabitants of the New World are not "living in prelapsarian innocence" but are "devils in the form of men," as also Stillman notes in his treatise (NY 42). Upon further reflection, however, Robinson doubts that he is in a position to judge them, as they obviously follow other laws than he does (RC 123-125). This means that the barbarian, while being a figure for the outcast and abject, is constructed from the inside of society and its norms.[17]

What is even more remarkable, Robinson takes his reflection one step further by stating that had he killed the 'cannibals,' he would have been no better than "the *Spaniards* in all their Barbarities practis'd in *America*" (124). For the Spaniards "destroy'd Millions of these People, who however they were Idolaters and Barbarians, and had several bloody and barbarous Rites in their Customs, such as sacrificing human Bodies to their Idols, were yet, as to the *Spaniards*, very innocent People". Hence "the very Name of a Spaniard is reckon'd to be frightful and terrible to all People of Humanity" (125). Robinson's reflection reminds us of how the notion of the 'barbarian' serves to cover up the barbarities of civilization (cf. also Stillman, 42). On a closer look, however, the reflection on barbarism serves as a pretext, too: By calling the Spaniards barbarians, he acknowledges that Europeans, too, behave like barbarians, while at the same time distinguishing himself from both Spaniards and 'cannibals.' The barbaric Spaniards serve as a "buffer zone" between civilization and its other: "it is now not Crusoe but the Spaniards who are uncomfortably cannibal-like"[18]. Seeing through this distancing gesture, recent studies on 'cannibalism' in *Robinson Crusoe* ask to what extent Robinson

[17] Cf. Markus Winkler (ed.): Barbarian: Explorations of a Western Concept in Theory, Literature, and the Arts. Stuttgart: Metzler 2018.
[18] James H. Maddox: Interpreter Crusoe. ELH 51.1, 1981, pp. 33-52, p. 38; Peter Hulme: Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797. New York: Routledge 1992. 1986, p. 200.

"as anthropocentric and colonialist subject bears traits of cannibalism" himself.[19] A good example for Robinson's figurative cannibalism is his use of autobiography: Marshall shows how Robinson reacts to each unsettling episode "by recognizing the other as an image of himself" (909), thus making him "a part of his autobiography" (911) and incorporating him in his "life." "All beings crossing Robinson's path, first animals, then humans, are integrated into the order of the 'I'".[20]

Reading *Robinson Crusoe* closely, one may thus feel confirmed in the postmodern insight that the other, the abject and outcast, always is a distorted mirror of the self. However, I would like to stress the fact that Robinson never actually becomes a cannibal, while Quinn as Robinson really turns into a "bum" (117); he loses his identity and becomes "another" (118). This difference between Defoe's and Auster's Robinson is significant, as it marks Quinn's transition to a new form of writing as well as Auster's departure from puritanic practices of reading and writing. As I have shown in this section of my paper, one can connect *City of Glass* on several levels to *Robinson Crusoe* as a 'spiritual autobiography.' When it comes to Auster's staging of authorship, however, he still refers to Robinson, but he reads the character more independently and emphasizes the idea that like Quinn, the author has to endure Robinsonesque solitude in order to become 'another.' One of the devices in this quest for the other is autobiography.

2. Robinson Crusoe as a model of authorship

At least in Quinn's case, becoming another is the precondition for literary writing. Giving up his observation, Quinn finally enters Stillman's apartment only to find it deserted. In a room that probably was the place of Peter Stillman Jr.'s isolation (Salmela 2008, 135), he undresses and starts writing in his notebook. "He felt that his words had been severed from him, that now they were a part of the world at large, as real and specific as a stone, or a lake, or a flower" (129). That seems to say that Quinn's words no longer are signs that mediate between speaker and things, but independent beings, Adamitic names that simply *are* what they say. In an essay on the objectivist writer Charles Reznikoff (1978),

[19] Cf. the illuminating comparison between Selkirk and Crusoe in Kling 2019, 313-322, especially 321.
[20] David Marshall: *Autobiographical Acts in* Robinson Crusoe. ELH 71.4, 2004, pp. 899-920. Kling 2019, p. 304.

Auster describes the work of the true poet as a "transcription of the visible into the brute, undeciphered code of being." The "act of writing" reveals the true names of things, so that the poet "is Adam" while he also is "the mute heir of the builders of Babel"––he "must learn to speak from his eyes" instead of "seeing with his mouth" (373). Does this analogy really mean that Quinn "made his difficult way back to language's unfallen core"[21]? Rather, it means that Quinn has taken on Stillman's job. The detective has replaced the criminal, the reader has become a writer of poetry.

In our world, however, Quinn's Adamic language can only be described, not written. Therefore, Quinn must remain a fictitious author, while the real author imagines his work. This simple observation leads to a paradox: On the level of narrative, *City of Glass* is a story about Quinn becoming a poet, but it fails in presenting the poet's new language. However, although Auster obviously can't write Quinn's poetic language, by inventing it he affirms his own authorship on the level of the text. The result is a paradox: Auster's authorship depends on a failure to reproduce the poetic ability of his characters. Similarly, on the level of fiction, Auster introduces a fictional character called "Paul Auster," who is a writer and resembles the real author, but doesn't function as the narrator of the story. Instead, the novel is narrated by an anonymous voice that takes its distance with "Auster." The result is a similarly paradoxical manifestation and denial of Auster's authorship. In an interview from 1991, Auster accordingly describes himself as a split person, distinguishing between his "autobiographical self" and his "author self, that mysterious other who lives inside me and puts my name on the covers of books" (301). In this section, I will discuss how Auster reads Robinson Crusoe's solitude as a model for becoming 'other' in the early autofictional texts from *Invention of Solitude* (1983), constructing the author-persona as split in two.[22] I will then turn to the last novel of the *Trilogy* in order to further back my claim that Auster's detective novels can be read as stories about the

[21] Rowen: The Detective in Search of the Lost Tongue of Adam, p. 232.

[22] I use Doubrovsky's term "autofiction" in order to stress the fictional distance that Auster takes towards his own person, e.g. by writing about himself in the third person in *The Book of Memory.* Cf. Sonja Longolius: Performing Authorship: Strategies of 'Becoming an Author' in the Works of Paul Auster, Candice Breitz, Sophie Calle, and Jonathan Safran Foer. Bielefeld: transcript 2016, p. 52-61; Amy Parish: Strange Intimacies: Autre-biography, Failure and the Body in J.M. Coetzee and Paul Auster, PhD-thesis UNWS Sydney, 2017, p. 10-44. www.unsworks.unsw.edu.au/primo-explore/fulldisplay?vid=UNSWORKS&docid=unsworks_45715&fromSitemap=1.
The term "author-persona" is meant to emphasize that Auster constructs an image of the author in his autofictional and fictional texts that differs from the author as a historical being.

search for this "mysterious other" and as performances of authorship. Both in the autofictional and the fictional texts, then, Robinson Crusoe is part of Auster's strategy to stage authorship.

Invention of Solitude has been considered "both the *ars poetica* and the seminal work of Paul Auster".[23] It is an inquiry into Auster's biographical memory and a construction of himself as an author-to-be that resonates in many of his novels, "a self-conscious attempt to find and create his own author's position within the literary field" [24] [25] It is connected to Robinson Crusoe on a very general level, since parts of the text appear as a kind of journal and thus emphasize solitude as a precondition of journal writing. [26] More specifically, its second part, *The Book of Memory*, recounts anecdotes of the life of "A." and combines them with philosophical reflections, literary interpretations and essayistic criticism. Many of the anecdotes concern A.'s family, especially his relation to his father, and deal with his biological genealogy, while the essayistic parts inscribe A. into a literary genealogy. Obviously, the letter A. stands for Auster, but the text is narrated by an anonymous auctorial voice that switches between telling stories and taking notes for a book-to-be. On both levels, Robinson Crusoe is cited as a figure of solitary authorship, creating a "individual mythology" of solitude.[27]

In an anecdote from A.'s life in Paris, A.'s paternal friend S., a Russian composer, is compared to Crusoe: "This was life as Crusoe would have lived it: shipwreck in the heart of the city." (Invention, 74). The point here is that S. lives a solitary life, withdrawn in his cave-like apartment that nevertheless comprehends "an entire universe […], a miniature cosmology […] This was the womb, the belly of the whale, the original site of imagination" (73). The anecdote resonates with the earlier description of A.'s own small and dark room on Varick Street, New York––"The world has shrunk to the size of this room for him" (64) ––, which recalls a prison cell and which the anonymous narrator provides with the following marginal notes: "Life inside the whale. A gloss on Jonah […] Then shipwreck. Crusoe on his island. […] Solitary consciousness" (64f.). Hence, Bruckner identifies Auster

[23] Pascal Bruckner: "Paul Auster, or The Heir Intestate", Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster. Edited by Dennis Barone, Philadelphia, U of Pennsylvania P, 1995, pp. 27-33, p. 27.
[24] Interview, p. 307.
[25] Longolius: Performing Authorship, p. 63.
[26] Ibid., 63f.
[27] Longolius: Performing Authorship, p. 12; cf. Markku Salmela: The Bliss of Being Lost: Revisiting Paul Auster's Nowhere. Critique 49.2, 2008, pp. 131-146, p. 135; p. 138.

as a "voluntary castaway, a Robinson Crusoe" (28). Robinson's confinement on his island, rendered vividly by a quote from Defoe ("I am divided from mankind, a solitaire, one banished from human society" Invention, 65=RC 49), is then paralleled with the feeling of being locked up in one's own consciousness and memory:[28] "Memory as a room, as a body, as a skull, as a skull that encloses the room in which a body sits" (Invention, 72). The motive of solitude, omnipresent in Auster's early work, therefore is connected to Robinson Crusoe on a fundamental level. Furthermore, Auster develops it into the idea of consciousness as a "locked room," a notion that has an affinity to the detective genre ("locked room mystery").

Between womb and tomb, the motive of the locked room permeates the whole text of *Invention of Solitude*. "The words rhyme, and even if there is no real connection between them, he cannot help thinking of them together." Further variations of the motive include the rooms of Anne Frank, Descartes, Hölderlin, and Emily Dickinson. In its logic, it is only in spatial confinement and social isolation that the imagination is set free: "the room [as] a kind of mental uterus, site of a second birth" (Bruckner 1995, 28; cf. Salmela 2008). The anonymous narrator can therefore make the general statement that "every book is an image of solitude."

In an interview (1991), Auster elaborates further on his notion of solitude: Because we can always reflect upon ourselves, we are to some extent detached from social reality, locked up in our own consciousness. However, Auster then goes on to explain that solitary self-consciousness is an effect of the gaze of the other. Therefore, solitude can be considered a trace of the other, as Auster exemplifies with another allusion to Robinson Crusoe: "It isn't possible for a person to isolate himself from other people. No matter how apart you might find yourself in a physical sense––whether you've been marooned on a desert island or locked up in solitary confinement––you discover that you are inhabited by others" (309). [29] In this dialectic, the discovery of the other in me is an effect of Robinsonesque solitude.

In *Invention of Solitude*, Auster describes a similar experience while writing alone in his room on Varick St.: "the sudden knowledge that came over him that even alone, in the deepest solitude of his room, he was not alone, or, more precisely, that the moment he

[28] Auster suppresses explicitly the fact that after many years of isolation, Robinson has found a friend in a native he calls Friday: "And Friday? No, not yet. There is no Friday, at least not here."
[29] Interview, p. 307.

began to try to speak of that solitude, he had become more than just himself" (118). It is interesting that here, the experience of multiplicity in solitude is an effect of language, as if Auster were to hint at the duplication of the writing subject––the split between *sujet d'énonciation* and *sujet de l'énoncé*. This is also emphasized by Auster's choice to write about his early attempts at writing in the third person: The writing subject is not identical with the protagonist––"which gets us back," Auster comments in an interview, "to the multiplicity of the singular. The moment I think about the fact that I'm saying 'I,' I'm actually saying 'he.'" But Auster doesn't stop at writing about himself as another, he also describes this other as a struggling author-to-be, while his text appears as a first draft of his future book. A. can therefore be read as a figure for the "mysterious other," the "author-self" that Auster's text produces performatively by 'inventing' solitude à la Robinson. [30]

Furthermore, the notions of solitude and authorship are connected to the question of fatherhood that permeates Auster's autofictional texts. *Invention of Solitude* revolves around the sudden death of Auster's father due to a heart-attack and Auster's urge to remember him who wasn't very present while alive, either. Also in this sense, he is comparable to Robinson, who has left his parents very early to go to sea. Although Robinson conceives of his departure against the will of his parents as his "original sin" and tries to redeem himself more than once, his parting with his parents also is the precondition for staging himself as a self-made man––he is Robin rather than Robinson[31]. Similarly, Auster describes the death of his father, who left him a small inheritance that enabled him to focus on his writing, as causing a feeling of guilt that is simultaneously accentuated and redeemed by his writing. Associating Robinson's isolation with Gepetto's confinement in the belly of the shark, A. asks if it is true "that one must dive to the depths of the sea and save one's father" as Pinocchio did "to become a real boy?" (Invention, 64). The first part of *Invention of Solitude* can be understood as Auster's effort to rescue his father posthumously, for here he tries to paint his picture, a *Portrait of an Invisible Man.* Tellingly, the book ends with a quote from Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, stating that in the spiritual world, "he who is willing to work gives birth to his own father." A similar idea is expressed in *Invention of Solitude*, where A. writes that after death of the father, "the son becomes his own father and his own son."

[30] Cf. Longolius: Performing authorship, pp. 69-71.
[31] Hulme: Colonial Encounters, p. 197.

The problematic complex of authorship and fatherhood takes me back to *City of Glass*, where a similarly complex scene takes place between Quinn and his 'father' "Auster." Having run into difficulties, Quinn decides to ask "Paul Auster," the supposed private detective, for help, but he only finds a writer by that name. The writer, whose son is called Daniel just like Quinn, can't help him with his case, but he tells him of his projected essay on the relation between Cervantes and Don Quixote––author and character, father and son. As is well known, Cervantes denies that he is the author of *Don Quixote* and claims that he bought the manuscript by a certain Cide Hamete Benengeli on a market. But Benengeli can't be eyewitness to Quixote's story, for he never appears in it. Auster therefore speculates that Quixote himself "orchestrated the whole thing himself" (98): He only simulated his madness, made his friends––Sancho, the barber, and the priest––write an account of his deeds and then, disguised as an Arab, sold the manuscript to Cervantes. In this setting, Quixote's friends would be the collective author of the story. "It is, then, possible in this strange world for a character in a novel to be its author"[32], for a 'son' to give birth to his 'father.'

"Auster's" speculation has an interesting parallel in the narrative setting of the text. As becomes clear on the last pages of the novel, the story is narrated by an anonymous voice that claims to merely reproduce the content of Quinn's notebook. The speaking "I" criticizes "Auster" for his behavior towards Quinn and states his sympathy for the detective. In the third novel of the trilogy, a similarly anonymous "I" will claim authorship for all three stories (288). Thus, a character that is part of the fictional world becomes its author, while "Auster," whose name refers to the author's name on the book cover, is treated as a merely fictional character. Just like in *Invention…*, Auster treats himself as other and defers authorship to another voice that explicitly differs with him. *City of Glass* thus stages the author as "mysterious other"––a strategy of performing authorship that Auster afterwards develops into his authorial signature.[33] In an interview (1991), he

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[32] William Lavender: *The Novel of Critical Engagement: Paul Auster's City of Glass*, in: *Contemporary Literature* 34.2, 1993, pp. 219-239, p. 223.

[33] Cf. Auster's *The Red Notebook*, an essay in which he claims that the idea for *City of Glass* was in fact inspired by a "wrong number," a person who called Auster but wanted to talk to the Pinkerton Agency, and tells how he received another call many years later by someone who wanted to "speak to Mr. Quinn." The bottomline of the story is that "books are never finished" and that stories "go on writing themselves without an author." Cf. Longolius: Performing Authorship, 202f.; John Zilcosky: *The Revenge of the Author: Paul Auster's Challenge to Theory*, in: *Critique* 39.3, 1998, pp. 195-206, p. 204f.

affirms his fascination with books that appear to be written by no one: "On the one hand, it's an illusion; on the other hand, it has everything to do with how stories are written. For the author of a novel can never be sure where any of it comes from. The self that exists in the world […] is finally not the same self who writes the book".[34]

❧

If Auster's reads Robinson Crusoe in *Invention of Solitude* as a figure for individual isolation, the fact that everybody is locked up in their own consciousness, then it is clear that *The Locked Room* picks up this motive from Auster's autofictional writings and transposes it into the detective genre. The "locked room mystery" is a conventional plot model consisting of a crime committed and solved in a confined space. In Auster, however, the locked room is the narrator's consciousness, which is haunted by the elusive figure of his writer-friend Fanshawe, so that the story's detective element consists in a search for this author. In my following reading of the novel, I will claim that even more than *City of Glass, The Locked Room* fictionalizes Auster's autobiographical reflections and performs authorship.

In the last novel of the trilogy, an anonymous narrator tells the story of the search for his friend Fanshawe, who vanished and is supposedly dead, leaving only a bunch of unpublished manuscripts behind. The narrator, himself a failed literary writer, realizes the value of the manuscripts and publishes them (in Fanshawe's name) to great success; marrying Fanshawe's widow and adopting his son, he replaces the author also on a personal level. This novel, too, plays with the assonance between tomb and womb: For example, the narrator remembers how Fanshawe once stepped into a freshly digged tomb, imagining the death of his father, and he recalls Fanshawe's habit of retiring into a cardboard box in order to isolate himself and set his imagination free. It therefore comes as no surprise that Fanshawe's preferred novel is *Robinson Crusoe.* Later, Fanshawe resurfaces; he plays cat and mouse with the narrator, suggesting that all of his moves were orchestrated by him beforehand, but after a long search the narrator finds him in Boston, where Fanshawe commits suicide in a locked room, leaving a red notebook for his former friend behind. At this point, the anonymous narrator reveals himself as the author of all three novels of the *Trilogy*: "The entire story comes down to what happened at the end, and without that end inside me now, I could not have started this book. The same holds

[34] Auster: Interview, p. 301.

true for the two books that come before it, *City of Glass* and *Ghosts.* These three stories are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage of my awareness of what it is about" (288).

The Locked Room is thus presented as a reworking of *City of Glass*, picking up several motives (the red notebook, Boston) and characters (Quinn and Stillman reappear as subsidiary characters). Furthermore, the idea that the *Trilogy* tells the same story three times connects it with a statement about A. in *Invention of Solitude*: "Everything he has written so far is no more than the translation of a moment or two in his life––those moments he lived through on Christmas Eve, 1979, in his room at 6 Varick Street." Beyond the question of authorship, both novels have in common that Auster provides several writing characters with traits from his biography, so that he represents himself as split into multiple persons. While Quinn's fate as a poet recalls Auster's first attempts at poetry, he meets a fictional "Auster" and realizes that he is a kind of negative image of the fulfilled life that Auster leads both as writer and husband. In *The Locked Room*, the narrator (failed writer) and Fanshawe (accomplished author) form a similar constellation, but here the narrator gradually replaces Fanshawe. Furthermore, both the narrator and Fanshawe recall certain aspects of Auster's depiction of solitary authorship from *Invention of Solitude*: Like Auster, Fanshawe worked on an oil tanker and lived in Paris, earning his livelihood with odd jobs as a translator and scriptwriter. Other than Auster, however, he in addition wrote his first novels of literary value and commercial success while staying in France. In this respect, Auster is closer to the narrator who makes his living with literary criticism and essays.

The topic of solitary authorship––the locked room as spatial confinement and creative freedom––is brought center stage at the end of the narrator's search for Fanshawe. The narrator arrives at a house in the French countryside where Fanshawe spent a year in solitude. "Solitude became a passageway into the self," the narrator says of Fanshawe: "Although he was still young at the time, I believe this period marked the beginning of his maturity as a writer" (272). "[O]ne senses a new availability of words inside him, as though the distance between seeing and writing had been narrowed" (271)––a description that recalls Quinn's transformation into a writer via Auster's essay on Reznikov. The narrator, however, whose search comes to a standstill in the same country house, reacts differently to the solitude of the countryside. Having given up hope to find Fanshawe, he realizes that the latter is nevertheless closer to him than ever before:

"Fanshawe was exactly where I was, and he has been there from the beginning" (286). Trying to conjure an image of him, he sees "a locked room" in which Fanshawe is "condemned to a mythical solitude." But as Fanshawe never appears in person, the narrator has to admit that the image of the isolated author is his own construction: "This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull" (286). Fanshawe appears to be the narrator's author-persona.

This statement remains true, even if the novel ends with a confrontation between the narrator and Fanshawe: Three years later, the latter summons his former friend to an abandoned house in Boston. Keeping himself hidden in a locked room, he communicates only vocally through the closed door, telling the narrator that he will commit suicide and leave a red notebook behind. Although he feels strangely illuminated by its language, the narrator still can't rationally comprehend it, because it is crystal clear and enigmatic at the same time. The novel closes with the image of the narrator tearing the notebook apart, thus freeing himself of Fanshawe and putting his own story in his place. This move is similar to the ending of *City of Glass*, where the narrator distances himself from "Auster;" it also differs from it insofar as the narrator here claims full responsibility for the three novels and doesn't hide behind the red notebook anymore. *The Locked Room* thus performs a self-reflexive loop, connecting its narrative ending with its creative beginning: While the accomplished writer Fanshawe, who staged the whole detective plot on the level of the narrative, dies in his locked room, the narrator who only recounts what happened to him in his fascination with authorship, is set free and finally becomes the author of his own story. The question of authorship is thus answered paradoxically once again: The narrator becomes an author by telling stories why he isn't an author. This ambiguous stance towards authorship is in turn characteristic for Auster's author-persona.

❧

By way of conclusion, let me remark that this 'postmodern' staging of authorship is not completely foreign to *Robinson Crusoe*. I have already mentioned that Defoe's novel, too, can be read as a story narrating Robinson's path towards authorial self-composure. Not only is Robinson the author of his own life, in the prefaces to the sequels of his story he also reacts to contemporary critique of his work, if only inconsistently. For example, he insists against those who consider the text a work of fiction that "there is a Man alive" whose actions "are the just Subject of these Volumes." The paradox here is that Robinson,

the presumed author of his life story, refers to himself in the third person, as if there were a difference between the author Robinson and the character Robinson. To make matters worse, Robinson later calls the first volume an "imaginary Story" that "has its just Allusion to a real Story, and chimes Part for Part […] with the inimitable Life of *Robinson Crusoe.*" Are we to assume, then, that Robinson Crusoe, the protagonist of the "imaginary Story," is not identical with the 'real' Robinson Crusoe who wrote it? While all three volumes generally uphold the fiction that Robinson is writing his own story, gaps like the one cited "should be seen as evidence that Defoe is in his proto-Sternean mode, playing a kind of cat-and-mouse game with his readers".[35] To put it another way: In those passages that play with the coherence of the fictional writer, Robinson meets his author.

The 'real' encounter between Defoe and his literary characters, however, takes place in another meta-fictional work, namely Charles Gildon's satirical dialogue *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Mr. D–– De F––* (1719; abridged in Defoe 1994, 257-261). Here, Mr. De F–– is confronted by Robinson and Friday who criticize him severely for creating them as inconsistent characters. While Friday complains (in fluent English) that De F–– imagines him as a "blockhead" who after years of practice still isn't able to speak English correctly, Robinson objects to his contradictory religious beliefs. Together, they condemn De F–– to eat all three volumes of his fiction, to which he reacts with indigestion and diarrhea. The dialogue ends with De F–– waking up in his bed, taking the encounter as a frightening nightmare, the reality of which is proven to him by the contents of his breeches: "This," he concludes, "is a fresh Proof of my Observation in the second Volume of my *Crusoe, that there's no greater Evidence of an invisible World, than that Connexion betwixt second Causes,* (as that in my Trowsers) *and those Ideas we have in our Minds.*" The reality of fiction has never been proven more palpably.

The complex relation between fiction and reality staged in Defoe and Gildon rivals Auster's self-reflective loops, in which fictional characters meet their author. A passage from *Ghosts*, the second novel of the trilogy, can be read as an inversion of Gildon's profane proof. Here, two private detectives, Blue and Black, are observing each other. When they talk to each other for the first time, Black tells Blue two anecdotes about an author: one anecdote tells how Whitman's chamber pot stood in the middle of the room when Thoreau came to pay his respects; the other how Whitman's brain was to be measured after his

[35] George Alexander Starr: Introduction, in: Daniel Defoe: *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* [1720]. London 2008, p. 3.

death but fell on the floor and had to be thrown out as garbage. "There's a definite connection," Black muses, comparing the 'visible' and the 'invisible world:' "Brains and guts, the insides of a man. We always talk about trying to get inside a writer to understand his work better. But when you get right down to it, there's not much to find there" (172).[36] That is to say, even if you scholars saw the poet's head open, his mind will stay a locked room, an isolated Robinson. On the other hand, trying to get into the writer's head is precisely what the author's work is all about: a "lone person sequestered in that bunker of a room for seven or eight hours a day […] sitting at his desk for no other purpose than to explore the interior of his own head." For according to Auster's author-myth, it is only by fathoming the depths of solitude that the "I" reveals that "mysterious other who lives inside my and puts my name on the covers of books."

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[36] Also on a more general level, *Ghosts* appears as another depiction of Auster's idea of authorship: two people become close by watching each other, the one either reading or writing, the other writing reports about the first one; in the end, the second one subdues the first and disappears. There is also an indirect allusion to Robinson's solitude (156).