

**THE CASE OF A TWOFOLD REPETITION: EDGAR ALLAN POE'S
INTERTEXTUAL INFLUENCE ON PAUL AUSTER'S *GHOSTS***

MARIA LAURA ARCE ÁLVAREZ
Complutense University of Madrid

ABSTRACT. *The aim of the following contribution is to analyze the intertextual relation between Paul Auster's Ghosts (1986) and Edgar Allan Poe short story William Wilson (1839). This article studies different aspects that Paul Auster's novel has as a reinterpretation and rewriting of Edgar Allan Poe's short story. Auster creates an intertextual relation with Poe's narration in order to introduce certain aspects of his fiction such as the issues of identity, the concept of the double and the construction of Auster's theory of writing. In this sense, this proposal presents an interpretation of Auster's Ghosts as an intertextual and postmodern reading of Edgar Allan Poe's short story.*

Keywords: Contemporary American literature, postmodern literature, intertextuality, comparative literature and theory of literature.

EL CASO DE UNA REPETICIÓN DOBLE: LA INFLUENCIA INTERTEXTUAL DE EDGAR ALLAN POE EN LA NOVELA FANTASMAS DE PAUL AUSTER

RESUMEN. *El objetivo del siguiente artículo es analizar la relación intertextual existente entre la novela Fantasma (1986) de Paul Auster y el cuento William Wilson (1839) del escritor Edgar Allan Poe. Este artículo estudia los diferentes aspectos que la novela de Paul Auster presenta como una reinterpretación y reescritura del cuento de Poe. Auster crea una relación intertextual con la narración de Poe para introducir ciertos aspectos de su ficción tales como la identidad, el concepto del doble y la construcción de una teoría de la escritura en Auster. En este sentido, esta propuesta presenta una interpretación de la novela Fantasma de Paul Auster como una lectura intertextual y posmoderna del cuento de Edgar Allan Poe.*

Palabras clave: Literatura norteamericana contemporánea, literatura posmoderna, intertextualidad, literatura comparada y teoría de la literatura.

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Paul Auster's first novel, *The New York Trilogy* (1987), becomes one of the most important works in the literary career of the American writer. Written as the continuation of his non-fictional work *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), the trilogy is the most relevant pillar of Auster's fictional work and one of the referents of anti-detective fiction in the postmodern American literature of the 1980s. The novel is presented as a collection of three different and, apparently not connected, novels that deal with a character-detective and a case without solution. Apart from this, Auster's trilogy stands out as a work constructed by the different literary influences the American writer had throughout his literary career. The three novels present explicit and implicit references to authors and works remarkable for specific literary periods. In general terms, Auster's work has been influenced by French symbolism, especially in his role as translator of French poetry during his stay in France in the 1970s, and specific authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman or even Samuel Beckett. Probably one of the most significant influences in Auster's work is the reading of the authors Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville. In some cases Auster quotes explicitly these authors, in others he uses images, characters or even the plots of their novels or short stories to reinvent them and create his own fiction. In the particular case of Edgar Allan Poe, it can be argued that one of Auster's sources

to create his detective plot in the trilogy is Edgar Allan Poe's short stories. Many critics, like Anne Hopfzapel or Bernd Herzogenrath, point out the fact that the detective fiction that Auster constructs in this novel has its most immediate referent in Poe's short stories "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), Poe's first detective story, and "MS. Found in a Bottle" (1831). References to Edgar Allan Poe and his short stories can be found throughout the trilogy; nevertheless, it is in the first novel, *City of Glass*, and the second, *Ghosts*, in which the presence of Poe is more noticeable. The first volume of the trilogy *City of Glass* introduces a character Daniel Quinn, who writes detective novels under the pseudonym of William Wilson, the title of one of Poe's stories. Still, Auster's reinterpretation of Poe's narration also puts emphasis on the short story's plot. Edgar Allan Poe deals with the idea of the double and the presence of an "other" that disturbs the life and environment of the character. Auster will use this idea of the double in the three novels of the trilogy but the comparison with Poe's narration is more explicit in *Ghosts*. In this article, my intention is to analyze how Auster uses Poe's short story in order to create and discuss the idea of influence, the double and how it is presented as a way to construct Auster's theory of writing.

Different critics have claimed the influence Edgar Allan Poe and his fiction has on Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*. Alike Varvogli in her work *The World that is the Book* (2001) proposes an extensive analysis on Auster's intertextuality. From an intertextual perspective she concludes:

In the case of Auster's writing, although of course not uniquely, a study of the thematic preoccupations of his novels is crucial in understanding his relationship with literary genres Auster works within, or subverts, also illuminates the author's practices (18-19).

Varvogli's thesis explains how Auster's fiction is influenced by the work of other writers not only from a theoretical perspective, in the repetition of certain literary models, but also it deconstructs the genre by using the plot and images of other writer's works in order to construct his literary space. According to Worton and Still in their book *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (1993), there is a clear influence of the reader's previous and current readings, here intertextuality is focused on the writer's readings and how that contributes to the creative process. As Worton and Still assert, "the writer is a reader of texts before he/she is a creator of texts, and therefore the work of art is inevitably shot through with references, quotations and influences of every kind" (Worton and Still 1993: 1). This is the particular case of Edgar Allan Poe in relation to Paul Auster's fiction and specifically in *The New York Trilogy*. It could be argued that Poe's influence on Auster's novel is showed in different ways in the trilogy. The most explicit references are the use of the name William Wilson as a pseudonym for the central

character Daniel Quinn, in *City of Glass*, and when the narrator mentions Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1837): "Quinn's thoughts momentarily flew off to the concluding pages of *A. Gordon Pym* and to the discovery of the strange hieroglyphs on the inner wall of the chasm-letters inscribed into the earth itself, as though they were trying to say something that could no longer be understood" (Auster 2004: 70). Evidently, there is a possible comparative interpretation between the plot of the novel *City of Glass*, Daniel Quinn and his detective case with Poe's novel. In the context of the analysis of the second novel of the trilogy *Ghosts*, whereas in *City of Glass* the name William Wilson seems to be there only to introduce the idea of the double, in the novel *Ghosts* the plot of Poe's story becomes fundamental in the construction of Auster's novel. In relation to this, Varvogli (2001) claims:

However, unlike Poe, Auster is not so much interested in creating the effect of psychological terror that is often found in his predecessor nor would a psychoanalytical approach be especially fruitful. Auster is interested in the double because of the questions it poses about selfhood, the meaning of 'identity,' and whether there can be a separation between the observer and the self observed, while the perils of interpretation also concern both writers (64).

I agree with Varvogli in the fact that Auster leaves the psychological terror behind in order to use the idea of the double from a different perspective. Rather than representing the idea of selfhood and the meaning of identity, I believe it is possible to make an analysis in which the double stands as a metaphor for the effect of writing in the writer and the conclusive fictional creation. From this particular perspective, the role of the observer and self observed would not be related to identity issues but to the process of inspiration of the writer-character and thus becoming the double a source of inspiration for the protagonist.

Poe's influence on Auster's trilogy is also reflected in other aspects of the novel. As mentioned before, in terms of structure, certain Poe's stories become an influence in Auster's detective novel. As Varvogli (2001: 24) asserts "Edgar Allan Poe is credited with the invention of the detective story with the publication of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" in 1841" and Auster in the three novels of the trilogy deconstructs detective fiction in order to propose a new way of writing it by creating what some critics such as Anne Holzapfel, Corey Adrews or Allison Russell among others consider Auster's anti-detective fiction. Apart from this, there are other ways in which Poe influenced Auster's work. As Mark Brown (2007) suggests in his work *Paul Auster. Contemporary American and Canadian Novelists* the figure of the lonely individual wandering around the streets is parallel to the "image of the poet in the

metropolis, from Poe and Baudelaire onwards" (Brown 2007: 9) and he explains the existence of this character in Auster's fiction with one of Poe's short stories:

One of the most famous urban pedestrians in American fiction, and one who influences the origins of Auster's wanderer-characters, is Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd.' Benjamin contrasts Poe's tale with Baudelaire's crowd scenes. He describes how Poe characterizes the crowd as unknowable, which makes it compelling and menacing, investing it at once with a sense of alienation, anonymity and fascination (10).

Thus, Poe's influence, as it occurs in "William Wilson", is not limited to explicit quotations introduced by the narrator, it is also seen in remarkable aspects of Auster's plot who uses Poe's metaphors and symbols in order to reinterpret them, reinvent them and accordingly construct his personal postmodern literary space.

Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson" (1839) tells the story of a man called William Wilson whose life is marked by the presence of another man called as him and who shares with him the same physical features. This "other" appears in the most crucial moments of the central character's life and follows him almost everywhere he goes. Most of the critical studies propose a lacanian and freudian analysis of the text. In her article "Poe's William Wilson" Yonjae Jung (2007) proposes an analysis of the text in which the second Wilson is a manifestation of the Freudian superego due to "the protagonist's internalization of the castrating father's prohibiting law" (Jung 2007: 84). She elaborates this idea using Lacan's concept of foreclosure, a psychological mechanism Lacan defines as the lack of strong paternal image that results in the difficulty of the individual to enter the symbolic order and therefore, in a psychological chaos. Based on this idea, Jung (2007) concludes that the existence of the double is provoked by this psychological break in the childhood of the protagonist and this would be the reason why he ends up killing his double or superego. This interpretation would support the idea of the "other" as a psychological projection of the central character. However, this thesis opens different readings of the story.

Another proposal presents Poe's story as a literal and allegorical story at the same time and that is the case of Tracy Ware (1989) in her article "The Two Stories of 'William Wilson'". She discusses the fantastic and psychological readings of the short story and proposes an allegorical reading of the story mixing the two perspectives mentioned above but always based in the ambiguity of the narrator. Thus, she believes in the existence of a fantastic William Wilson product of a possible psychological projection. Certainly, the ambiguity in the existence of the "other" Wilson makes difficult to assert a specific interpretation to the story. Poe contributes to this uncertainty by creating a mysterious atmosphere, common in his short stories. In this particular context, the short story's duality can be explained by Sigmund

Freud's theory of the uncanny. This is a concept created by Freud to refer to that which "belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (Freud 2003: 123). Concretely he considers the idea of the double as one of the things that produces an uncanny effect:

the 'double' (the Doppelgänger), in all its nuances and manifestations-that is to say, the appearance of persons who have to be regarded as identical because they look alike. This relationship is intensified by the spontaneous transmission of mental processes from one of these persons to the other-what we would call telepathy-so that the one becomes co-owner of the other's knowledge, emotions and experience. Moreover, a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self: or he may substitute the other's self for his own. The self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged. Finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing, the repetition of the same facial features, the same characters, the same destinies, the same misdeeds, even the same names, through successive generations (Freud: 2003: 141-142).

Although Freud's theory explains the mysterious atmosphere of the story and the psychological game of the characters, this is not exactly the function it performs in relation to *Ghosts*. As mentioned before, Auster does not seem to use the idea of the double as a metaphor to create a strange and even frightening atmosphere nor to present an existential discussion in the plot. In this analysis, the image of the double and the parallelism with the plot of "William Wilson" exists to represent the creative act of writing and a process of inspiration between the figure of the observer and the observed.

Ghosts is presented in the volume of the trilogy as another example of an anti-detective story. In this case the protagonist, Blue, is a private detective hired by White to solve a very simple case: watch what a man called Black does and report his actions and movements. The case starts to get complicated when Blue finds that there is nothing to report since Black spends most of his time sitting in a room writing. The narrator's first impressions of the two characters suggest an indirect relationship that during the course of the novel turns inseparable. Both are described as two men of the same age, Black with a "face pleasant enough, with nothing to distinguish it from a thousand other faces one sees every day" (Auster 2004: 141), a statement that explains that Black is just an ordinary man and this fact disappoints Blue since "he is still secretly hoping to discover that Black is a madman" (Auster 2004: 141). Basically, this description makes both characters equal and makes possible identify one with the other. Some lines after, the narrator describes how the case starts to become boring and especially inactive for the protagonist. This situation opens a new perspective in the relationship between the two central characters:

Now, when he himself is the boss, this is what he gets: a case with nothing to do. For to watch someone read and write is in effect to do nothing. The only way for Blue to have

a sense of what is happening is to be inside Black's mind, to see what he is thinking, and that of course is impossible (Auster 2004: 141).

Here, the narrator suggests the possibility of Blue getting into Black's mind to see how it works and as a way to solve the case. It could be argued that what seems to be an impossible alternative in the investigation turns out into a possible interpretation for the novel, that is, the construction of Blue and Black as doubles in this fiction. While the topic of the double is found in many of Auster's works, it could be stated that in *Ghosts* we find one of the most explicit examples. Several critics follow this line of analysis. Carsten Springer in his work *Crises: The Works of Paul Auster* (2001) proposes a latent schizophrenia in the character that "in the apparent personality split into Blue and his *doppelgänger* Black, the observer and the observed, corresponds to the breakdown of the connection between signifier and signified" (Springer 2001: 117). This hypothesis accords with Alikei Vavogli's (2001) interpretation of the protagonists as metaphors for creator and object created:

Blue and Black, who both sit in their rooms looking at each other and writing, reflect the situation of the author as creator of fictions. On the other hand, he is the one who looks, enquires and records, but he is also the one looking at himself writing. In this sense, Blue and Black are two aspects of the same entity (49).

Although both critics propose different creative and theoretical perspectives on the subject, the two coincide on the explicit complementary duality of the character. In this context, the analysis of the text as an anti-detective story is left behind in order to focus it from a more existentialist and metafictional perspective. Blue's most significant task becomes to write what the other character does. In this sense, establishing a creative relationship between them in terms of inspiration and object created in which Blue, in his act of watching and writing, is inspired by another character, Black, apparently his double and who, the reader learns at the end of the novel, is doing the same. This thesis would coincide with Springer's analysis of the two characters as signifier and signified.

One of Blue's activities to solve his case is observation. He spends the whole day watching what Black does from the window of his apartment. In relation to this, the narrator comments:

Now, suddenly, with the world as it were removed from him, with nothing much to see but a vague shadow by the name of Black, he finds himself thinking about things that have never occurred to him before, and this, too, has begun to trouble him. If thinking is perhaps too strong a word at this point, a slightly more modest term-speculation, for example, would not be far from the mark. To speculate, from the Latin *speculates*, meaning mirror or looking glass. For in spying out at Black across the street, it is as though

Blue were looking into a mirror, and instead of merely watching another, he finds that he is also watching himself (Auster 2004: 146).

The text, indeed, compares and identifies the two characters with each other, thereby making Blue and Black doubles and, furthermore, making Black a projection of Blue's mind. Thus, the window stands for a looking glass or mirror that offers Blue an image of himself. Also, it is very interesting the reflection about the word "speculate", which not only is etymologically related to the concept "mirror" but also it refers to "guess", "suppose" or "think", concepts that can be used to express the idea of "invention". From this point of view, Blue, looking at his own reflection, speculates what Black is doing and accordingly invents about it in his writing. In this context, the link with Black and the constant observation turns into a way of inspiration for Blue who writes what he sees in that reflection. Together with this, Blue realizes that the only way to find out something about Black, and therefore stop the speculation, is by entering his mind. Black's room can, thus, be considered a metaphor for Black's and Blue's mind.

In relation to this, Ilana Shiloh asserts in her book *Paul Auster and Postmodern Quest* (2002) that Blue's task is framed more in the existentialist thought than in the detective fiction genre. Quoting Sartre and his concept of existentialism, she concludes that: "The quest is not about crime, but about the self and its relation with the Other. And the role of the Other-for Sartre and for Auster-is ambiguous. He is the subject's salvation, and his damnation. While the Other's look makes me a gift of my identity, it at the same time destabilizes my universe" (Shiloh 2002: 62). For Shiloh, commenting on Sartre's thoughts, "the figure of the other is the entity that complements the individual's identity since "the other is the one whom I see-but also the one who sees me. His look is indispensable to my existence: it acknowledges me, and at the same time forces me to constitute myself through human interaction" (Shiloh 2002: 61). Thus, it could be argued that two lines of thought can be brought about in order to interpret the relationship between Black and Blue. On the one hand, the idea of the double which is then employed for the protagonist to journey into his own mind in a quest for his own identity. On the other hand, the idea of Black becoming a projection of Blue's mind could support the argument of Black being just Blue's invention and, therefore, understanding Blue as an individual with a transitory mental disorder. On these terms, Blue's existentialist problem would coincide with William Wilson's identity issue since, as mentioned before, the "other" William Wilson in the story may stand as a projection of the protagonist's mind. It can be stated that Auster takes the idea of the mental projection but instead of using it as an explanation for a mental problem, he takes it to rewrite it and describe a mental projection that is an invention. That being so, Black is Blue's literary invention, a projection Blue writes and creates in his notebook for his investigation.

In this context, it is possible to establish a comparison between Edgar Allan Poe's short story "William Wilson" and this novel, especially in the relationship between the two characters as an imitation of William Wilson's experience in Poe's short story. Focusing on this particular novel, it could be interpreted that Auster uses the short story "William Wilson" to construct his plot. Indeed, the final scene of *Ghosts* can be considered a rewriting of the end of "William Wilson". In his book *An Art of Desire. Reading Paul Auster* Bernd Herzogenrath states about "William Wilson":

The duality principle is not doubled but itself divided between the 'moral representation' of either side: the 'bad' William Wilson, who is 'the descendant of a race [of] imaginative and easily excitable temperament' (Poe, 466), and the 'good' William Wilson, whose "moral sense, at least, if not his general talents and worldly wisdom, was far keener than [bad' William Wilson's] own" (Poe, 455) (Herzogenrath 1999: 19).

Above all, Herzogenrath considers the short story a narrative in which "the one is (the existential prerequisite of) the other-their mutual interdependence cannot be resolved except in mutual exclusion" (Herzogenrath 1999: 19) and I believe this is the point in which the two narratives, Auster's and Poe's, meet. Contrary to Auster's representation of the double, Poe presents two independent characters in the fiction but with a mysterious connection. From the first lines of the story, the narrator calls himself William Wilson, the same name that another character of the story has. Moreover, it is also in the first lines where the narrator creates a gloomy, mysterious and frightening atmosphere in relation to what the central character, William Wilson, has to tell: "The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation. This has been already too much an object for the scorn-for the horror-for the detestation of my race" (Poe 2003: 110). A few lines after, he continues: "I would not, if I could, here or to-day, embody a record of my later years of unspeakable misery, and unpardonable crime" (Poe 2003: 110). The first significant difference between the two stories is the fact that in the case of "William Wilson" the two Williams are physically equal and they have contact and an intimate relationship from the beginning. The narrator explains:

The words were venom in my ears; and when, upon the day of my arrival, a second William Wilson came also to the academy, I felt angry with him for bearing the name, and doubly disgusted with the name because a stranger bore it, who would be the cause of its twofold repetition, who would be constantly in my presence, and whose concerns, in the ordinary routine of the school business, must inevitably, on account of the detestable coincidence, be often confounded with my own (Poe 2003: 117).

First of all, it is the name what bothers the narrator as a symbol of his identity and usurpation of his existential space since, as he says, it is "the cause of its twofold

repetition". What seems to be a simple coincidence becomes an illogical and inexplicable situation when the two characters have the same physical appearance without any relative connection. Especially when people start to relate them and that implies a total dependence of the central character with the other William Wilson:

The feeling of vexation thus engendered grew stronger with every circumstance tending to show resemblance, moral or physical, between my rival and myself. I had not then discovered the remarkable fact that we were of the same age; but I saw that we were of the same height, and I perceived that we were even singularly alike in general contour of person and outline of feature. I was galled, too, by the rumor touching a relationship, which had grown current in the upper forms. In a word, nothing could more seriously disturb me, (although I scrupulously concealed such disturbance,) than any allusion to a similarity of mind, person, or condition existing between us (Poe 2003: 117).

This passage reminds of the narrator's first impression of Black on the eyes of Blue:

Black's age to be the same as his, give or take a year or two. That is to say, somewhere in his late twenties or early thirties. He finds Black's face pleasant enough, with nothing to distinguish it from a thousand other faces one sees every day. This is a disappointment to Blue, for he is still secretly hoping to discover Black is a madman (Auster 2004: 141).

The physical resemblance between the characters in the two narrations is treated in a different way. Whereas in "William Wilson" the narrator depicts an explicitly physical similarity that even relates to a rare and frightening nature, in *Ghosts* the narrator insinuates a parallelism between the two characters that never confirms a physical similarity. However, in the two cases, the two characters seem to have a dependent relation on his other in which it could be argued that, in some way, this "other" represents a part of the central character's identity. The narrator of Poe's story is trapped in a constant rivalry with him and Blue is trapped in a constant search of his other. Therefore, the "other" acts as a psychological projection of the character that, in the case of Edgar Allan Poe, is projected in the text in order to represent one aspect of the character's self. In the particular case of Auster, it is also a projection of the central character but as an act of invention and literary inspiration. Blue's inspiration is based on observation. Whereas observation can be considered as a way of contrasting and comparing the character's identities, here observation results in writing. It is true that, at the beginning Blue's observation and consequent writing is not creative, it is only mechanical. Nevertheless, in the solitude of the room and the isolation from his world, Blue starts to project in his writing a fiction that would explain his isolation, the uncertainty of the case and especially Black's

life. This act of speculation and creation culminates in Blue's attempt to usurp Black's room to find out the whole truth of the case. In this context, Auster rewrites the idea of the double being the projection of the protagonist's mind in order to transform the double into an imaginary and fictional creation of the protagonist's process of writing.

In "William Wilson" the narrator and his "other" are constantly presented in the text as twins. In his article "William Wilson and the Disintegration of the Self" (2002) Robert Coskren asserts:

The imitation of appearance is a necessary requirement for Wilson as a psychological construct, for it must present to the imagination a self apparently identical to its own. But the repugnance of the narrator is again the reaction of the inner self to a vision of itself as a particular being (Coskren 2002: 159).

The fact that the two Williams are seen in the story as twins reinforces the argument of the double as an object of terror. Physical resemblance is not expressed in this way in *Ghosts*. Although there are explicit references in the novel of the similarities between Black and Blue, they are not treated as twins. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, during the first part of the novel Blue observes Black through the window of his apartment. The glass of Blue's window stands for a mirror that shows Black's image, a symbol of Blue's own reflection. In the two texts, the protagonists have to face their doubles. The strange and annoying nature of the situation move the characters to confront their doubles and in this way stop the helplessness they constantly feel. This is what Coskren calls "repugnance" and it is in this confrontation when the conflict of the story solves and when, as Herzogenrath states, the mutual interdependence resolves in a mutual exclusion. This is described in the stories in the two final scenes, especially in the final scene of *Ghosts* which becomes a rewriting of the one in "William Wilson".

During the second half of *Ghosts*, the different meetings between Black and Blue are more frequent. However, they do not introduce each other with their real identities, Blue constantly disguises as different characters. Whereas in "William Wilson" the two doubles meet in a masquerade at Rome, the encounter in *Ghosts* is more violent since Blue breaks into Black's apartment. Blue decides to usurp Black's room. There, Black is waiting for him with his face hidden behind a mask, the same image and metaphor Poe uses in his story for the character who embodies the double of William Wilson: "mask of black silk" (Poe 2003: 129) covering his face. Surprisingly, Black is waiting for Blue and in a revealing confession, he tells Blue that he needed him from the beginning "to remind me of what I was supposed to be doing. Every time I looked up, you were there, watching me, following me, always in sight, boring into me with your eyes. You were the whole world to me,

Blue, and I turned you into my death. You're the one thing that doesn't change, the one thing that turns everything inside out" (Auster 2004: 196). Here, Black explains clearly how his whole existence depends on Blue's sight and adds that he has turned him into his death, a statement that would explain Herzogenrath's thesis about mutual exclusion. From a creative perspective, this mutual interdependence can also refer to the relationship between them as creator and object created and, therefore, Black would be claiming his entity as object created and how his existence is only possible if his creator reminds him of what he is supposed to be doing. The end is unavoidable and the forthcoming elimination of the two characters concludes with a violent act in both cases. Likely, the most remarkable event of the final fights is the removal of the masks in both characters. In other words, the whole final struggle only takes place in order to remove a symbolic mask that covers the real identity of the character. In the situation of "William Wilson", the discovery is both frightening and astonishing since what the protagonist finds out is his own image in the character of his double:

A large mirror,-so at first it seemed to me in my confusion-now stood where none had been perceptible before; and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait. Thus, it appeared, I say, but was not. It was my antagonist-it was Wilson, who then stood before me in the agonies of his dissolution (Poe 2003: 129-130).

The mirror as symbol produces a psychological effect since the image of the protagonist in the figure of William Wilson is not recognized by himself face to face but reflected in a mirror, parallel to the experience suffered by Blue with the window glass during the first part of the novel. This creates the alternative of an unconcluded end in which the definite identification of the two characters is not completed. The same effect is created by Auster in *Ghosts*, in which he borrows the resource of the mask in order to suggest an open ending:

Eventually, when Blue's fury begins to abate and he sees what he has done, he cannot say for certain whether Black is alive or dead. He removes the mask from Black's face and puts his ear against his mouth, listening for the sound of Black's breath. There seems to be something, but he can't tell if it's coming from Black or himself. If he's alive now, Blue thinks, it won't be for long. And if he's dead, then so be it (Auster 2004: 197).

Essentially, the mask and the mirror are used as symbols which hide the identities of the characters and which prevent the central characters identifying with their doubles. The possibility is suggested particularly when the final fight ends in the death of the double. Accordingly, the double turns into a projection of the central character's mind and identity as a reflected image in a mirror. Although the end

remains open, the quest for the self and the other is accomplished in the extermination of the two characters.

In conclusion, the two stories base their plots in the idea of the double and how it represents a projection of the central character's mind. While for Edgar Allan Poe the creation of a twin character turns into the projection of the central character's self and a psychological game, for Auster the double is also a projection of the central character's mind but also a way to depict the creative process of writing. In terms of influence, I believe that, although Auster mentions "William Wilson" in the first novel of his trilogy, he experiments with a rewriting of Poe's short story in the second, not only by using the topic of the double but also by introducing parallel scenes to complete his plot. Thus, it could be asserted that Auster proposes a postmodern version of the detective fiction started by Poe and also a new version of his idea of the double making of it a metaphor of the creative act of writing.

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