INVESTIGATING THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT

- An examination of the theme of place in Paul Auster's *Moon Palace*.

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Introduction.

In 1995, Dennis Barone predicted that "Auster scholarship will witness an exponential growth in the late 1990s."[1] Whether or not this development has taken place is a hard task to decide, but we have seen the publication of some material, mainly articles, dealing with Auster's works. Generally speaking, Auster scholarship has tended to focus on theoretical issues such as Auster's approach to mimesis, realism, language, signs etc. Furthermore, much Auster scholarship has taken *The New York Trilogy* as its focal point.

The approaches taken in much Auster scholarship in the past are both justifiable and understandable, because all the issues that have been treated are issues of great significance to a reading of Paul Auster's works. He *is* a writer who deals very explicitly with these theoretical issues. In fact, this is one of the important factors in the establishment of his position as "one of America's most praised contemporary novelists."[2] One area that seems direly uncharted, however, is Auster's status as a national writer. He is not merely a postmodern writer from America. He is, in fact, a writer whose works seem to be, in many ways, strangely and decidedly *American*.

The idea of national literature draws much of its strength from Romanticism with its insistence on the existence of such notions as national identity and national spirit. The Romantics claimed that the inhabitants of each nation possessed a certain inward quality that made them particular to that nation and different from all other nationalities. Today, in a modern international society, many critics will claim that the importance of nationality has decreased, and the world is becoming more and more homogenous. This may be true in some instances. In fact, it might be hard to imagine how people all over the world could be expected to remain different when technology keeps pulling them closer to each other. Nevertheless, when reading Paul Auster, this striking sense of *Americanness* continues to shine from his novels.

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[1] Dennis Barone, "Introduction: Paul Auster and the Postmodern American Novel" in Dennis Barone (Ed.) *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995; 1996) p. 1.

[2] Ibid.

It will be the objective of this thesis to examine this Austerian Americanness, and Auster's 1989 novel *Moon Palace* has been chosen as a focal point in the analysis, because by reason of its setting in space - and perhaps time - this is a novel that seems particularly adept at expressing issues of Americanness. Since nationality has been perceived traditionally as a question of *place*, this thesis will examine the two places in which the action in *Moon Palace* occurs: the Frontier and New York City. Because of a logic proposed by a voice in the narrative, the focus will be on the Frontier which will be dealt with first.[3] Since Auster works very consciously within a long tradition of American Frontier literature on the one hand and City literature on the other, the two chapters dealing with these places will be preceded by short chapters presenting and/or explaining the theory behind these two "genres".

Moon Palace is a novel that deals with a very important period of time in America. Third generation immigrant Marco Stanley Fogg narrates his story which turns out to span three generations from the beginning of the 20th Century to 1971. The novel takes as its starting point New York City, which has come to be a contemporary metonym for America in the eyes of many outside contemplators. The narrative quickly reveals its use of the Frontier, an even older metonym for America, as a point of reference, and these two places become the spatial poles in Auster's most direct and thorough treatment of what it means to be American.

By examining the polarities of place in *Moon Palace*, the Frontier and the City[4], we shall see first what these places are like in the novel, how they are employed and what their significance is in an overall interpretation of the book. During the course of the following analysis the aim will be to establish a spatially based reading of Auster's poetics as they are presented in *Moon Palace*. In connection with this reading, references will be made to other works by Paul Auster that emphasise, develop or contradict the poetics proposed in *Moon Palace*. The latent claim behind the analysis will be that what Mark Irwin calls Auster's "wonderful obsession with space"[5] has significance both for a reading of *Moon Palace*, which Auster has called his "response to the world's falling apart around 1970"[6], and for a reading of the perspectives implied by the novel. These perspectives range far and deal essentially with the meaning of America. For, as Auster has said himself: "America is an invented country. It's an experiment, and people are still wondering what it is."[7]

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[3] As we shall see in the section on Effing/Barber, this voice is of course Moran's. This section will also explain the necessary focus on the Frontier in this thesis.

[4] These two terms have been capitalised throughout this thesis to emphasise the fact that they are essentially abstractions.

The pages of this thesis have been set up according to the demands proposed in the "specialepjece" so that one page approximates one normal page ("normalside").

The Frontier.

In a famous lecture given on July 12th 1893 at the American Historical Association in Chicago, Frederick Jackson Turner quoted "a recent bulletin of the Superintendent of the Census for 1890"[8] for saying that the Frontier had officially ceased to exist. Turner continues:

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[5] *Interview with Mark Irwin* in Paul Auster, *The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews and The Red Notebook* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997; 1998) p. 327.

[6] Susan Shaw (Producer & Director), *Paul Auster* (Edited and Presented by Melvyn Bragg), DR2, 3rd October, 1997.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893) in *The Frontier in American History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986;1992) p. 1.

> This brief official statement marks the closing of a great historic movement. Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of the American settlement westward, explain American development.[9]

When speaking of the "Frontier", then, Turner refers to a phenomenon just West of American civilisation. "In the census reports it is treated as the margin of that settlement which has a density of two or more to the square mile."[10] Turner admits, however, that the term is "elastic" and that there is no need for a firm definition.[11] The important claim in Turners opening statement is that the Frontier has ceased to exist. America has been settled from coast to coast, but why is the ending of the Frontier such an important historic event?

The answer must be that the ending of the Frontier is significant precisely because the Frontier had been such an integrated part of American history - and, according to Turner, such an integrated part of the American ethos:

> American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character.[12]

According to Turner, the significance of the Frontier in American history is immense, and its significance in the formation of an American character is just as important. Three keywords in the paragraph above are: *rebirth*, *fluidity* and *opportunities*. These words constantly show up in connection with the Frontier and in connection with the concept vaguely described as "the American dream". In order to start a new life, to initiate a quest for new opportunities, the American has always had the possibility of moving West. In an unsettled territory, the American could create a new future for him- or herself - and perhaps escape from the past. According to

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., p. 3.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., p. 2f.

Turner, the Frontier lay dormant in every American as a constant security: the awareness that a new beginning was possible.

The Frontier was also an important catalyst in the Americanisation of new immigrants. Not only was the movement into America via Ellis Island a movement west in relation to the Old World, Europe, but once the immigrants were granted American citizenship, many of them followed the gradually moving Frontier westward - further away from the Old World. This movement west was, according to Turner, an important part in the solidification of the Americanness of these new citizens. It was central to the American experiment: "In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English neither in nationality nor characteristics."[13]

When Turner gave his famous lecture in 1893, America had been settled from coast to coast, and there was no longer a Frontier in the West. The search for the Western Eldorado[14] had come to a halt, and Turner tried to address a problem: "The Western problem is no longer a sectional problem: it is a social problem on a national scale."[15] What will a nation "formed under pioneer ideals"[16] do when the basis of these ideals has disappeared? Turner gave the following answer:

> This, then, is the real situation: a people composed of heterogeneous materials, with diverse and conflicting ideals and social interests, having passed from the task of filling up the vacant spaces of the continent, is now thrown back upon itself, and is seeking an equilibrium.[17]

Thrown back upon itself and *seeking an equilibrium*. Here Turner is foreshadowing a new kind of inwardness in American character. When the Frontier is no longer a physical option, it will remain as a psychological safety net, a kind of mental space to which escape is possible *fictionally*. This is the basic explanation why the American West may still function as a promised land even today as we see it in much modern American fiction and popular culture. Even if the country has been populated from coast to coast, the American West will still stand as the ultimate myth in America. As Leslie Fiedler says in a very intriguing study of the myths particular to American culture:

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[13] Ibid., p. 23.
[14] Ibid., p. 21.
[15] Ibid., p. 220.
[16] Ibid., p. 269.
[17] Ibid., p. 220f.

> We have defined the "territory ahead" for too long in terms of the mythologies created out of our meeting with and response to the Indians to abandon them without a struggle.[18]

That is, even after the near-extinction of Native American culture, the myth of the Indian lives on in the American mind. The myth of the American West continues to exist simultaneously, and "this ultimate West is, of course, the real America, which exists always beyond any historical America even as it existed before it: the America of the European dreamers"[19] - or the vision of the promised land.

The problem with myths lies at their very core; assumedly central to a certain group of people, they can hardly be grasped, measured and documented. A myth will always remain an assumption, or a generalisation, and the mythic potential of the Frontier was clear from the beginning: "The West, at bottom, is a form of society, rather than an area."[20] Or, as Leslie Fiedler asks, "where, geographically, is the elusive West?"[21] The question is rhetorical, and the answer is actually suggested in Turner's statement. The elusiveness of the Frontier is also implied in the very vagueness of the definition given by the census report and the essence of the concept "West" which is only definable in relation to a focal point, and in relation to the East.

From the vantage point of Europe, the entire American continent is "the West", but when seen from New York City, Charleston etc., the Frontier is even more "Western". Defined only relatively, then, the notion of the Frontier slips through our fingers, out of reality and into the mythic domain. Therefore, when the eponymous Huckleberry Finn states at the end of his *Adventures*, that he wants "to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest" because he does not want to be "sivilized"[22] again, this is not really a journey with a fixed goal, and Peter Coveney seems rather rash when he claims that the "Territory" is the area which was later to become the State of Oklahoma.[23] The Territory, the West and the Frontier could be anywhere to the west of any given vantage point.

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[18] Leslie A. Fiedler, *The Return of the Vanishing American* (New York: Stein and Day, 1968; 1976) p. 27.
[19] Ibid., p. 78.
[20] Turner, op. cit., p. 205.
[21] Fiedler, op. cit., p. 26.

This elusiveness of the terms does not negate the historic existence of an American West or a Frontier, however. It would be absolutely pointless to claim that the American West never existed, for "[n]owadays a myth tends to signify a fiction, but a fiction which conveys a psychological truth."[24] Richard Slotkin explains this in *Gunfighter Nation* which is a diachronic study of the American Frontier myth:

> Myths are stories drawn from a society's history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society's ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness - with all the complexities and contradictions that consciousness may contain. Over time, through frequent retellings and deployments as a source of interpretive metaphors, the original mythic story is increasingly conventionalized and abstracted until it is reduced to a deeply encoded and resonant set of symbols, "icons", "keywords", or historical clichés.[25]

This is what has happened to the myth of the American West, and this explains the persistence of this particular myth. Leonard Lutwack criticises what he calls "geographical determinism" and says that "[e]ven though Turner's frontier thesis has been seriously challenged by historians, traces of it can be found in the claims some literary critics still make for the influence of space on American literature."[26] Although it is true that "[p]laces are neither good nor bad in themselves but in the values attached to them"[27], Lutwack seems to miss a point here. With regard to the fictional domain, it is meaningless to say that the Frontier myth is unfounded, and it makes no sense to say that place has no influence on national literature. Any correspondence between a certain place and a certain motif, feeling or theme may be mythically based, but we cannot pretend that the myth does not exist.

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[22] Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (London: Penguin, 1884; 1985) (Ed. Peter Coveney, 1966) p. 369.

[23] Ibid., p. 394n.

[24] J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin, 1977; 1992) p. 562.

[25] Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992) p.5.

[26] Leonard Lutwack, *The Role of Place in Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1984) p. 139.

In fiction, the author has no responsibility to regard the Frontier critically. History has established the Frontier as a myth, and much of the American canon works with the assumption that American place has a certain influence on American character. In fact, Lutwack and Slotkin both demonstrate that literature is among the institutions in society most apt to solidify values ascribed to places and construct "a system of archetypal place symbolism."[28] Slotkin even describes how cultural myths create specific genres that reproduce the ideology of a given culture.[29] In the case of America, this connection between genre and myth can be seen in connection with the genre vaguely defined as the "Western" which will be dealt with below.

The Western.

From the time of Aristotle, critics have made attempts at categorising literature into smaller groups known as "genres". The number of genres have varied greatly, the characteristics of particular genres have been described differently, but attempts at describing "genre" as a theoretical construct have been rather vague. The Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin has a rather ingenious way of doing this, however:

> a genre is what Mikhail Bakhtin calls a "field" for future expression enabling authors and readers to create by absorption and modification of literary conventions. The genre collects and stores these predictable conventions for later use in what Bakhtin calls "genre memory."[30]

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[27] Ibid., p. 35.

[28] Ibid., p. 31.

[29] Slotkin, pp. 5-8.

[30] Ronald Primeau, *Romance of the Road: The Literature of the American Highway* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996) p. 2.

In a postmodern mode of understanding, genre is best described as a database into which every old and new publication within the genre is uploaded. If we speak of the Western genre, every Western known to man will have been uploaded to the genre memory of that particular genre. This creates a prototype composed of the most typical characteristics, but the genre memory will also contain a number of slight deviations from the prototype.

All in all, the genre memory will contain a great number of conventions and characteristics. Some of the conventions are central, some are marginal, but, in theory, any author wanting to compose a Western will have to consider all of them individually. A generically very conventional work of art will respect most of the conventions, whereas a less conventional work will respect fewer and perhaps even turn some of the conventions upside down. In the case of the Western, this may finally create an Anti-western, but writer and reader would not be able to know the Anti-western if there was no playing with the conventions proposed in the "real" Western.

Leslie Fiedler provocatively divides American literature into four major genres: the Northern, the Southern, the Eastern and the Western.[31] Fiedler's categorisation is not a division of the American national literature into smaller groups of regional literature as such. The names of the groups have nothing to do with place of composition. The division into Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western genres is a way of signalling that American literature is first and foremost a literature about place. The three first genres deal with American place, sometimes in relation to the Old World, but Fiedler deals mostly with the Western, which is also the main object of investigation here.

According to Fiedler, the central convention in the Western genre "is not the confrontation with the alien landscape […] but the encounter with the Indian, that utter stranger for whom our New World is an Old Home".[32] Of seemingly unknown descent, the Indian “escapes completely the mythologies we brought with us from Europe.”[33] In this way, he or she becomes the epitome of everything that is different in the West. In fact, with the ageing of the genre, and with the settling and modernisation of the land, everything “Western” has been assimilated but the Indian:

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[31] Fiedler, op. cit., pp. 16ff.

[32] Ibid., p. 21.

> Everything else which belongs to the Western scene has long since been assimilated: the prairies subdivided and landscaped; the mountains staked off as hunting preserves and national parks; fabulous beasts, like the grizzlies and the buffalo, killed or fenced in as tourist attractions; even the mythological season of the Western, that nonexistent interval between summer and fall called “Indian summer,” become just another part of the White year. Only the Indian survives, however ghetto-ized, debased, and debauched, to remind us with his alien stare of the new kind of space in which the baffled refugees from Europe first found him (an unhumanized vastness), and the new kind of time through which, despite all our efforts, he still moves (a historyless antiquity).[34]

The Western is, then, according to Fiedler essentially a story of the confrontation between the WASP and the Indian, and even today, the Indian haunts American awareness like a nightmare.

“[S]pecific geographical sites become associated with certain themes through custom or fashion”[35], says Leonard Lutwack. Thus, it is no grand surprise that the Western is “associated with the western states of the USA”.[36] Actually, the Western is so often connected with the experience of the Frontier that a Western is intrinsically a kind of Frontier narrative. If the Frontier myth is the “oldest and most characteristic myth”[37] in American culture, then, the Western must be the archetypal American genre. Being assumed so central to the American ethos, and the essence of the American “experiment”, the Frontier myth and the Western genre may reveal something about Americanness as a mythic construction. The following chapter will base itself upon this assumption and investigate the use of the Frontier myth and the Western genre in *Moon Palace* to see what kind of Americanness Paul Auster presents in this book.

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., p. 23f.

[35] Lutwack, op. cit., p. 29.

[36] Cuddon, op. cit., p. 1042.

[37] Slotkin, op. cit., p. 10.

The Frontier in *Moon Palace*.

The significance of the Frontier in *Moon Palace* is indicated by the name of the protagonist/narrator, Marco Stanley Fogg. The strange name is highly suggestive, but Paul Auster typically foresees that the reader will eventually wonder about this name. Therefore, he lets Uncle Victor play deliberately with Marco's name so that the reader cannot come up with clever and unexpected allusions. "Victor's nominalism"[38] unfolds several of the allusions inherent in the name:

> According to him, it proved that travel was in my blood, that life would carry me to places where no man had ever been before. Marco, naturally enough, was for Marco Polo, the first European to visit China; Stanley was for the American journalist who had tracked down Dr. Livingstone "in the heart of darkest Africa"; and Fogg was for Phileas, the man who had stormed around the globe in less than three months.[39]

The narrator refutes the allusions in the name:

> It didn't matter that my mother had chosen Marco simply because she liked it, or that Stanley had been my grandfather's name, or that Fogg was a misnomer, the whim of some half-literate American functionary.[40]

This refutation of symbolism, however, does not mean that the name carries no allusions relevant to the interpretation of the narrative. Nor does it mean that the precise allusions revealed by Uncle Victor's games are "untrue". The refutation is more like a metafictional joke, because, as we shall see, Victor's reading of Marco's name is *very* relevant to the interpretation of the narrative. Bernd Herzogenrath even traces Victor's nominalism back to "the American myth of the 'self-made' man"[41] which emphasises the connection to the whole complex of Frontier related imagery.

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[38] Paul Auster, *Moon Palace* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989; 1990) p. 7.

[39] Ibid., p. 6.

[40] Ibid., pp. 6f.

The journeyman motif, which is suggested by Victor's nominalism, then, becomes an epitome of many of the spatial and thematic structures in *Moon Palace*. It becomes an indication of the many journeys and Frontiers in *Moon Palace*. In fact, frontier images and stories pervade the main narrative, as well as many of the parallel narratives and implications, to the extent that the Frontier becomes a leitmotif in *Moon Palace* - a point of thematic convergence in the book. Steven Weisenburger says that *Moon Palace* is a "novel saturated with references to 1492 and Cristoforo Columbo, to the systematic westwarding domination of the Outside after Columbus, and to the crisis of that progressive, modern, imperialistic ethos during the sixties".[42] In the next sections, we shall examine some of these references, and we shall see how these images relate to an interpretation of the narrative.

Marco's Childhood.

The novel starts *in medias res* with a pronoun that has no real antecedent: "It was the summer that men first walked on the moon."[43] Having drawn the readers into the narrative, the narrator flashes back from the summer of 1969 to the fall of 1965 when he first came to New York City as a freshman at Columbia University. After a short resume of Uncle Victor's story and Marco's experiences during his first years in New York City, the narrator focuses on his family. "There is not much to tell about my family"[44], he says, but we do learn several things of importance to the overall narrative. First of all, Marco's grandfather and his wife immigrated from Europe and shed their original name, Fogelman[45], which became Fog and later Fogg. As the name suggests, the family history is foggy, which is emphasised greatly when Marco's genealogy begins to unfold by chance during the narrative.

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[41] Bernd Herzogenrath, *An Art of Desire: Reading Paul Auster* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999) p0. 126.

[42] Steven Weisenburger, "Inside *Moon Palace*" in Barone, op. cit., p. 129.

[43] *Moon Palace*, p. 1.

[44] Ibid., p. 3.

[45] "*Fogel* meant bird, my uncle informed me […] A bird flying through fog, I used to think, a giant bird flying across the ocean, not stopping until it reached America." (Ibid., p. 3f.) Again, emphasis added to the travel motif

Marco has vivid childhood memories of sitting in a cinema watching "Randolph Scott Westerns".[46] It could be either of the Westerns, Randolph Scott participated in, but the reference is probably meant to bring to mind the Westerns directed by Budd Boetticher, for example *Westbound* from 1959. Like most of the Westerns which were the main genre in Scott's career, these are fairly conventional adaptations of the genre with a somewhat romanticised perception of the Frontier milieu. The reference to Randolph Scott is one of the first instances of Westward movement and experiences of the Frontier in *Moon Palace*.

Simultaneously with other information on Marco's childhood, we are told that Marco's mother, Emily, is buried at "Westlawn Cemetery"[47] where Solomon Barber will eventually end up also. From the beginning, then, there is a clear duality in the Frontier images in *Moon Palace*. One pole of the spectrum is inhabited by the images evoking a romanticised and somewhat tempting side of Frontier life, in this case the Westerns seen from both a spatial and a temporal distance. The other pole is presented in the association of the West, literally contained in the name of the Cemetery, with the finality of death. The opposition is parallel to a dichotomy of romanticised action and movement versus ultimate stasis (death) which pervades the novel like a realistic threat from above opposed to the promise of the West.

Howard Mumford Jones indicates the dichotomy of the West like this: "Plenitude, sublimity, *terror*, energy, overwhelming power on the one hand, and the littleness of mankind on the other!"[48] Inherent in the idea of the West from the very beginning was the notion that the land may provide everything, like an Eldorado, or it might undo the

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suggested by Victor's nominalism.

[46] Ibid., p. 4.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Howard Mumford Jones, *The Frontier in American Fiction: Four Lectures on the Relation of Landscape to Literature* (Jerusalem: Turim Press, 1956) p. 24. (Emphasis added.)

pioneer venturing into the wilderness. In fact, the duality was contained even in the official discovery of America in 1492, an event referenced, for instance, by the amount of books inherited by Marco.[49] When Columbus set out for America, the world was well aware of the dangers involved in the quest for new land. Either Columbus would find abundant riches, or he would topple over the edge of the Earth and perish in the attempt! Thus, self-destructiveness[50] is a trait inherent in the Frontier hero from the time of Columbus to the present. It is also a characteristic trait in Auster's protagonist.

According to Leonard Lutwack one of the traditional conceptions of America presents it as a wilderness:

> Always an ambivalent symbol in the history of man everywhere, the wilderness in America early came to represent both the forbidding aspects of the new continent, its perils and hazards standing in the way of survival, as well as the mysterious source of spiritual health and regeneration.[51]

This is the ambivalence contained in Marco's childhood image of the West: death or regeneration. It is an opposition that is central to Auster's use of place, and we shall return to it time and again. An adult character will somehow need to make a "choice". If the adult "chooses" the wilderness, he or she either succeeds which results in regeneration, or he or she perishes in the attempt.[52] For young Marco, however, the options exist side by side without necessarily negating each other. To a child, the West is *both* Randolph Scott romanticism *and* death in the Cemetery.

Another Frontier image connected with Marco's childhood is the image Marco constructs of his father in lieu of confirmed genealogy:

> There was no evidence of him anywhere in the house. Not one photograph, not even a name. For want of something to cling to, I imagined him as a dark-haired version of Buck Rogers, a space traveler who had passed into the fourth dimension and could not find his way back.[53]

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[49] *Moon Palace*, p. 13.

[50] Cf. Turner, op. cit., p. 209.

[51] Lutwack, op. cit., p. 166.

[52] Barber / Effing's Frontier experience in the cave, for instance, is regenerative, whereas Solomon Barber's is destructive - resulting in *his* burial at Westlawn Cemetery. We shall return to these two Frontier narratives later.

[53] *Moon Palace*, p. 4.

The image is important in two ways. First, because Marco imagines his father as a Frontier hero, who has lost the battle with the wilderness, a pioneer who has failed to fulfil "[t]he first ideal of the pioneer […] that of conquest. It was his task to fight with nature for the chance to exist."[54] Secondly, because Marco compares his father with Buck Rogers specifically - Buck Rogers, the comic strip hero from *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* which ran consecutively from 1929 to 1967. Buck Rogers was a great success from the beginning. He was the hero of the world's first science fiction comic strip, and since the beginning of his "career" he has surfaced in almost every other kind of media. Three years after his debut, he "had become a national hero whose image graced a variety of tie-in merchandise, including toys, games, cups and plates, and clothing."[55]

Filling in the blank hole in his genealogy with an image of a nationally acclaimed fictional super-hero, the grand conquistador of Space, Marco imagines that he descends from a Frontier hero who tackled the last great Frontier in the World: the Frontier of Outer Space. This is the true Frontier of the 20th and 21st Centuries as Fiedler indicates[56], and the Space imagery ties in very well with the moon imagery which pervades the book on every level. We shall return to the Frontier of Outer Space later. For now, it will suffice to say that Marco establishes himself as a character with "lunacy"[57] in the blood.

At the beginning of *Moon Palace*, the chronology of the narrative is rather abrupt. When Emily Fogg dies, however, Marco goes to Chicago to live with his Uncle Victor. This initiates a new phase in the narrative - and a new string of Frontier images and narratives. The next section of this chapter will look into this phase of the book.

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[54] Turner, op. cit., p. 269.

[55] *The Buck Rogers Official Website*. 19th September, 2001. <http://www.buck-rogers.com/comic_strip.htm>

[56] Fiedler, op. cit., p. 27.

[57] The notion of lunacy will be explained in the section on Ralph Albert Blakelock.

The Time with Uncle Victor.

From his childhood homes in Boston and Cambridge[58], the move to Uncle Victor in Chicago is a move westward; a journey into old Frontier territory. Victor is a musician playing in an ensemble called "Howie Dunn's Moonlight Men".[59] The name is, of course a reference to the Frontier of Outer Space and a symbol of Victor's restlessness. Victor does not take on the role of a parent to Marco, but he establishes a warm friendship with the protagonist.

Life with Victor in Chicago may be read as a Frontier narrative; or more precisely: a string of Frontier motifs together adding up to something resembling a Frontier narrative. Together Victor and Marco play a kind of Frontier game in which they invent a new world:

> Within a month of my arrival, we had developed a game of inventing countries together, imaginary worlds that overturned the laws of nature. Some of the better ones took weeks to perfect, and the maps I drew of them hung in a place of honor above the kitchen table.[60]

The game resembles the creation of myths connected with the discovery of America, which was rumoured to be a New Eden[61], and subsequently the myths connected with the movement westward of the Frontier: "[t]he notion that beyond the wilderness, in space *or time or both*, there was always the promise of a fine country".[62] This promised land is not necessarily a place. It may also be a point in time, and this supports Turner's claim that the Frontier is a kind of *society*. This desire to reach that point (in space or time) is what motivates the fictional countries created by Victor and Marco:

> Given the difficulties the real world had created for both of us, it probably made sense that we should want to leave it as often as possible.[63]

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[58] *Moon Palace*, p. 4.

[59] Ibid., p. 5.

[60] Ibid., p. 6.

[61] Jones, op. cit., p. 14.

[62] Ibid., p. 16. (Emphasis added.)

[63] *Moon Palace*, p. 6.

The creation of fiction is essentially parallel to the creation of myth.[64] Part of the American literary legacy has always been the interconnectedness between myth and American fiction, or fiction of America. As such, it could be argued, fiction is central to the American experiment. As indicated above, the dream of America existed long before the actual discovery of the new land, and fictions or myths of America came to represent this new land in the minds of Europeans. In this way, "[i]mmigrants were […] forced to conceive of America before experiencing it, and consequently preconceptions of its physical qualities far outstripped reality"[65], says Lutwack.

Marco's desire to escape into fictional space is essentially a desire to escape into myth, that is, into a kind of space that "exists" only as fiction. This kind of desire is inherently a Frontier narrative, since it deals with a venture into some kind of wilderness. Having no real Frontier anymore, Marco needs to construct an open space for himself; a Territory for which he can light out *mentally*. Cuddon argues that "myth tends to signify a fiction, but a fiction which conveys a psychological truth."[66] The Frontier may have ceased to exist as a physical option, but it remains open as a "state of mind". This is the first instance in *Moon Palace* in which the construction and consumption of fiction is presented as a Frontier experience, but it will turn out to be a common motif in the book.

The desire to move physically, a desire inherent in any Frontier narrative, is also contained in the fact that Victor and Marco go to the cinema to see *Around the World in 80 Days*[67], a film that will soon take up an important part in Uncle Victor's nominalism, which was described previously in this chapter. Fiction about travelling assumes the same symbolic role as the invention of fictional countries. It becomes part of a larger complex of Frontier symbolism representing a desire in the protagonist to escape occupied space and light out for uncharted lands to construct and locate “a place in the world I could now call my own.”[68] According to Ulrich Wicks, this quest for home is essentially a picaresque quest; “the essential picaresque pattern [is] a quest for ‘home’”.[69] To all intents and purposes, therefore, Marco is both the personification of the American experiment, as Auster presents it, and a prototypical picaro.

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[64] The words fiction and myth are even etymologically connected. Cf. Cuddon, op. cit., p. 562.

[65] Lutwack, op. cit., p. 143

[66] Cuddon, op. cit., p. 562.

[67] *Moon Palace*, p. 6.

The notion of the picaresque is also indicated in Marco’s abbreviation of his name into M. S., an abbreviation often used in critical apparatus meaning *manuscript*. Victor approves of this choice of name and says that “[e]very man is the author of his own life […] The book you are writing is not yet finished. Therefore, it’s a manuscript.”[70] Life is presented as an unfinished book, and this, according to Bernd Herzogenrath gives emphasis to the reading of Marco as a picaro: “in its open-endedness: just like the life it depicts, the individual picaresque is ‘a work in progress.’”[71] Victor, moreover, invokes the ideal of the “self-made man”: “every man is the author of his own life”.

This notion of self-making and the notion of presenting life as a fiction are typical of Paul Auster, and we shall return to them later. Steven Kellman has even explained how the “American myth of the ‘self-made man’”[72] has participated in the creation of a modern sub-genre: “the self-begetting novel [which is…] an account, usually first-person, of the development of a character to the point at which he is able to take up his pen and compose the novel we have just finished reading.”[73] This is a genre often employed by Auster, since several of his novels, among them *Leviathan* and *The New York Trilogy*, exhibit traits of self-begetting. Moreover, the ideal of “self-making” is one of the pioneer ideals connected with the Frontier mythology:

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[68] Ibid., p. 108.

[69] Ulrich Wicks, *Picaresque Narrative, Picaresque Fictions: A Theory and Research Guide* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989) p. 48.

[70] *Moon Palace*, p. 7.

[71] Herzogenrath, op. cit., p. 119.

[72] Steven G. Kellman, *The Self-Begetting Novel* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980) p. 8.

[73] Ibid., p. 3.

> The self-made man was the Western man's ideal, was the kind of man that all men might become. Out of his wilderness experience, out of the freedom of his opportunities, he fashioned a formula for social regeneration, - the freedom of the individual to seek his own.[74]

When everything is going its best at Uncle Victor's, and Marco seems about to complete his picaresque quest for a new home, and the implicit Frontier quest of "taming the West", the alcoholic Dora enters the narrative, and Marco's quests fail. Marco describes the relationship between Victor and Dora as an "infernal machine"[75] and the problem is solved when Marco is enrolled in a boarding school back east in New Hampshire. This solution is somewhat of an admission of defeat to Marco, and it equals the failure of his Frontier/picaresque quest. The West, finally, cannot be tamed; a home cannot be established at the Frontier, and Marco is forced to retreat to the safety of the "Old World". The association of Marco's stay in Chicago with the Frontier is emphasised by Marco's referring to Victor's divorce as "the marriage wars"[76] a phrase invoking "the Indian wars" and all their symbolic significance in connection with the Frontier mythology.[77] To all intents and purposes, therefore, the first phase in the narrative of Victor and Marco may be read as a failed Frontier quest.

The second phase in this narrative begins when Marco returns to Chicago for his Christmas vacation, and Victor has divorced Dora and disbanded the Moonlight Moods to start another ensemble: the Moon Men.[78] The reference in the name to the Frontier of outer space is maintained, and the new ensemble turns out to be central in uncle Victor's personal Frontier narrative:

> The bookings are extensive so far, and no doubt others will follow. Colorado, Arizona, Nevada, California. We'll be setting a westerly course, plunging into the wilderness. It should be interesting, I think, no matter what comes of it. A bunch of city slickers in the land of cowboys and Indians. But I relish

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[74] Turner, op. cit., p. 213.

[75] *Moon Palace*, p. 10.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Richard Slatta, *Cowboys of the Americas* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990) p. 170: "In the United States, countless movies and pulp novels have sensationalized the Indian wars."

[78] *Moon Palace*, p. 11.

> the thought of those open spaces, of playing my music under the desert sky. Who knows if some new truth will not be revealed to me out there?[79]

Again, the westerly course is associated with a new beginning and a quest for personal success. Furthermore, the final goal of this Frontier quest is a record contract with a company in Los Angeles - as far West as it is possible to go in America. Essentially, Victor's quest is a Western plot, a desire to reach the latent riches of a Western Eldorado. The Western symbolism, moreover, is also used metafictionally when Victor is about to say farewell to Marco; "Pulling up stakes, I think they call it in the Westerns."[80] There is also a metafictional layer in the type of postcards Victor sends home to Marco after his departure:

> These were generally garish, full-color tourist items: depictions of Rocky Mountain sunsets, publicity shots of roadside motels, cactus plants and rodeos, dude ranches, ghost towns, desert panoramas. Salutations sometimes appeared within the borders of a painted lasso, and once a mule even spoke with a cartoon bubble above his head: Greetings from Silver Gulch.[81]

The West Victor reaches is presented as a vulgarised cliché. "The real pleasure lay in the cards themselves, and the more inane and vulgar they were, the happier I was to get them"[82], Marco says. The implication is of course, that the West does not exist anymore. Like Turner showed a hundred years before the publication of *Moon Palace*, the Frontier has ceased to exist physically although it remains in the American ethos as a kind of all-pervasive myth. It seems that the essential goal of Victor's Frontier quest is not really material, but personal and abstract. Victor is primarily aiming for the revelation of "some new truth". Like Turner foresaw in 1893, the Frontier quest has been made inward.

Just like Marco's first Frontier quest, however, Victor's fails. He experiences a streak of bad luck with his Moon Men, and just as he is about to go back east, he dies. Simultaneously with Victor's failure, Marco is beginning to construct a home for himself, significantly on *West* 112th Street. On a chance glance out of an apartment window, Marco makes “the singular discovery that helped [him] to warm up to the place and settle in.”[83] Marco has discovered the Moon Palace sign from the nearby eponymous restaurant:

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[79] Ibid., p. 12.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., p. 14.
[82] Ibid.

> I had never experienced anything so sudden and absolute. A bare and grubby room had been transformed into a site of inwardness, an intersection point of strange omens and mysterious arbitrary events. I went on staring at the Moon Palace sign, and little by little I understood that I had come to the right place, that this small apartment was indeed where I was meant to live.[84]

Marco’s first attempt at establishing a life with Victor in the West may have failed, but his second attempt at doing so is a success. Marco finally overcomes the Frontier symbolically in an apartment on “West” 112th Street with a view of the “Moon”. The Frontier symbolism is double, and Marco’s new home is a reconstruction within the boundaries of New York City of a Frontier home. This successful Frontier narrative within the overall narrative sets up one extreme of place, namely the extreme of *comfort*. Feeling at home in a given place is the positive extreme of place, whereas the negative extreme is semanticized when Marco hears of Victor’s failed Frontier quest, “hard times had hit the Moon Men”[85]: “I imagined all the things that can happen to a man between Boise and New York, and suddenly the American continent was transformed into a vast danger zone, a perilous nightmare of traps and mazes.”[86] The negative extreme of place, hence, is *danger*.

The two extremes of place in *Moon Palace* are contained in a traditional dichotomy of place in literature. Leonard Lutwack points to the fact that:

> Two opposed ideas about earth have always competed for man’s assent: one, that earth is a hostile, alien place, keeping man from a human potential that can only be realized by transcending earth; and the other, that earth is man’s true home, his only possible environment, which he must adapt to and control in order to fulfill himself.[87]

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[83] Ibid., p. 16.
[84] Ibid., p. 17.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid., p. 18.
[87] Lutwack, op. cit., p. 3.

These ideas about place are traditionally “translated into literary terms through various genres and literary movements.”[88] But *Moon Palace* seems to contain both extremes of place; the Western Frontier that Victor seeks out is dangerous and leads him straight back to Westlawn Cemetery, whereas Marco’s Frontier “West” in the interior of New York City represents the safety of home. It seems that there is no final decision in the narrative as to the true character of place. This, in fact, is not only true of the presentation of the Frontier, but as we shall see in the presentation of place as such.

All in all, the phase of *Moon Palace* which is connected with Uncle Victor is pervaded by Frontier narratives. In the instances when a character tries to seek out and conquer the old West, the result is failure. The only successful Frontier narratives in this phase of *Moon Palace* are the narratives in which the Frontier is symbolic or fictional. Thus, Victor and Marco’s creation of fictional Frontiers to conquer is a success story. Marco’s creation of a new home in the symbolic “West” of New York City is also a success story. Finally, when Victor is buried, Marco experiences his first success in the real West, Chicago, when he conquers a prostitute in a hotel with the symbolically significant name Eldorado Hotel.[89] Sadly, however, the encounter is fraught with ironic implications, and the conquest is bound to be certain without any real accomplishment:

> I wandered blindly for two or three hours, threw up again on a doorstep, and then found a thin, gray-eyed prostitute named Agnes standing under an umbrella on a neon-lit street. I accompanied her to a room in the Eldorado Hotel, gave her a brief lecture on the poems of Sir Walter Raleigh, and then sang lullabies to her as she took off her clothes and spread her legs.[90]

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[88] Ibid., p. 6.

[89] In a significant reiteration of a central motif in *Moon Palace*, the prostitute calls Marco a “lunatic” which in a sense confirms his “family relations” to Buck Rogers the space traveller. This motif was mentioned briefly earlier in this chapter, and we shall return to the discussion of lunacy later.

[90] *Moon Palace*, p. 19.

The Uncle Victor phase of the narrative indicates that the real West cannot be conquered. The Frontier exists only as a myth, and the only successful conquest of the West hence takes place symbolically or in fiction. This motif is continued in the narrative phase initiated by Uncle Victor's death which will be examined in the next section of this chapter.

Marco's Reading and the Hunger Project in Central Park.

The death of Uncle Victor initiates another phase in the narrative of Marco Stanley Fogg. Victor has left Marco a total of 1492 books, a "propitious number […] since it evokes the memory of Columbus's discovery of America"[91], Victor says before setting out on the quest that eventually undoes him. As indicated previously by Steven Weisenburger, the *1492 motifs* in *Moon Palace* are closely connected to the Frontier imagery and the Frontier narratives, since the story of Columbus is essentially the story of a Frontier quest.[92] In fact, Columbus is in many ways the initiation of the American Frontier.

Read with this close connection in mind, therefore, it is significant that Marco's reading of Victor's books is described as a journey of exploration:

> It was almost like following the route of an explorer from long ago, duplicating his steps as he thrashed out into virgin territory, moving westward with the sun, pursuing the light until it was finally extinguished.[93]

Marco's reading process, the symbolic move westward, is not only a Frontier narrative in the abstract sense, however. Going westward mentally is combined with a growing reason for going west in a more traditional way. Marco is running out of funds, and selling off the books when read is only a limited postponement of the inevitable eviction from his apartment. Eventually, Marco will have to do as so many

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[91] Ibid., p. 13.

[92] Weisenburger, op. cit., p. 129.

[93] *Moon Palace*., p. 22.

Americans have done before him. He will have to “light out for the territory” in order to find Eldorado with all its material opportunities and begin a new life. Within the confines of New York City, however, the only Frontier opportunity is represented by Central Park which is where Marco takes his quest when the eviction comes at last:

> I turned south, paused for a moment, and then took a step. Then I took another step, and in that way I began to move down the street. I did not look back once.[94]

From the apartment on West 112th Street, Central Park is a move “downward”, into the lower parts of Manhattan. The idea of up and down in relation to the City and the experience of City space will be dealt with in the part of this thesis dealing with the City in *Moon Palace*. For now, it seems more important to stress that a move from West 112th Street to Central Park could also be perceived, geographically, as a move slightly west.

A physical move west in relation to West 112th Street, Central Park is even further “west” ideologically speaking. Within the functionality of Manhattan, Central Park may be viewed as a remainder of what Witold Rybczynski terms “the city beautiful”.[95] Since the “city beautiful” as an architectural ideal was abandoned around 1900 and supplanted by the ideology of “the city profitable”[96], the move into Central Park is also a kind of flashback to an earlier period of time. Authorised in 1853, Central Park has come to represent not only nature within the City, but also the past within the most modern metropolis in the World.

With these associations in mind, it is clear why Marco would refer to his move into Central Park as “my pilgrimage”.[97] For the city dweller, the Park is essentially uncharted territory; a Frontier to be experienced. And just like Jackson Turner suggested, the Frontier experience turns out to be centred around inwardness - an experience best expressed in religious terms. The conversion of place into a religious experience is continued in the fact that place itself becomes a quest. That is, in order to survive in Central Park, Marco needs to find and optimise a place of his own. Place is no longer a given fact in life:

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[94] Ibid., p. 47.

[95] Witold Rybczynski, *City Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995; 1996) p. 147.

[96] Ibid.

[97] *Moon Palace*, p. 51.

> It had been one thing to sit in my room and wait for the sky to fall on top of me, but it was quite another to be thrust out into the open. […] I would have to *find a place* to sleep.[98]

All in all, the eviction from the apartment and the new Frontier experience in Central Park compose a completely new set of parameters for the use and interpretation of place in *Moon Palace*. Not only does place become a factor one has to search for and construct oneself, on some level place actually ceases to exist. "I've made my nothing, and now I've got to live in it"[99], Marco says. "Nothing" is suddenly turned into a physical entity, and New York City becomes an unrecognisable "anywhere", "devoid of associations".[100]

"This was New York, but it had nothing to do with the New York I had always known", says Marco upon becoming a resident in Central Park. As Leonard Lutwack says:

> Americans of the twentieth century, more than any other generation, suffer from the Rip Van Winkle syndrome, the disquieting discovery that a place has been transformed almost beyond recognition.[101]

In these terms, Marco must be a prototypical 20th Century American, because the experience of Central Park throws him into a severe feeling of displacement. New York of old has become a completely *New* York in which everything seems to be inverted. The park is described in explicitly religious terms and set in opposition to the streets that used to be so familiar to Marco, but are now his enemies:

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[98] Ibid., p. 54. (Emphasis added.)

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid., p. 56.

[101] Lutwack, op. cit., p. 181. Rip Van Winkle is the eponymous main character in a short story by Washington Irving. (Washington Irving, *Rip Van Winkle* (1819) in Nina Baym et. al. (Eds.) *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979; 1995) pp. 401-413.)

> I slept in the park every night after that. It became a sanctuary for me, a refuge of inwardness against the grinding demands of the streets. […T]he park offered me the possibility of solitude, of separating myself from the rest of the world. In the streets, everything is bodies and commotion, and like it or not, you cannot enter them without adhering to a rigid protocol of behavior. […] By contrast, life in Central Park allowed for a much broader range of variables.[102]

Setting up the dichotomy of inside versus outside, Marco presents the Park as a more democratic place than the surrounding City; democracy which was one of the traditional values ascribed to the Frontier, but revealed by Slatta to be a hollow myth.[103] The Park becomes a place where Marco is able to re-establish himself as an individual, a place where he can return to his "inner life"[104] by "doing a Thoreau" as Thea Astley so elegantly phrases it in her great novel *Vanishing Points*.[105]

The experience of nature in religiously coloured terms and the connection between outer nature and inner nature are motifs generally ascribed to the Romantics, but in the American cultural heritage, they are closely connected, in particular, with Henry David Thoreau who began composing his philosophy of life, *Walden*, in 1846. To America, *Walden* is a manifesto of the simple life of the self-made man - ideals that are at the core of the American "experiment" and pervade American awareness on many cultural levels. "There is a powerful theme in American literature, not only to return to nature, as in *Walden*, but return to the primeval state of relationship to Nature, Mother Nature"[106], says David Holbrook in a discussion of three major American poets of the sixties and seventies. This poetic motif is culturally pervasive, and Auster's *Moon Palace* is among the works of American literature that includes it.

In *Walden*, Thoreau describes how he "left" civilisation to live near Walden Pond in accordance with simplicity and nature. He describes his motivation in the following manner:

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[102] *Moon Palace*, p. 56f.

[103] Slatta, op. cit., p. 159.

[104] *Moon Palace,* p. 58

[105] Thea Astley, *Vanishing Points* (Victoria: Minerva, 1992; 1993) p. 7.

[106] Boris Ford (Ed.) *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature: American Literature* (London: Penguin, 1988; 1991) p. 545.

> I went to the woods because I wished to live *deliberately*, to front only the *essential* facts of life, and see if I could not *learn* what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. […] I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, […] and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were *sublime*, to know it by *experience*, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.[107]

The same sort of discourse is prevalent in Marco's description of his Frontier experience in Central Park. Without a doubt, Marco lives deliberately in Central Park which gives him "a chance to return to [his] inner life [and establish] an equilibrium between the inner and the outer."[108] This will turn out to be an important dichotomy in the overall thematic structure in *Moon Palace*, but for now it will suffice to say that Central Park awakens in Marco an inwardness like the one precipitated by Turner in 1893.

Like Thoreau, and like Uncle Victor, Marco also uses the Frontier to search for knowledge and truth: "Perhaps that was all I had set out to prove in the first place: that once you throw your life to the winds, you will discover things you had never known before, things that cannot be learned under any other circumstances."[109] This sort of learning can only be acquired trough a mystical, sublime experience like the one Thoreau describes.

Marco's experiences while "exploring"[110] Central Park give him great personal insight, an insight that turns everything upside down: "Causality was no longer the hidden demiurge that ruled the universe: down was up, the last was the first, the end was the beginning. […] change was the only constant."[111] The personal insight that Marco gains in Central Park may be negative, "change is the only constant" may not be the greatest consolation, but the insight is an important part of Marco's understanding of himself. The same is true of another insight, Marco gains from the Frontier experience in Central Park:

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[107] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854) in Baym, op. cit., p. 835. (Emphasis added.)
[108] *Moon Palace*, p. 58.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid., p. 62.
[111] Ibid.

> In my less exultant moods, I tended to look at myself from a political perspective, hoping to justify my condition by treating it as a challenge to the American way. I was an instrument of sabotage, I told myself, a loose part in the national machine, a misfit whose job was to gum up the works. No one could look at me without feeling shame or anger or pity. I was living proof that the system had failed, that the smug, overfed land of plenty was finally cracking apart.[112]

Reading himself as a symbol of the cracking up of the American dream, Marco gains a sublime insight. Inherent in this insight is the knowledge that something is wrong with the American experiment, and Marco's quest for "truth" at the Frontier is successful although somewhat depressing. In his mystically acquired sense of himself and America, Marco views Central Park as an epitome of the world: "I enjoyed the paradox of living in a man-made natural world. This was nature enhanced, so to speak".[113] The mimetic conflict between *man-made* and *natural* is inspired by the English Renaissance poet Sir Philip Sidney who wrote in 1595 that:

> Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers Poets have done, neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet smelling flowers, nor whatsoever els may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brasen, the Poets only deliver a golden.[114]

Sidney's claim is that all art is mimetic, but not necessarily realistically so. Art may produce a world that is more beautiful than its "real" referent and full of supernatural beings. Marco takes the paradox inherent in *The Defence of Poesie* and stretches its implications. Since Central Park is "nature enhanced" and "man-made", Central Park is a work of art. Living in Central Park, Marco is also living, concretely, in a work of art. This coincides with the pun on Marco's name, M. S. for *manuscript*, and a pattern emerges. Marco has realised that a human being is essentially the creator of his or her own world. We have seen that New York has become an "anywhere" devoid of meaning, and we have seen that a Frontier experience is not bound to any specific geographical location. More than anything else, a Frontier experience is a mental project, also demonstrated by Marco's "game" with Uncle Victor, and the importance of place seems to recede before Marco's eyes. Marco has reached an understanding of what is according to Leonard Lutwack a quintessential American predicament:

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[112] Ibid., p. 61.

[113] Ibid., p. 62.

[114] Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poesie* (1595) in *Defence of Poesie, Astrophil and Stella and Other Writings* (London: Everyman, 1997; 1999) p. 88.

> the still prevailing view of America as an opportunity for individual achievement rather than a place, a means rather than an end. […] Having such idealistic preconceptions and such abstract motivations, Americans appear not to feel much attachment to the land they live in.[115]

Place ceases to be of importance to Marco; his experiences in Central Park have demonstrated to him that home can be constructed just about everywhere, and he completely loses the sense of place that was associated with him at the beginning of the narrative.[116] His hunger project has been taken too far, the delirium induces in him a dream in which the two "o"s in the Moon Palace sign are looking down on him with "scorn and impatience" and Marco becomes "convinced that they were the eyes of God."[117] The dream has all the potential of a sublime experience, and it turns into a strange dream about Indians which ends with Kitty Wu and Zimmer rescuing Marco from his delirious state. The dream and its implications will be dealt with in the next section of this chapter. For now, it will merely be pointed out that Zimmer and Kitty manage to make Marco forget his newly acquired knowledge about the essence and value of place until Effing's Frontier story will awaken the knowledge in Marco again.

Kitty Wu, Restitution and the First Landscape.

Upon waking from his delirium induced dream in Central Park and seeing his friend Zimmer and Kitty Wu again, Marco narrates what he sees:

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[115] Lutwack, op. cit., p. 178.

[116] *Moon Palace*, p. 69.

[117] Ibid., p. 70.

> Kitty was the one I saw first, but I didn't recognize her, even though I sensed that she was familiar to me. She was wearing her Navaho headband, and my initial response was to take her for an afterimage, a shadow-woman incubated in the darkness of my dream. Later on, she told me that I smiled at her, and when she bent down to look at me more closely, I called her Pocahontas.[118]

Marco has only seen Kitty once previously, and he can hardly remember her. She has fallen in love with him on first sight, however, and when she enters his life again in Central Park, symbolically compared to Pocahontas, this is a reference to what Leslie Fiedler calls the myth of "love in the woods"[119]. This myth is one of the basic myths in American culture, writes Fiedler, because it is "a myth of reconciliation between the races by love and marriage."[120] In this way, the myth of love in the woods and the Pocahontas legend are part of a larger mythical complex, since the myth is inherent in the melting pot myth which deals with the integration of races in America.

An Americanised Chinese girl compared to a mythic Indian princess, Kitty Wu must be the incarnation of the melting pot myth. She is the daughter of Kuomintang General Wu and his second concubine. She is sent to American schools and provided with all sorts of luxury. Eventually she ends up in a boarding school in America where she decides to stay. [121] Again, place is described as the goal of a quest: "it did not take her long to fit in and find a place for herself."[122] As we have seen previously in this chapter, the conquest of place is a typical Frontier motif, and the story of how "America had become her country" is interpreted by Zimmer and Marco to be a prototypical American story:

> "It sounds familiar, doesn't it?" Zimmer asked.
> "Familiar?" I said. "It's one of the most exotic stories I've ever heard."
> "Only on the surface. Scratch away some of the local color, and it boils down to almost the same story of someone else I know. Give or take a few details, of course."
> "Mmm, yes, I see what you mean. Orphans in the storm, that kind of thing."

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[118] Ibid., p. 70.
[119] Fiedler, op. cit., p. 63.
[120] Ibid., p. 70.
[121] *Moon Palace*, pp. 84-86.
[122] Ibid., p. 86.

"Exactly."[123]

The story of "orphans in the storm" is, of course, essentially Marco's own story, but it is also the story of the formation of America. Immigration to a new place and appropriation of a new culture is the archetypal American story which is inherently a Frontier story, or a story of conquest. All in all, Kitty Wu becomes a symbol of America, and she manages to create yet another *New* York around Marco, because with her around, the City seems to regain its peacefulness, and to Marco:

> The whole scene had an imaginary quality to it. I knew that it was real, but at the same time it was better than reality, more nearly a projection of what I wanted from reality than anything I had experienced before.[124]

Reality with an imaginary quality to it - that is the compound material of myths, and the love story between Marco and Kitty is just that: a re-enactment of the story of Pocahontas which has according to Fiedler in 1968 "left untouched the imagination of our classic writers [and] moved chiefly the producers of popular entertainment in prose and verse".[125] The most recent employment of the Pocahontas myth in popular culture, if this term is functional at all, is of course Disney's animated feature film *Pocahontas* from 1995. However, Auster's employment of the myth in *Moon Palace* from 1989 is certainly also significant because it is an expression of the incorporation of popular culture into a novel as self-conscious as *Moon Palace*. Slatta points out how stories of cowboys and Indians have been relegated to a status of "B" culture, but he also demonstrates how "[m]any Americans retain a taste for a B Western worldview in their movies, reading, and politics."[126]

Maybe the distinction between high and low art has broken down like John Barth suggests: "”The ideal postmodernist novel will somehow rise above the quarrel between realism and irrealism, formalism and "contentism," pure and committed literature, coterie fiction and junk fiction."[127] At least, this may seem to be a valid reading of Auster, and we shall return to this issue later. For now it will suffice to point out that the use of the Pocahontas motif in *Moon Palace* is *one* instance of incorporation into the narrative of motifs and generic traits typically ascribed to "B" culture.

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[123] Ibid., p. 86f.
[124] Ibid., p. 94.
[125] Fiedler, op. cit., p. 64.
[126] Slatta, op. cit., p. 193.

Kitty is also important in connection with place in *Moon Palace* because - apart from Zimmer which is German for "room"[128], literally an integrated part of every home - she is the one person who is able to transform the City into a home for Marco. Like Leonard Lutwack emphasises: "The presence of woman transforms place from ordinary reality to a condition of intense life and beauty."[129] In short, female presence is the factor which may transform *place* into *home*, and the notion of "home" becomes a continuum dependant on female presence. This is part of what happens in connection with Marco's restitution and his temporary reintegration into the City. When Marco lights out for a new "territory" and leaves Kitty at the end of the narrative, however, it becomes clear that not even female presence has been able to construct a home for Marco in New York City.

Leonard Lutwack quotes a character from John Updike's *Bech* for saying that "We fall in love…with women who remind us of our first landscape." Lutwack continues to explain that "Man's first landscape is the mother, of course"[130], but the prototypical love story proposed by Updike could just as well be read metaphorically. That is, we fall in love with the woman who reminds us of our first physical landscape - our geographical prehistory. Therefore, when Marco falls in love with Kitty while comparing her to an Indian, it is, symbolically, his way of dealing with the "profoundest guilt" of the American, the "awareness that [they] began [their] national life by killing something vital to the New World as well as something essential to the Old".[131]

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[127] John Barth, "The Literature of Replenishment", in *The Atlantic* Vol. 245, No. 1 (Jan., 1980) p. 70.

[128] This seems to be one of Auster's favourite words and/or puns. It is also iterated in *The Invention of Solitude*, p. 99.

[129] Lutwack, op. cit., p. 64.

[130] Ibid., p. 90.

Initially, when Marco moves in with Kitty, their relationship is described in terms inspired by religious quests for places: "I came closer to human paradise than at any other time in the years I have spent on this planet. […] I had been lost in the desert, and then, out of the blue, I had found my Canaan, my promised land."[132] They move into a loft on East Broadway in "the heart of Chinatown"[133], and the quest for the past is continued. The move into *East* Broadway is the metaphorical representation of the "Eastern" quest for the old world, for their American and pre-American roots. Chinatown and Kitty's "silk *chipao*"[134] are the physical expressions of this quest.

The meeting with American prehistory in Chinatown leaves Marco "overwhelmed by a sense of dislocation and confusion."[135] He experiences this new part of town as something completely foreign:

> This was America, but I could not understand what anyone said, could not penetrate the meanings of the things I saw. […] I did not have the feeling that I had moved to another part of town. I had traveled halfway around the world to get where I was, and it stood to reason that nothing should be familiar to me anymore, not even myself.[136]

The meeting with Chinatown and Marco's first landscape is described in Frontier terms. As Mumford Jones points out, in the meeting with the Frontier environment, the hero will often experience some sort of conflict between the *world* and the *words* intended to describe it. It is basically the mimetic problem encountered in much Post-colonial literature and its theory; the problem of using familiar concepts to describe what was strange.[137] The strangeness of his environment, however, does not scare

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[131] Fiedler, op. cit., p. 75.
[132] *Moon Palace*, p. 228.
[133] Ibid., pp. 228f.
[134] Ibid., p. 229.
[135] Ibid., p. 230.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Mumford Jones, op. cit., p. 10.

Marco away: “Contrary to what I might have thought, I did not mind being an outsider. It was a strangely invigorating experience”.[138]

This duality is maintained in the description of the relationship with Kitty. Marco says that his “Chinatown paradise continued”[139], and even when Kitty becomes pregnant and things begin to go wrong for her and Marco, he states himself that “it was never a question of not loving each other.” Thus, the end of their relationship is described in conventionally tragic terms, and the reasons for their break up are abstract and intangible:

> Kitty discovered that she was pregnant in late March, and by the beginning of June I had lost her. Our whole life flew apart in a matter of weeks, and when I finally understood that the damage was beyond repair, I felt as if my heart had been cut out of me. […] It was never a question of not loving each other. […] It was just that we no longer spoke the same language. […] I shut myself up in a stubborn irrationality, more and more shocked by my own vehemence, but powerless to do anything about it.[140]

In the extracts above, it is clear how the narrator exploits many of the clichés of love literature: “lost her”, “heart cut out”, “not speaking the same language” etc. Marco cannot understand himself and his own reactions in the matter, and the break up seems somewhat pointless to the reader. In fact, Solomon Barber, who somehow comes to represent the voice of the reader, tries to mediate and convince Marco and Kitty that they are “still in love, and [their] refusal to do anything about it bewildered and frustrated him.”[141] In the very end, when Marco wants to come back to Kitty, she will not let him, and he is forced to continue his journey westward until he reaches the Pacific Coast where he will make a new beginning:

> I had come to the end of the world, and beyond it there was nothing but air and waves, an emptiness that went clear to the shores of China. This is where I start, I said to myself, this is where my life begins.[142]

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[138] *Moon Palace,* p. 230.

[139] Ibid., p. 273.

[140] Ibid., pp. 278f.

[141] Ibid., p. 284.

[142] Ibid., p. 306.

According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, the "perfect tragedy" deals with a change of fortune for the protagonist, but contrary to what many critics have read into Aristotle, the change of fortune "should come about as the result not of vice, but of some great error or frailty, in a character [i.e. the protagonist]".[143] The essence of the tragedy, namely, lies in the fact that the hero is not to blame morally for his downfall. Marco very well complies with this generic demand, for he has done nothing wrong except being ignorant and persistent; traits he cannot understand himself. This is his tragic flaw, and herein lies the core of Marco and Kitty's tragic story. More than anything else, it seems, Marco leaves Kitty, because it is a generic necessity:

> I went because I had no choice. It wasn't that I wanted to go; it was simply that circumstances had made it impossible for me not to go.[144]

Having entered into the tragic part of the narrative, Marco feels obliged to obey the rules of the genre. He does not want to go, but the generic conventions, "circumstances", force him to depart. Likewise, in leaving Kitty, Marco is obeying the rules of the Western/Frontier narrative. "[W]estering, in America, means leaving the domain of the female"[145], says Leslie Fiedler. This means that we have two reasons for Marco's break up with Kitty. First of all, there is the fictional reason, the pregnancy and its termination, and secondly there are the metafictional reasons, the idea that Marco leaves Kitty out of respect for generic conventions. In the story of Marco and Kitty, therefore, place has been incorporated so deeply into the narrative that it has become a determinant rather than just a setting. Symbolically speaking, Kitty and Marco meet at the Frontier in Central Park, they are bound together as a re-enactment of the prototypical American Frontier narrative, and they split up because of Marco's westering fate.

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[143] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher (London: 1907).<Http:/classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html> (18th October, 2001).

[144] *Moon Palace*, p. 278.

[145] Fiedler, op. cit., p. 60.

The part of *Moon Palace* dealing with Marco's relationship to Kitty Wu stands a bit apart from the rest of the narrative because it is particularly loaded with symbolism as it has been indicated above. Kitty is, in E. M. Forster's terminology, a rather "flat" character. She is "constructed round a single idea or quality"[146], i.e. her status as representative of China and the Frontier qualities ascribed to China which will be explained below.

China has traditionally been associated with the moon which is very significant in almost every aspect of Chinese culture - from religion and philosophy to horticulture. China is also linked to the whole notion of conquest and Frontier symbolism inherent in *Moon Palace*, because Cathay (modern China) was Christopher Columbus' original objective on his voyages of discovery. Kitty as a Chinese woman, thus, is a focal point in the thematic structures pervading *Moon Palace*. She is associated with the moon because of her femininity, which is also a traditional trait of the moon[147], and her Chinese descent. In fact, she is so closely connected to the moon and the whole complex of Frontier symbolism that Marco is able to describe their relationship as his setting "foot in China".[148] All in all, it turns out, Kitty is more a place of conquest than an "actual" character. Her flatness emphasises her function as part of a mythic complex in which she is more a symbol of the Frontier than anything else. She is important in the narrative, because she participates in the rescue of Marco from his hunger project in Central Park, but her importance as an expression of Frontier imagery and myths is far greater.

In the next section of this chapter, we shall examine another complex of Frontier motifs in *Moon Palace*: the story of Thomas Effing/Julian Barber which is decidedly the most "Western" part of the book. This part of the narrative is entrenched within the story of Kitty and Marco since Marco works for Effing while he is with Kitty. In fact, Effing’s Frontier narrative may bear much of the responsibility for nurturing Marco’s fulfilment of his Frontier fate.

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[146] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Penguin, 1927; 1990) p. 73.

[147] Allison Protas, *Dictionary of Symbolism* (Eds. Geoff Brown, Jamie Smith and Eric Jaffe) (University of Michigan Homepage: <http://www.umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html/M/moon.htm> 29th December, 2001

[148] *Moon Palace*, p. 8.This ironically distanced description ties in very well with the Frontier coloured description of Chinatown which is also centred around conquest and alienation.

Effing/Barber and the B Western.

Thomas Effings[149] narrative is the part of *Moon Palace* which is most thoroughly pervaded by Frontier symbolism and motifs. Significantly, Effing’s apartment is placed at *West* End Avenue[150]; it is “one of those enormous *West* Side apartments”[151] and symbolically, therefore, yet another move west. Many Frontier motifs from the previous parts of the narrative are repeated in the Effing episode. Reading is described as a “pursuit” again, and the travel books Marco is forced to read out loud for Effing deal with “the question of travel, most often travel into the unknown and the discovery of new worlds.”[152] Reading again makes Marco lose all sense of place.[153] The Rip Van Winkle motif is repeated in Effing’s description of the story of Long Island,[154] and Effing himself is described as an explorer of an urban Frontier in a kind of mock heroic:

> He looked forward to an excursion through the streets of the neighbourhood with all the enthusiasm of an explorer about to begin a journey to the Arctic. There were countless preparations to be attended to: checking the temperature and wind velocity, mapping out a route in advance, making sure that he had on the proper amount of clothing. In cold weather, Effing wore all manner of superfluous outer protection, wrapping himself up in sweaters and scarves, an enormous greatcoat that reached down to his ankles, a blanket, gloves and a Russian fur hat equipped with earflaps. On especially frigid days (when the temperature dropped below thirty degrees) he also wore a ski mask.[155]

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[149] Due to complications in the plot, the narrated voice has another name than the narrating voice. In this section, I will use the name Thomas Effing consequently when referring to this character, since this is the identity he narrates from, and I wish to stress Effing’s role as narrating subject rather than his role as narrated object.

[150] *Moon Palace*, p. 97.

[151] Ibid., p. 100. (Emphasis added.)

[152] Ibid., p. 110.

[153] Ibid., p. 112.

[154] Ibid., p. 129f.

[155] Ibid., p. 119.

With the addition of Effing's resume of his artist friend Ralph Albert Blakelock's "travels out West" it seems that Frontier stories invade the narrative on all levels; the diegetic level surrounding Marco's primary narration and every entrenched level within the frame are pervaded with stories of this kind. With all the thematic and symbolic repetition, however, Effing's story also adds something significantly new to the understanding of Frontier space in *Moon Palace*.

When Effing describes his initial meeting with the Frontier landscape, for instance, he describes it using the same alienated terms that Marco used to describe Chinatown: "It was like nothing I had ever seen before."[156] However, the "real" Frontier is opposed to the City in being "The flattest, most desolate spot on the planet, a boneyard of oblivion. […] Not a tree, not a shrub, not a single blade of grass. Nothing but whiteness, cracked earth stretching into the distance on all sides."[157] What Effing adds to the understanding of the Frontier landscape, however, is the notion that:

> It's all too massive to be painted or drawn; even photographs can't get the feel of it. Everything is so distorted, it's like trying to reproduce the distances in outer space: the more you see, the less your pencil can do. To see it is to make it vanish.[158]

The Frontier cannot be understood, "we could barely negotiate the terrain"[159], as Effing expresses it. But why, then, is the Frontier motif so extensively used in *Moon Palace*? Effing says of the painter Thomas Moran that:

> Moran got famous for what he did out there, he was the one who showed Americans what the West looked like. […] I wasn't a painter like Moran, you shouldn't get that idea. I was part of the new generation, and I didn't hold with any of that romantic bullshit. […] but he'd been influenced by Turner, and we had that in common, along with a passion for landscape, a passion for the real world. Moran kept talking to me about the West. If you don't go out there, he said, you'll never understand what space is. Your work will stop growing if you don't make the trip. You've got to experience that sky, it will change your life.[160]

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[156] Ibid., p. 154.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid., p. 157.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid., p. 149f.

Their artistic methods may be very different, but Moran's understanding of space influences Effing greatly. When Effing finally decides to "do a Rip Van Winkle" and leave his wife for the wilderness, he soon learns that Moran was right in his theory of landscape.

"A man can't know where he is on the earth except in relation to the moon or a star"[161], Effing is told by his travel companion Byrne. The microcosm can only be understood in relation to the macrocosm, or as Effing expresses it himself: "A here exists only in relation to a there".[162] That is, according to the theory proposed by Moran, Byrne and Effing himself, place is like a thematic product that emerges only from the meeting of two opposed terms.[163] *Black* can only be understood in relation to *white*, *good* can only be understood in relation to *evil*, and *here* can only be understood in relation to *there*. According to Moran, Byrne and Effing, thus, the Frontier is a necessary point of reference in any understanding of the American experiment.

Effing's initial perception of the wilderness is negative:

> The land is too big out there, and after a while it starts to swallow you up. I reached a point when I couldn't take it anymore. All that bloody silence and emptiness. You try to find your bearings in it, but it's too big, the dimensions are too monstrous, and eventually, I don't know how else to put it, eventually it just stops being there. There's no world, no land, no nothing. It comes down to that, Fogg, in the end it's all a figment. The only place you exist is in your head.[164]

When the world has ceased to exist as a reality, when the Frontier has been obliterated by its own vastness, then a character is free to turn towards him- or herself and investigate the inwardness that Turner foresaw in 1893. This is exactly what happens to Effing. When he realises that art can never be truly mimetic[165], Effing describes how he lost himself in the wilderness[166], and gave up his old identity, Julian Barber, the artist, in order to become Thomas Effing:

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[161] Ibid., p. 153.
[162] Ibid., p. 154.
[163] Cf. Erik Nielsen, "Om Tema" in Lis Møller (Ed.) *Om Litteraturanalyse* (Århus: Systime, 1995) pp. 45ff.
[164] *Moon Palace*, p. 156.
[165] Ibid., p. 157.
[166] Ibid., p. 164.

> That was the moment when Julian Barber was obliterated: out there in the desert, hemmed in by rocks and blistering light, he simply cancelled himself out.[167]

The initially negative perception of the wilderness is soon turned into a positive knowledge, however. Gradually realising the pointlessness of mimetic art, and living more and more like Thoreau, Effing comes to acknowledge the minute changes in nature and "[h]e found it almost unimaginable, but little by little the world had become enough for him."[168] Reproductive art ceases to have importance when mimesis is considered futile and one part of the world can only be understood in relation to another. This is the truly significant insight Thomas Effing adds to the narrative: America can only be understood in relation to the Frontier, and the Frontier needs to be understood in relation, for example, to the City.

Effing's part of the narrative is not only the focal point in the understanding of the Frontier in *Moon Palace*, however. It is also the part of the narrative that is most typically "Western". According to Elin Algreen-Petersen, "two situations [in *Moon Palace*] in particular are references to an archetypal American historic scene with lawless cowboys and large cactuses on a desolate prairie in the Wild West."[169]

The first is the situation that occurs when Scoresby has led Effing and Byrne astray and Byrne is fatally wounded when his horse stumbles. Scoresby wants to leave Byrne behind, and when Effing refuses to take part in this, Scoresby taunts him for talking "like a hero in a goddamned book."[170] This metafictional commentary sets up the dichotomy between hero and villain which is the central axis in any Western. As Algreen-Petersen says:

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[167] Ibid., p. 165.

[168] Ibid., p. 172.

[169] Elin Algreen-Petersen, Moon Palace *i Virkeligheden: En Undersøgelse af Realismen i Paul Austers Roman* Moon Palace (Diss. University of Copenhagen, 1997) p. 42. (My translation.)

[170] *Moon Palace*, p. 159.

> The confrontation between the brave man, who recognises his responsibility for his partner regardless of the circumstances, and the coward, who fails his responsibilities in order to save himself, is a classic Western scene.[171]

The B Western level in *Moon Palace* is set up very deliberately and self-consciously as it is evident from Scoresby's comment above. The narrative voice, in this particular case: Effing's voice, is also very direct in his use of metafictional comments. In talking about the "canyon country in the southeast"[172], Effing says: "That's where they shot all those cowboy-and-Indian movies, the goddamned Marlboro man gallops through there on television every night."[173] The tone is direct and ironically distanced; a type of irony that surfaces often during the narrative:

> Before Scoresby left, I tore out a page from my sketch pad and wrote a letter to my wife. I don't remember what I said. Something melodramatic, I'm fairly sure of it. This will probably be the last time you ever hear from me, I think I actually wrote that.[174]

Clearly Effing has no delusions about the "B" quality of the scene he has been taking part in, for the ironic distance to the plot continues to lie just beneath the surface of the narrative voices.

"The second archetypal Western scene is Effing's ambush on the Gresham brothers"[175], says Algreen-Petersen. "What gives associations to the Western narrative is the location (the cave, the prairie, South-western America), the rifle, the three brothers (like the Dalton brothers), the whiskey, the card game, the horses outside the cave and then, of course, the shoot-out."[176] The entire scene is very well-constructed, and strewn with exciting moments and one-liners which are also generic characteristics:

> "Jesus fucking Christ," the man whispered. "You're supposed to be dead."

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[171] Algreen-Petersen, op. cit., p. 43. (My translation.)
[172] *Moon Palace*, p. 156.
[173] Ibid., p. 157.
[174] Ibid., p. 159.
[175] Algreen-Petersen, op. cit., p. 43. (My translation.)
[176] Ibid., p. 44. (My translation.)

> "I'm afraid you've got it the wrong way around," Effing replied. "You're the one who's dead, not me."[177]

The Western references pervade every level of these two situations, then. The plot structure, the setting, the characters, the props and the dialogue. Even the conclusion of the second Western scene in Effing's narrative respects the conventions of the genre. In fact, the only breach of convention in this ending is the lack of a Lucky Luke sunset in the horizon:

> He slept out in the open that night, and the following morning he prepared himself for his journey. He packed the saddlebags, he gathered up food and water, he strapped everything onto the three horses the Greshams had left behind. The he rode off, trying to imagine what he would do next.[178]

The inclusion of the Western scenes in *Moon Palace* coincides, of course, with the prevalent Frontier imagery in the novel, but the heavy use of Western motifs and plot structures in Effing's narrative is important because they are examples of "B" culture incorporated into the overall narrative.[179] Richard W. Slatta says that "[d]espite the cowboy's cultural significance in the United States, "cowboy" novels and art have decidedly second-class status in the nation's cultural hierarchy."[180] *Encyclopædia Britannica* even notes that "by the 1980s westerns had almost ceased to be produced in the United States."[181]

Encyclopædia Britannica is talking about Western films, whereas Slatta is speaking of the genre in general. The intention is clear, however: the Western as a genre is presented as outdated B culture. The narrative voices in *Moon Palace* are aware of this, and they toy with the notion of B culture as well as with the idea of stratification of culture in general. This is typical of Paul Auster, and perhaps typical of post-modern literature as such, but we must still bear in mind that "the cowboy is one of the most potent shorthand cultural symbols in America"[182] and that "[m]any Americans retain a taste for a B Western worldview in their movies, reading and politics."[183] Slatta himself mentions that American popular culture has tended to understand the Vietnam War in terms of "simple, familiar frontier metaphors"[184], but the interpretative use of the Frontier is much more prevalent in the American ethos than people tend to think. The American president George W. Bush, Jr. said in his presentation of the aftermath of the terrorist acts on September 11th, 2001: "We have an old sign out West: Wanted: Dead or Alive."[185] Whether or not the Frontier exists today, there is no escaping the fact that many Americans tend to understand their world in terms of Frontier imagery. In this connection it is also significant that Marco's descriptions of space are perfected just after Effing's narration of his Frontier experiences.[186]

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[177] *Moon Palace*, p. 180.

[178] Ibid., p. 182.

[179] Auster's crime novel *Squeeze Play*, which was published pseudonymously in 1984, is another example of Auster's mastery of the B genres. Paul Benjamin, *Squeeze Play* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984; 1991).

[180] Slatta, op. cit., p. 204.

[181] *Encyclopædia Britannica CD 99 - Multimedia Edition* (London: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1999).

The inclusion in the narrative of elements from traditional B culture leads up to a discussion of the distinction between high and low culture as well as a discussion of the notion of post-modernism. Today, the inclusion of Western elements may be considered "post-modern", forty years ago it may have been considered "kitsch", but there was a time when the representation of the West was just that: representation with no judging association attached. We have already looked at Effing's friend Thomas Moran who was "one of the first artists to explore the Far West"[187], but *Moon Palace* makes much use of another painter Ralph Albert Blakelock (1847-1919) and particularly his painting *Moonlight*. The next section of this chapter will examine the use of this painter and his painting in *Moon Palace*.

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[182] Slatta, op. cit., p. 195.

[183] Ibid., p. 193.

[184] Ibid.

[185] Eric Sabo, "Will Revenge Make Us Feel Better?" in *CBS Health Watch*, 20th September, 2001. <http://cbshealthwatch.medscape.com/cx/viewarticle/404667> 20th October, 2001.

[186] *Moon Palace*, p. 219.

[187] *Encyclopædia Britannica*, op. cit.

Blakelock, "Moonlight" and the Notion of Lunacy.

> Effing's exemplary artist is the obscure nineteenth-century painter Ralph Albert Blakelock (1847-1919). Indeed, so vital is Blakelock to [*Moon Palace*], and particularly Blakelock's 1885 canvas "Moonlight," that any reading of Auster will have to take account of the Blakelock image as a standard of aesthetic, moral, and ideological values in this novel.[188]

As Helga Korff has pointed out in her essay "Art in *Moon Palace*", the fairly lengthy description of Blakelock's "small, unimportant and absolutely unspectacular painting in a prominent place almost precisely in the middle of the novel"[189] is important in a reading of the novel. It is important because the painting does not seemingly hold any role in the plot and because it is not used to convey any required geographical knowledge. It is also important, because Blakelock's painting takes up not only the exact *spatial* middle of the novel, it is also "the ideological center of *Moon Palace*."[190] This claim will be explained below.

It is a hard task to come by information on the painter Ralph Albert Blakelock. If not for one or two books about him[191] and a few short references scattered in art histories and encyclopaedias, he could easily be misconstrued as a fictional character; a creation of Auster's mind. According to *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Blakelock (1847-1919) was an "American painter whose luminous impasto paintings of moonlit scenes convey a mysterious romanticism."[192] The encyclopaedia continues by mentioning that Blakelock was a self-taught and highly original landscape painter, that he was fascinated with the Indians, whom he was able to observe during his travels West in 1869, and that he was largely neglected by the public until he was committed to an asylum in 1899.

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[188] Weisenburger, op. cit., p. 137.

[189] Helga Korff, "Art in *Moon Palace*: Zur Rolle der Kunst und des Künstlerischen Prozesses". <http://www.mcg.fr.bw.schule.de/auster/art.htm> 20th September, 2001. (My translation.)

[190] Weisenburger, op. cit., p. 138.

[191] Abraham A. Davidson, *Ralph Albert Blakelock* (New York: Penn State UP, 1996) is the only currently available book on the subject, it seems.

[192] *Encyclopædia Britannica*, op. cit.

Effing's far more personal narration of Blakelock's tragic story, however, is not merely expressive of a "fascination with his tragic vita"[193] as Helga Korff indicates. Effing's fascination with Blakelock reaches far deeper, and the role he assumes in Auster's novel is much greater. Blakelock functions symbolically in connection with the Western/Frontier theme in *Moon Palace*, and this function combined with his artistic profession makes him an integral part of the poetics of the novel.

With the travels out West as part of his cultural apparatus, Blakelock has every opportunity, according to Moran's statement about place in America, to "understand" the country. Marco initially cannot "help feeling disappointed" with "Moonlight", but it is "a deeply contemplative work, a landscape of inwardness and calm". The longer Marco contemplates the painting, the more it grows on him and opens up new vistas for him. Initially, Marco can only see the surface of the painting. He can see lake, the tree, the Indian etc., and he has a growing sense of the "plot" in the painting: "another figure (lying on his back - possibly asleep, possibly dead, possibly staring up into the night)". Only when Marco is able to look more abstractly at the painting, does it begin to unravel itself, however.

Marco suddenly realises that:

> Even taking the full moon into consideration, the sky seemed *too visible*. The paint beneath the cracked glazes that covered the surface shone through with an *unnatural* intensity […] Once I finally noticed this, I began to see other *odd things* in the painting as well. The sky, for instance, had a largely greenish cast. […] How could the sky be green? I asked myself. It was the same color as the lake below it, and that was *not possible*.[194]

Marco, in short, begins to realise that the painting is not primarily mimetic, but largely symbolic:

> But if he hadn't been trying to represent an actual landscape, what had he been up to? […] I did not want to make any wild, symbolic judgements, but based on the evidence of the painting, there seemed to be no other choice.[195]

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[193] Korff, op. cit.

[194] *Moon Palace*, pp. 137f. (Emphasis added.)

[195] Ibid., p. 139.

The true inwardness of the painting seems to reside in its anti-mimetic nature, and the representation of the Indian landscape becomes an expression of an idea proposed by Lutwack:

> The practical difficulty of preserving an actual wilderness for the benefit of any considerable number of people makes it necessary for the relation of mankind to the wilderness to take a symbolical rather than literal form. […] Art has always had to assume some of the burden of preserving the wilderness experience […] Art is an elegy for the departed wonders of the world, and for the civilized man art conveys primitive experience more acceptably than any other way. […] American literature has been particularly adept at this task, probably because the disappearance of the actual wilderness is so recent in American history.[196]

Finally, after a long line of failed Frontier experiences, Marco is able to assume the Turnerian inwardness that Effing experienced in the cave. Marco can largely thank Effing for this new feeling, and as in Effing's case, Marco's inwardness is the result of his realisation about the inability of art to be truly mimetic. This realisation is the essence of the Austerian poetics as proposed in *Moon Palace*, and connected with it we find an essential knowledge about place:

> In spite of their smallness in relation to the setting, the Indians betrayed no fears or anxieties. They sat comfortably in their surroundings, at peace with themselves and the world, and the more I thought about it, the more this serenity seemed to dominate the picture. I wondered if Blakelock hadn't painted his sky green in order to emphasize this harmony, to make a point of showing the connection between heaven and earth. If men can live comfortably in their surroundings, he seemed to be saying, if they can learn to feel themselves a part of the things around them, then perhaps life on earth becomes imbued with a feeling of holiness. I was only guessing, of course, but it struck me that Blakelock was painting an American idyll, the world the Indians had inhabited before the white men came to destroy it. […] Perhaps, I thought to myself, this picture was meant to stand for everything we had lost. It was not a landscape, it was a memorial, a death song for a vanished world.[197]

That art cannot be truly mimetic and appeal to man's inwardness at the same time is the essence of Auster's poetics - what Weisenburger calls the "aesthetic" values in the novel. This also explains to some extent Auster's great reliance on chance as an organising principle. That Effing turns out to be Marco's grandfather and Solomon

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[196] Lutwack, op. cit., p. 209f.

[197] *Moon Palace*, p. 139.

Barber turns out to be his father is hardly an attempt at mimesis, but an attempt at showing some symbolic truth about the nature of the world. This kind of writing is what Algreen-Petersen so aptly terms Auster's "radical realism": the "intertwining of metaphoric and realistic levels in one narrative level."[198] "What Blakelock - like Auster - tries to accomplish is […] a subversion of tradition 'from within,' subverting a 'genre' and its 'solace of good form' by - formally - showing what this form represses"[199], writes Bernd Herzogenrath. Like Blakelock, Auster is questioning the notion of mimesis, and this point of convergence is the justification for Blakelock's position near the ideological centre of the novel.

In Blakelock's painting, and the passages in *Moon Palace* dealing with that painting, the aesthetic, moral and ideological values of the novel are iterated and mixed to the extent that it becomes impossible to look at them separately. We may say, however, that the representation of the landscape carries much of the aesthetic values discussed above, whereas the Indian is expressive of the moral/ideological values, that "[i]f men can live comfortably in their surroundings […] if they can learn to feel themselves a part of the things around them, then perhaps life on earth becomes imbued with a feeling of holiness."[200] That is, the moral/ideological position of *Moon Palace* deals with the notion of *presence*.

Much modern poetry deals with the theme of *presence* versus *absence*. The French symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), whose works Auster has translated himself, dealt with the theme of loss and "absence in presence" often[201]; that is the notion of not being present in the here and now. Mallarmé's poetics have influenced much modern World Literature. T. S. Eliot deals with the notion in several of his poems.[202] Auster's emphasis on "presence", thus, is one example of his indebtedness to the modernist tradition. The motif, moreover, is used extensively by other contemporary authors than Auster, and this indicates the importance of the term in an understanding of modernity. According to the Danish poet Henrik Nordbrandt[203], for instance, the all-pervasive predicament for modern man is his "absence in presence" and his "presence in absence".[204]

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[198] Algreen-Petersen, op. cit., p. 62.

[199] Herzogenrath, op. cit., p. 151.

[200] *Moon Palace*, p. 139.

[201] Cf. Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude* (New York: Penguin, 1982; 1988) p. 112.

[202] "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", for instance, deals with the opposition between presence and mere contemplation: "Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?' / Let us go and make our visit." Part of Prufock's tragedy, thus, has

The above selection of authors may seem somewhat haphazard, but the point is to indicate the widespread nature of the "absence/presence" theme. It is not only an American phenomenon, it is an international, modernist/post-modernist theme dealing with one of mankind's problematic characteristics. Auster deals with this deficiency of modern man; the complete and destructive restlessness that controls the characters in his novels. Inherent in the Austerian poetics expressed in *Moon Palace* we find a strong desire for being present *completely* in the *here* and *now*. The Indian in Blakelock's painting possesses the ability to do so, and thus he is able to avoid feelings like Marco's sense of lacking congruity between character, time and place:

> We were always in the right place at the wrong time, the wrong place at the right time, always just missing each other, always just a few inches from figuring the whole thing out.[205]

The quotation above is about place, the "right" place and the "wrong" place, but it is also about presence, because no place is inherently right or wrong. A place can only be right or wrong in relation to some external factor, such as a character or a period of time, for instance.[206] The importance of Auster's notion of presence is epitomised by the word "missing" which has tragic overtones. It is only possible to "miss" a person in

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been his inability to take chances and be "present", he has dreamt his life away thinking of being heroic/active instead of just acting. T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974) pp. 13-17.

[203] Cf e.g. Henrik Nordbrandt, *Drømmebroer* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1998; 2000).

[204] Thomas Bredsdorff, *Med Andre Ord: Om Henrik Nordbrandts Poetiske Sprog* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1996) pp. 37-41.

[205] *Moon Palace*, p. 249.

[206] Cf. Lutwack, op. cit., p. 35.

the physical sense[207], if some sort of absence is in play, and in quotations like the above, absence is a predicament.

This all-pervasive absence is the core of Marco's tragedy, and the Austerian poetics[208] are aiming to eliminate this deficiency in man. The centrality of this aim in Auster's poetics is emphasised by two factors. First, that the interpretation of "Moonlight" in *Moon Palace* is "a reading of "Moonlight" that Auster originally published (with slight variations) in a 1987 issue of *Art News*."[209] That is, we are led to assume that the narrative voice in *Moon Palace*, in this particular passage, at least, is miming Auster's own voice and expressing a point of view close to the author's own. Second, that Auster in the assumedly autobiographic book *The Invention of Solitude* is talking about his father who is described:

> as if immune to the world. He did not seem to be a man occupying space, but rather a block of impenetrable space in the form of a man. The world bounced off him, shattered against him, at times adhered to him - but it never got through. […] The point is: his life was not centered around the place where he lived. His house was just one of many stopping places in a restless, unmoored existence, and this lack of center had the effect of turning him into a perpetual outsider, a tourist of his own life. You never had the feeling that he could be located. […] It was never possible for him to be where he was. For as long as he lived, he was somewhere else, between here and there. But never really here. And never really there.[210]

Not relating to one's immediate surroundings is, according to Auster, the basis of tragedy: the inability to be present at the right time. "From the very beginning, it seems, I was looking for my father, looking frantically for anyone who resembled him."[211] The childhood tragedy of Auster's is re-enacted in Marco's narrative and finalised in his ending up on the American West Coast alone; an ending that is tragic although imbued with a vague hope of starting over. In this way, however, not only Marco is a tragic character. The lack of presence and lack of centre is connected with so many different characters in *Moon Palace* - and in many of Auster's other works -

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[207] I.e. walking past each other, for instance.
[208] The term here refers to the ideology, intention and guiding principle inherent in Auster's works.
[209] Weisenburger, op. cit., p. 138.
[210] *The Invention of Solitude,* pp. 7-19.
[211] Ibid., p. 21.

that it emerges as a valid predicament for the modern American as presented by Auster. Often, moreover, this deficiency is connected with the notion of lunacy.

Throughout the novel, “lunacy” is used so often that it becomes a kind of personalised metaphor describing an American characteristic. In *Moon Palace*, lunacy is not a clinical term, nor is it merely a figure of speech. With all the reiteration of “lunacy” and references to the moon, it seems that Auster employs the term as a kind of synonym to cover restlessness and any desire to be “somewhere else than *here*.” Think, for instance, of Effing’s critique of Marco: “You’re a dreamer, boy […] Your mind is on the moon”.[212]

From the beginning of the novel, when Marco is put in relation to Buck Rogers, the space traveller, his “lunatic” genes are laid bare. Significantly, Auster describes himself in much the same terms in *The Invention of Solitude*:

> I was my mother’s boy, and I lived in her orbit. I was a little moon circling her gigantic earth, a mote in the sphere of her gravity, and I controlled the tides, the weather, the forces of feeling.[213]

Symbolically speaking, then, both Marco and Auster are of “lunatic” descent. Marco’s lunacy is also underlined by the incident mentioned previously when a prostitute calls him a “lunatic”. As indicated above, lunacy is connected with travelling, the Frontier, and restlessness throughout most of the novel. The first moon landings, the events that initiate the narrative, are described as a journey far away from home: “since the day he was expelled from Paradise, Adam had never been this far from home.”[214] Just a little later, when the Moon Men have decided to go West, Marco asks himself “why does the American West look so much like the landscape of the moon?”[215] And he emphasises once more the connection between the West and madness inherent in the term lunacy as used in *Moon Palace*:

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[212] *Moon Palace*, p. 216.

[213] *The Invention of Solitude*, p. 20f.

[214] *Moon Palace*, p. 31.

[215] Ibid., p. 32.

> It went on and on like that, and the more I opened myself to these secret correspondences, the closer I felt to understanding some fundamental truth about the world. I was going *mad*, perhaps, but I nevertheless felt a tremendous power surging through me, a gnostic joy that penetrated deep into the heart of things.[216]

This is also the first instance in which the connection is made between lunacy and insight which will be prevalent throughout the narrative.

As demonstrated in the previous sections, the Frontier as an abstraction exhibits a duality; it may eventually undo a character completely while it promises a new beginning and unlimited possibilities. "Lunacy" functions in much the same way. Blakelock, the "artist gone lunatic"[217], is both the sad, ridiculous figure who "painted money with his own picture on it […] million-dollar bills, sums beyond all imagining"[218] and the phenomenal artist who awakens in Marco an insight of epiphanic proportions. Like the Frontier, lunacy is both a threat and a potential.

The first truly significant mention of lunacy coincides with Marco's eviction when Simon Fernandez, the building superintendent, says:

> Sometimes it's like everybody's gone crazy. If you wanna know what I think, it's those things they're shooting into space. All that weird shit, those satellites and rockets. You send people to the moon, something's gotta give. You know what I mean? It makes people do strange things. You can't fuck with the sky and expect nothing to happen.[219]

Just a few pages earlier, Marco has called America "the ideal place for moon launchings".[220] That is, America is presented by the narrative voice as a particularly "lunatic" country, a notion that is emphasised later in the narrative, when we are informed that a "lunatic spirit had taken hold of [New York City]."[221] According to this reading of *Moon Palace*, therefore, America was around 1969 a country that was particularly "crazy" in its quest for new spaces, but it is and was also a country that possesses an enormous mystic potential that must be accessed. *Moon Palace* is not only a “revisionary critique of sixties radicalism”[222], it is also a praise of America’s potential and a plea that this potential is realised. The key to realising it is, according to Auster’s poetics, inherent in the understanding of place possessed by the Indian in Blakelock’s painting. In the end, the American ethos is centred around the notion of place.

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[216] Ibid., p. 33. (Emphasis added.)

[217] Weisenburger, op. cit., p. 140.

[218] *Moon Palace*, p. 140.

[219] Ibid., p. 46.

[220] Ibid., p. 39.

[221] Ibid., p. 209.

Conclusion.

The preceding sections have demonstrated that the Frontier is used extensively and variedly throughout *Moon Palace*. The Frontier functions on many levels in the book, and it is one of the most significant motifs in the narrative. As a leitmotif in the novel and an epitome of its themes, the Frontier always exhibits a duality in *Moon Palace*. It represents rebirth, opportunities and fluidity; all key concepts in the American ethos. Like a traditional Lucifer motif[223], however, the Frontier is also the place of ultimate destruction, a catalyst of tragedy. The West is the place where people get lost, suffer and die, but it still carries with it traditional myths of hope and riches.

Every part of the narrative is pervaded by references to the Frontier and the mythology and genres surrounding the Frontier. Most of the time, the references are symbolic: West 112th Street, Westlawn Cemetery etc., and it is significant that the “real” West is never tamed. It is inherent in the duality of the West, that it is unconquerable and unavoidable at the same time. In *Moon Palace*, the Frontier and the American West are presented as the necessary point of reference in any understanding of the American “experiment”.

It is also demonstrated throughout the narrative how the “real” West may not be reproduced and represented in any way. This refutation of mimesis is a central part of

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[222] Weisenburger, op. cit., p. 140.

[223] The name Lucifer carries a complex semantic composition. Meaning both “lightbringer” and “destroyer”, the name is the prototypical representative of duality. Cf. Ivor H. Evans (Ed.), *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1970; 1994) p. 663.

Auster's poetics. Still necessary, though, the Frontier becomes a psychological quality, a fictional refuge often expressed in games and dreams.

One extreme in the spatial spectrum of *Moon Palace* is when place becomes hostile and the Frontier is internalised to the extent that place ceases to exist as a reality and *change* becomes "the only constant."[224] When place becomes a "nowhere" or an "anywhere", this touches upon a very important theme in Auster's works: transcendence of place. We have seen on several occasions, how a Frontier may be experienced almost everywhere, how the wilderness is forced to take a symbolic form, since there is no longer a real wild West in America. An "ordinary" American girl with Chinese descent, for instance, may suddenly be read as a Pocahontas figure - only because she is wearing a Navaho headband. In fact, these explicit, mythic readings of the fictional events often overtake the narrative and become determinants in the movement of the plot. As we have seen, this is what happens with Kitty Wu.

The other extreme is represented by the notion of "home", which, as the narrative emphasises, can be constructed almost anywhere: an apartment, a park, a cave etc. Homes are continuously threatened and break down as a result of various events, however. This means that *Moon Palace* exhibits a constant quest for place, in fact, place often comes to dominate the plot as a motivating factor rather than just a setting. Throughout the narrative, the quest for home is connected with the notion of "lunacy" which becomes Auster's personal synonym for this quest and the restlessness that is the result of such a continuous search. With Blakelock's painting "Moonlight" as a focal point, it is demonstrated how this "lunacy" is a prototypical American condition. The quest for home is presented as a worthy, and often necessary, quest, but *Moon Palace* also exhibits a critique of the "unmoored existence" that is so typically American.

Thus, Auster's poetics still emphasise the need for presence in one's immediate surroundings. "Lunacy" leads to tragedy, unless one is able to be "at home" in one's place. In the narrative, this is presented as a pre-lapsarian understanding of the healthy relationship between place and character; an understanding that was possessed by the Indian, but lost, or discarded, by the white American.

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[224] *Moon Palace*, p. 62.

To Auster, that is, the Frontier is not important in itself. The incorporation of the many Frontier elements in *Moon Palace* demonstrates how this place, that supposedly is such an integral part of the American ethos, has ceased to exist physically while it continues to exist as an interpretative mechanism in the American mind. It seems it may be applied to anything, anywhere. To Auster, the Frontier has no great significance as a geographical entity, but it has a great deal of ideological importance, because it is traditionally associated with values of inwardness and spirituality. In *Moon Palace*, the Frontier acquires its significance because it is one of the "places" where man may discover his or her inner qualities and create his or her own world. Just like a fiction, the Frontier is a creation of the mind. The problem with Auster's Frontier from an interpretative point of view is its elusiveness, but when reading Auster more closely, this elusiveness is actually not synonymous with a negation of meaning and coherence. On the contrary: the elusiveness of Auster's Frontier is more of an extension of potential meaning and opportunities. Like the detective genre that Auster seems to be so fond of, the Frontier may be seen as a kind of convention in American literature, but Auster's use of the Frontier resembles his use of other conventions:

> I tried to use certain genre conventions to get to another place, another place altogether. […] The question of who is who and whether or not we are who we think we are. The whole process […] is one of stripping away to some barer condition in which we have to face up to who we are. Or who we aren't. It finally comes to the same thing.[225]

In the end, it is all a question of identity.

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[225] *The Art of Hunger*, p. 279.

The City.

In a diachronic study the use of the City as setting, motif and symbol in literature, Richard Lehan says of the European tradition:

> the city was either attacked as the source of degeneration and decadence, or it was turned into the labyrinth - the maze - of late capitalism, the characteristic shape […] of the postmodern city.[226]

Throughout the history of Western literature, the City has been pervaded by a duality much like the duality contained in the presentation of the Frontier mentioned previously. The "city was both lure and trap; a lure to those who are called to it as if by a magnet, because only the city offers the means of realizing a heightened conception of self; a trap in its workings, which lead to human destruction."[227] Presented thus "as a set of competing dualistic forces"[228], the City emerges as a prototypical Lucifer motif - much like the Frontier.[229] The City, however, differentiates itself from the Frontier in its ideological foundations. The Frontier was centred around self-making, a pioneer ideal, according to which people were given a chance to create a new life out of nearly nothing. In contrast to this ideal, the City centres itself around money: "The city organizes the means of satisfying biological needs as long as one has money."[230]

As Richard Lehan explains of the American literary tradition: "With the end of the frontier, the city became the new nexus of power."[231] The City became the place where people came in search of power. Some found it, and the rest were *over*powered and succumbed to the metropolis. Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) is an excellent demonstration of the power of the City which will invigorate a few and drain the rest. The duality of the City is not restricted to the dichotomies *attraction* versus *repulsion*, and *death* versus *life*, however. Duality and opposition, according to Lehan, are the pervading principles in relation to almost any aspect of the City in literature.

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[226] Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) p.162.
[227] Ibid., pp. 39f.
[228] Ibid., p. 59.
[229] Cf. the previous chapter.
[230] Lehan, op. cit., pp. 62f.
[231] Ibid., p. 208.

With the end of the Frontier, the City took over as the main metonym for America, so that the City becomes another important point of reference in an understanding of the American experiment. The oppositional principle, furthermore, is important in any understanding of the City in American literature in particular. Richard Lehan explains how "[f]rom the earliest of times, the city contained both spiritual and material power"[232], but he also points out that the European City "had to define itself against its medieval origins and the transformations from feudalism." The American City, on the other hand, was best understood "against the wilderness and the frontier experience."[233] This explains how the American City was seen by "settlers mindful of the biblical idea of founding a city in the wilderness" as a new Jerusalem or a "city on a hill".[234] It also explains, however, why "what was wild in nature was never fully repressed in the city"[235]; i.e. why the Frontier continues to coexist as a frame of reference alongside, and inside, the modern metropolis. As Thomas Moran suggests to Effing in *Moon Palace*: without the Frontier as an interpretative starting point, "you'll never understand what space is."[236]

The relationship between the City and the Frontier/wilderness has been the focal point in much American literature - a few random examples would be: Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Henry James' *The American Scene* (1907) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1926). "[O]ne of the major disputes regarding the growth of cities in America is the question of how independent the city was from the American frontier"[237], says Richard Lehan. The following chapter about the City in *Moon Palace* will examine this relationship as it is expressed in Auster's novel, and several other factors of relevance to a reading of the City will be iterated and examined.

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[232] Lehan, op. cit., p. 14.
[233] Ibid., p. 167.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid. p. XV.
[236] *Moon Palace*, p. 150. (See previous chapter.)

The theory of the City does seem at first glance much less coherent and unambiguous than the theory of the Frontier. This is particularly true after the modern and postmodern paradigms have left their marks on literature and the reading of the City has become "more difficult."[238] Without a coherent theory, therefore, it will be futile to set up a long list of abstract parameters to be dealt with in an analysis of the City in general.

For now, therefore, it will suffice to say that the next chapter will deal with the City in *Moon Palace*. Several of the themes to be discussed in connection with the City in *Moon Palace* were suggested by Ralph Willet in his study of urban crime fiction in America, *The Naked City*.[239] Willet suggests factors such as *chance*, the *crowd*, the *Flaneur* and *verticality* as relevant to the reading of a modern City. These parameters will be explained and dealt with in the following chapter. One thing must be emphasised, however: the City in *Moon Palace* should always be read against the backdrop of the Frontier. This seems to be the essence of the use of the Frontier in the novel. The Frontier, however, cannot stand alone in *Moon Palace*, since the City remains as the frame in which everything else is contained. The two places are mutually interdependent in Auster's novel, and this interdependency pervades every use of place in the narrative.

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[237] Lehan, op. cit., p. 182.

[238] Ibid., p. 77.

[239] Ralph Willet, *The Naked City: Urban Crime Fiction in the USA* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996).

The City in *Moon Palace*.

Verticality.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have argued that:

> metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action […] the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.[240]

According to Lakoff and Johnson, we understand and describe the world in terms of metaphor, and the dichotomy *up* versus *down* is one of the types of metaphors that are conceptually central. Up versus down is an orientational metaphor, "one that does not structure one concept in terms of another but instead organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another."[241] "Such metaphorical orientations are not arbitrary", Johnson and Lakoff argue. "They have a basis in our physical and cultural experience."[242]

Lakoff and Johnson's argument is both forceful and convincing. Their conclusions are somewhat superficial, though. They mention a long line of examples of the use of up versus down metaphors. These examples generally demonstrate the association of up with *good* and down with *bad*: "Happy is up; sad is down", "Health and life are up; sickness and death are down" and "Virtue is up; depravity is down".[243] There is nothing wrong with the examples, but Lakoff and Johnson repeatedly propose physical factors as the most important basis for the association of good/bad with up/down when it would appear that social conventions, based on religious conceptions spanning many millennia, offer a much more coherent explanation.

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[240] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; 1999) p. 3.

[241] Ibid., p. 14.

[242] Ibid.

[243] Ibid., pp. 15f.

When we[244] associate good with up and bad with down, it seems that a significant part of the fundamental explanation is to be found in the traditional Christian dichotomy of Heaven and Hell. Heaven is up, physically, whereas its direct opposition, Hell, traditionally has been conceived of as "down". The *Bible* repeatedly documents how some are "received *up* into heaven"[245] whereas others are "brought *down* to hell"[246], and sources tell us that the same orientation was to be found in much pre-Christian Western mythology. The same orientational relationship between Heaven and Hell was inherent in Norse mythology according to which the eternal home of slain warriors, Valhalla, was placed in Asgard, the home of the gods, which could only be reached by climbing the Rainbow (up), and Hel, the realm of death, was placed beneath the roots of Yggdrasill, the world tree (down).[247] Ancient Greek mythology offers a similar distinction between Hades, which is the "normal" region of death and Tartarus, which is an equivalent of Hell placed far below Hades. In fact, the orientational differentiation inherent in Western dichotomies of Heaven and Hell in their various guises is signalled by the term "underworld" which locates that hellish domain in relation to its heavenly counterpart.

Verticality has become particularly interesting in connection with a modern metropolis like New York City, because it has had so little space to expand in horizontally that the inevitable expansion has taken place vertically. New York City, "the City of Incredible Towers" as the visionary French architect Le Corbusier labelled it in 1935[248], has soared into the skies, and the dichotomy of up versus down has been solidified and made necessary in any reading of the City. Le Corbusier called this kind of City the "vertical city" thereby stressing its new orientational focus. As it turned out, however, the vertical City was not only a City in which buildings "towered into the air and left open space at the bottom for parks and other human activity."[249] It was also a City ideal that consolidated the traditional associations attributed to up and down, since an "extended religious trope" has often been superimposed onto the City itself to describe "a climb out of hell toward a […] kind of redemption."[250]

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[244] "We" is a gross simplification which here refers to Western civilisation as such. Cultural conventions are inherently *not* universal, which is perhaps why Lakoff and Johnson tend to avoid this kind of explanation.

[245] Mark: 16.19. (Emphasis added.)

[246] Isaiah: 14.15. (Emphasis added.)

[247] Jens Anker Jørgensen (Ed.), *Litteraturhåndbogen* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1981; 1982) pp. 44f.

[248] Rybczynski, op. cit., p. 157.

In *Moon Palace*, the journey through the City is often described in religious terms, for example as "my pilgrimage"[251], but no moral absolutes are attached to up versus down. Instead, it seems that the associations ascribed to vertical opposites in Auster's City depend on the character who is not a constant, but a changing entity. At the beginning of the narrative, when Marco is able to manage economically, for instance, he can look down from his apartment on the fifth floor and experience the street level as a peaceful place that magically instils him with inwardness and contentment in his place above the City:

> I was looking down at Broadway, the smallest, most abbreviated portion of Broadway, and the remarkable thing was that the entire area of what I could see was filled up by a neon sign, a vivid torch of pink and blue letters that spelled out the words MOON PALACE. I recognized it as the sign from the Chinese restaurant down the block, but the force with which those words assaulted me drowned out every practical reference and association. They were magic letters, and they hung there in the darkness like a message from the sky itself. I immediately thought of Uncle Victor and his band, and in that first, irrational moment, my fears lost their hold on me. I had never experienced anything so sudden and absolute. A bare and grubby room had been transformed into a site of inwardness, and intersection point of strange omens and mysterious, arbitrary events. I went on staring at the Moon Palace sign, and little by little I understood that I had come to the right place, that this small apartment was indeed where I was meant to live.[252]

Just a little later in the narrative, when Marco has run out of money and is living like a vagabond in Central Park, he describes the street level like this: "[a]s time went on, the streets were what I came to dread most, and I was willing to do almost anything to avoid them."[253] Clearly, then, the City is divided into an *upper* sphere (e.g. the apartment) and a *lower* sphere (e.g. the street), but the values attached to these spheres are not absolutes. Auster's City may be connected with a search for redemption, but the religiously based associations with up versus down are deprived of their validity. Up is no longer *necessarily* good, and down is no longer *necessarily* bad.

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[249] Lehan, op. cit., p. 235.

[250] Ibid., p. 56. Richard Lehan is discussing Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, a novel written before the proposition of the vertical city ideal, but "important" enough to have initiated a trope that is still in use today.

[251] *Moon Palace*, p. 51. We shall return to this in the next section.

[252] Ibid., pp. 16f.

[253] Ibid., p. 60.

Auster's complete revocation of the enforcement of a priori values on places is further emphasised by the re-appropriation of the streets when Marco has been saved by Kitty and Zimmer, and the lower levels of the City have regained their peacefulness.[254] At this point of the narrative, Abingdon Square offers Marco repose, but the apartment seems to carry similar promises. A parallel development in the associations ascribed to up and down is exhibited by the cave in Effing's story. Placed high above the ground level, the cave is both "a good place to die in"[255] and a place to fight for.[256] "For all intents and purposes, it was a house."[257] The cave is both the place where epiphanies take place, it "houses" Effing's re-evaluation of his art and his change of direction, and the place where claustrophobic danger, i.e. the gunfight in the dark, is most prevalent.

Whether or not we can ascribe a priori values to the orientational dichotomy expressed by a modern metropolis like New York City, the relationship between high and low, up and down, is connected with a certain kind of gaze. In a 1999 article, Charles Lock has used Michel de Certeau as an example of the use of this gaze in City literature. Lock sets up an opposition between walking and seeing in the City: "der Wandersmann is down there, infinitely mobile, unregulated by constraints of distance or direction, and in no position, ever, to see much."[258] That is:

> Those who live down there, below the thresholds of visibility, are as though blind, and while from above the city resolves itself as transparent text, experienced from below, all is opacity and unreadability: we are like the blind, or at least the monocular, insofar as we cannot obtain a perspective. To see a city in its

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[254] Ibid., p. 91.
[255] Ibid., p. 165.
[256] Ibid., p. 176.
[257] Ibid., p. 166.
[258] Charles Lock, "Michel de Certeau: Walking the Via Negativa" in *Paragraph*, vol. 22, no. 2 (July 1999) p. 184.

> entirety we must leave it, either for a neighbouring hill, or by ascending a tower. Yet the city is made by those within, not by those looking down upon it […][259]

Certeau's idea is that "pedestrians [are] writing an urban text they do not read"[260], but also that the city dweller is constantly surveyed from above - "by an Eye in the Sky surveillance system".[261] Both of these notions are present in *Moon Palace*, and in Auster's novels in general. The Certeau inspired notion of the City as a constantly evolving text is expressed most clearly in the first part of *The New York Trilogy*, *City of Glass*, in which a character named Stillman[262] walks the City at random, it seems.[263] It is only when the protagonist begins to plot the routes on a map that he is able to see these routes for what they are: an imitation of the letters that make of the phrase "THE TOWER OF BABEL."[264] The notion of surveillance is, of course, also prevalent in the second part of *The New York Trilogy*, *Ghosts*, which is a story about watching and being watched.

Moon Palace is not the prototypical example of the use of up versus down in Auster's works. At least, the motif is not used as explicitly as we see it in *The New York Trilogy*. Up versus down and the themes associated with this dichotomy *are* incorporated in *Moon Palace*, however. The idea of surveillance, for instance, is reflected in Marco's dream which transforms the two "o"s in the Moon Palace sign into "the eyes of God."[265] The dream establishes Marco's, seemingly paranoid, awareness of surveillance which pervades the rest of the narrative. When he goes to take his physical, Marco says: "[i]t was impossible not to feel that I was being watched, that there were people in the building who could read my thoughts."[266]

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[259] Ibid., p. 191.

[260] Willet, op. cit., p. 4.

[261] Ibid., p. 3.

[262] The name is an obvious oxymoron. Stillman, the *still* man, as an appellative to he who is really "der Wandersmann", the *walking* man.

[263] Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy* (London: Penguin, 1985; 1990) pp.71f.

[264] Ibid., p. 85

[265] *Moon Palace*, p. 70.

[266] Ibid., p. 81.

Being exposed to surveillance leaves Marco feeling somewhat vulnerable, but *Moon Palace* clearly demonstrates that no social critique is inherent in the polarisation of up and down, watching and being watched.[267] *Moon Palace* is not a critique of a dystopian "big brother" society in which everyone is being watched by some kind of fascist authoritarian force. Rather, watching and being watched are merely two ways of experiencing the City. Sometimes it is necessary to be "down there" in order to experience and interact at close range, whereas it may be beneficial at other times to take a step away from everything and establish a kind of overview. When Marco has come to work for Thomas Effing, for instance, the world is suddenly "down below", and presented as "the muffled noise of traffic, the whoosh of tires as they moved along the rainy streets."[268] Marco experiences "this sense of detachment"[269] as a positive energy, because it allows him to delve deeper into the books he is reading. At the same time, Marco's experience of himself is overwhelmingly paradoxical:

> there were times when I became so engrossed in what I was reading that I hardly knew where I was anymore, that I felt I was no longer sitting in my own skin.[270]

By removing himself from the City, Marco is able to experience a new kind of inwardness, and he is able to see himself from the outside. This significantly takes place at a remove from the distractions of the street level. Marco's experience is thereby similar to Effing's experience in the cave, also "above" the world, which teaches him that self-knowledge, as well as the ability to "see" the world completely, can only be acquired by taking a step back and *painting the world away*.[271]

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[267] The only instances when a priori values are ascribed to the dichotomies of up and down is when Auster uses lexicalised phrases or idioms such as "downtrodden" and "down on his luck". These figures are not used extensively in *Moon Palace*, however. These figures are links to the social side of Auster's critique of the American experiment which will be discussed below.

[268] *Moon Palace*, pp. 111f.

[269] Ibid., p. 112.

[270] Ibid.

[271] Ibid., p. 171.

Leonard Lutwack describes a “hierarchy of values” connected with extremes on the vertical scale in literature. He bases his hierarchy on Christian distinctions like those proposed above, and he says that “[g]reat depths as well as great heights are often held sacred”.[272] This is true of Auster’s narrative universe, for inwardness, self-knowledge and spirituality can be experienced both through distance (heights) and intimacy (ground level). Northrop Frye has called the connection between the heights and the depths “the point of epiphany”[273]. The point of epiphany is the point where spirituality and insight is best achieved, and the verticality of a modern metropolis lends to New York City a great opportunity for reaching this new inwardness.

This section has demonstrated how the distinction between up and down becomes significant in a reading of *Moon Palace*, and how the heights may promise and provide an overview that leads to insight. The depths, as Lutwack suggests, may also provide insight, however. This is connected with the notion of the “flaneur” which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The Flaneur.

The French poet Charles Baudelaire, who has been a great source of poetic inspiration to Paul Auster[274], used the “flaneur” as one of the central characters in his works. According to Willet, this type of character is “a mythological ideal-type found more in discourse than in everyday life.”[275] The flaneur is a “traveller […who] moves in quest of deliverance from the miseries of self, only to find at every turn images of suffering and isolation that remind him all too pertinently of his own.”[276] Walking the streets, the flaneur is inevitably connected with the “depths of the city”. He is unable to see the City from above, and he cannot see the "text" he creates by walking the streets. He is not removed from the City's essence, though. Richard Lehan argues that:

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[272] Lutwack, op. cit., p. 39.

[273] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism; Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957; 1973) p. 203.

[274] *The Art of Hunger,* pp. 271-273.

[275] Willet, op. cit., p. 2.

[276] *Encyclopedia Britannica*, op. cit.

> Like the urban detective, the flaneur is the observer, the man who takes in the city at a distance. But unlike the detective, he goes to the arcades to be stimulated by the crowds. The crowd contains the potentiality for experience: meeting a lover or a friend or experiencing a spectacle. But the flaneur is discontented because the city offers more experience than he can assimilate. He always feels that he is missing out even in the process of experiencing: his state of mind is restless dissatisfaction, aimless desire […][277]

The notion of the flaneur is rooted in the Aristotelian Peripatetic school which advocated learning whilst walking the Lyceum in Athens. The Peripatetics argued that the mind was originally blank, and thus the flaneur is peripatetic in both method and theory. He is methodically peripatetic because he tries to acquire knowledge whilst walking, and theoretically peripatetic because he adheres to the idea that the mind is a blank that must be filled. Auster describes the essence of a peripatetic experience in *The Invention of Solitude*:

> Sometimes it feels as though we are wandering through a city without purpose. […] Sometimes it seems as though we are not going anywhere as we walk through the city, that we are only looking for a way to pass the time, and that it is only our fatigue that tells us where and when we should stop. But just as one step will inevitably lead to the next step, so it is that one thought inevitably follows from the previous thought […] so that what we are really doing when we walk through the city is thinking, and thinking in such a way that our thoughts compose a journey, and this journey is no more or less than the steps we have taken, so that, in the end, we might safely say that we have been on a journey, and even if we do not leave our room, it has been a journey, and we might safely say that we have been somewhere, even if we don't know where it is.[278]

To Auster, walking around in a City is thus equated with thinking, or, as he says later in that same book: "To wander about in the world, then, is also to wander about in ourselves."[279] What distinguishes Auster's flaneur from Baudelaire's, then, is the *direction* of the knowledge acquired through walking. Baudelaire's flaneur acquires a knowledge centred around the crowd and other external entities in the surrounding

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[277] Lehan, op. cit., p. 74.

[278] *The Invention of Solitude*, pp. 121f.

[279] Ibid., p. 166.

City, a knowledge of the City which could just as well be achieved by positioning oneself above the City, whereas Auster's flaneur mainly acquires self-knowledge.

Among the most typical Auster flaneurs we find Maria Turner in *Leviathan* who walks the City and feels "as if she had become a stranger, as if she had been turned into an imaginary being."[280] Maria's process of creating self-knowledge through perceiving herself as "another" resembles Effing's experience of art in the cave. Like Effing, Maria uses her art, photography, as a means of making the world disappear in order to see herself more truly: "The camera was no longer an instrument that recorded presences, it was a way of making the world disappear, a technique for encountering the invisible."[281] Quinn in *City of Glass* is another, almost prototypical, Auster flaneur. Walking the streets of New York City, Quinn comes to realise that "[m]otion was of the essence", and the City provides him with the feeling of being "[l]ost, not only in the city, but within himself as well."[282] Being lost, however, is not a negative state for the Auster flaneur. Being lost is a means of transcending place and attaining a new sense of inwardness: it is only on "his best walks" that Quinn is able to feel that he is nowhere. Just like Marco, Quinn is able to perceive New York as "the nowhere he had built around himself".[283]

Although Marco may not be the most typical flaneur in Auster's fictional universe, he does exhibit traits that link him to other Auster flaneurs. He describes his journey through the urban landscape as "my pilgrimage"[284], and Charles Lock has explained how "[t]he shift in the meaning of 'peregrine' [semantically linked to "pilgrim"] from 'aimless wandering' […] to purposeful movement […] could tell us much about the instrumentalization in modernity of everyday practices, including spiritual practices."[285] By referring to his pilgrimage, therefore, Marco establishes a link between himself and the flaneur tradition; he is making an attempt at using the City as a, somewhat instrumentalised, means of creating inwardness and self-knowledge.

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[280] Paul Auster, *Leviathan* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992; 1993) p. 63.
[281] Ibid., p. 64.
[282] *The New York Trilogy*, p. 4.
[283] Ibid.
[284] *Moon Palace*, p. 51.
[285] Lock, op. cit., p. 184.

Just like the typical Auster flaneurs in *Leviathan* and *The New York Trilogy*, Marco deprives the City of its signifying potential, so that New York becomes an *anywhere*. The process of deprivation, however, is not as negative as it may sound. It is more like a process of *liberation* which is also signalled by the comparatively positive predicate to New York: Marco's *anywhere* does not carry the negative associations that Quinn's *nowhere* carries, but the essential ideology is the same. By dissolving the unity and reality of the City, Quinn and Marco are able to enter into themselves, and Marco experiences "a newfound love for the world."[286] Walking leads to insight:

> I felt like someone about to be reborn, like someone on the brink of discovering a new continent. […] For the next few minutes, I just sat there in my own euphoria, listening to myself think. My mind was a blithering gush, a pandemonium of rhapsodic thoughts.[287]

Walking takes Marco to the restaurant where he experiences the epiphany above. Walking also takes Marco to the cinema where he watches the movie *Around the World in 80 Days* which results in a deepening of Marco's inwardness and self-knowledge:

> A thousand childhood sorrows came storming back to me, and I was powerless to ward them off. […] I had turned myself into a nothing, a dead man tumbling head-first into hell. […] This is what I deserve, I said to myself. I've made my nothing, and now I've got to live in it. […] I struggled to achieve some equilibrium within myself, but it was no use: everything was instability, turmoil, outrageous whim. At one moment I was engaged in a philosophical quest, supremely confident that I was about to join the ranks of the illuminati; at the next moment I was in tears, collapsing under the weight of my own anguish. My self-absorption was so intense that I could no longer see things for what they were: objects became thoughts, and every thought was part of the drama being played out inside me.[288]

As opposed to the scenario described by Auster in *The Invention of Solitude*, walking is not synonymous with thinking in Marco's experience. Rather: walking leads to thinking, or to places where thinking takes place: the restaurant, the cinema, Central Park, where Marco begins to see himself as an anti-story to the American dream, and eventually to the "real" West - the Californian coast. The distinction between walking that equals thinking and walking that leads to thinking is important, because in *Moon Palace* it seems that walking is not a goal in itself, but a means whereby one can reach a place of potential inwardness. This coincides very well with the insight proposed by the Indian in Blakelock's painting and by the Pascal quotation from *The Invention of Solitude*: we cannot "walk" into ourselves, but we can walk to a certain point in space where insight may be achieved if we allow ourselves to rest and be submerged in self-knowledge.

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[286] *Moon Palace*, p. 52.

[287] Ibid.

[288] Ibid., p. 53f.

The Crowd.

In an area so densely populated as New York City, a notion such as the "crowd" becomes important in order to understand and interpret the urban landscape.[289] In fact, Richard Lehan argues that, beginning with the advent of modernism, the crowd became "a metonym for the city".[290] Lehan also argues that "[m]odernism intensified the awareness that the individual and the crowd were separate entities with separate modes of being."[291] This means that the crowd is the faceless mass constituent of the modern City that is characterised by its opposition to the protagonist/flaneur. The classic dichotomy of flaneur/individual versus crowd is inherently flawed, however, since the individual is just as much part of the crowd as he or she is distinctive from it.

This duality of the individual in City discourse is essentially the schism of modern man, since he or she is both at home in the crowd *and* distanced from it. In *Moon Palace*, alienation pervades much of the narrative - and the chapter about the Frontier in *Moon Palace* has demonstrated how alienation is also the key emotion in a character who encounters a Frontier environment, both “real” Frontiers, such as Effing’s Western landscape, and “felt” Frontiers such as Chinatown. *Moon Palace* also demonstrates Marco’s alienation in the City, however, and it is significant that this feeling is strongest when Marco is ideologically most distanced from the workings of the City. In the “commercial city”[292], when Marco financially “safe”, i.e. able to manage economically, there is no great feeling of dislocation in relation to the crowd. When Marco lives in his apartment on West 112th Street, the City is presented as a fairly calm place. At this point of the narrative, the danger lies in the West where Uncle Victor has gone. Only when Marco runs out of money, is evicted and forced to do “a Thoreau” in Central Park, does the crowd begin to seem menacing.[293] Financial hardship is able to bring forth the anti-democratic nature of the crowd[294], whereas money makes the crowd seem less hostile, at times even friendly. Significantly, thus, Effing and Marco experience no problems while handing out money in the streets.

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[289] According to the Demographia Homepage, the population density of New York City is 10,238 per square kilometre, whereas the population density for Manhattan alone is 26,978. Http://demographia.com/dm-nyc.htm. 1st December, 2001.

[290] Lehan, op. cit., p. 71.

[291] Ibid.

When divulging his planned money handouts, Effing says of New York City that:

> If there’s one thing this godforsaken city has in abundance, it’s anonymous strangers. The streets are filled with them. Everywhere you turn, there’s another anonymous stranger. There are millions of them all around us.[295]

The anonymity of the individual in relation to the crowd is classic, but it is important that the crowd is not dangerous. At first, Marco is wary of the dangers supposedly connected with handing out money in the streets, but Effing and Marco plan things carefully and end up avoiding danger. They do not wall themselves off from the City and the crowd . Rather, they take the approach of the true Auster flaneur:

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[292] The “commercial city” is the appellative applied by Richard Lehan to the type of city that replaced the spiritual city. (Lehan, op. cit., p. 26.)

[293] Again, it seems we must turn to Moran’s notion that American space can only be understood in relation to the Frontier (which is the role Central Park comes to play for Marco).

[294] *Moon Palace*, pp. 56f.

[295] Ibid., p. 204.

> "A chauffeur! That's a preposterous idea. It would defeat the whole purpose." […]
> "I want to be able to roam around, to feel out the situations as they come up. You can't do that sitting in a car. You've got to be out there in the streets, breathing the same air as everyone else."[296]

Effing and Marco eventually go into the crowd without fear, and to the extent that the crowd is present at all, it is not dangerous. The only danger connected with the crowd in *Moon Palace* is the instance in Effing's narrative when he is subjected to an attack in the streets, but that instance is described as "a harsh and anonymous blow [which] had descended from the sky".[297] It is described, then, as something that has very little to do with the streets and the crowd. It is a Godlike act of justice which Effing perceives as a kind of punishment.

Based on the presentation of the city crowd in *Moon Palace*, it seems to be a misinterpretation when Willet talks about Auster's "menacing cityscapes"[298]. It is not really the City and the crowd that are menacing, but the social conditions pervading American society which are most clearly exemplified by the "commercial" City. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Lehan has described how the relationship between the City and the individual is centred around money[299], and this is where we encounter the true opposition to the Frontier which was traditionally centred much more around spiritual values and pioneer ideals such as self-making.[300] This is also the thematic point against which much of the explicit and implicit critique inherent in the narrative is directed. The crowd is a kind of metonym for the social side of Auster's critique of the American experiment.

The key to this reading of the novel is found in Marco's reading of himself after he has been evicted. At this point, Marco extends his own story and reads himself as a "living proof that the system had failed, that the smug, overfed land of plenty was finally cracking apart."[301] In his own interpretation of himself, Marco comes to represent a challenge, not only to the American way[302], but also to the American ethos and the dream of infinite possibilities as such. In the autobiographic *Hand to Mouth*, Auster summons forth the America that he has always been turning against:

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[296] Ibid., p. 206.
[297] Ibid., p. 188.
[298] Willet, op. cit., p. 9.
[299] Lehan, op. cit., pp. 62f.
[300] Through the development of the notion of self-making in America, and its implementation in the American Dream, self-making has often been presented as synonymous with a quest for money. Here, however, the concept aims at a more non-materialistically form of self-making, namely the ability to live primitively and provide for oneself.

> American capitalism had created one of the most prosperous moments in human history. It had produced untold numbers of cars, frozen vegetables, and miracle shampoos, and yet Eisenhower was President, and the entire country had been turned into a gigantic television commercial, an incessant harangue to buy more, make more, spend more, to dance around the dollar-tree until you dropped dead from the sheer frenzy of trying to keep up with everyone else.[303]

Inverting a central parallel in the American collective consciousness, Auster describes how America is not centred around a pursuit of liberty *and* justice, because these ideals are "often at odds with one another."[304] Auster also describes how "All [his] sympathies were for the downtrodden, the dispossessed, the underdogs of the social order" and how economic injustice and lack of equilibrium "filled [him] with shame - not just for [himself], but for living in a world that allowed such things to be in it."[305] In the description of his fathers coldness, Auster has also described how money functions as a safe haven from the world: "Having money means more than being able to buy things: it means that the world need never affect you."[306]

When reading the works of Paul Auster, it is hard to miss this humanistic approach to the world. The sympathies always seem to lie with those who are down on their luck. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the large number of drop-outs and vagabonds among Auster's main characters. It is perhaps most clear in Auster's latest novel *Timbuktu* which has the "poet-saint" and vagabond Willy G. Christmas and his dog, Mr. Bones, as the sympathetic central characters.[307] *Moon Palace* exhibits a similar sympathy for the downtrodden. Effing, for instance, voices his critical attitude towards the “American profit machine”[308] on several occasions, and there is a great degree of social criticism inherent in the “rules” that Effing and Marco establish regarding their money handouts:

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[301] *Moon Palace*, op. cit., p. 61.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Paul Auster, *Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), p.11.
[304] Ibid., p. 12.
[305] Ibid., p. 13.
[306] *The Invention of Solitude*, p. 53.
[307] Paul Auster, *Timbuktu* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999).

> We both agreed that there should be a hierarchy of worthiness, and that gave me a free hand to act as I saw fit. The idea wasn’t to hand out money to anyone who happened to pass by, but to look conscientiously for the most deserving people, to zero in on those whose want was greatest. The poor automatically deserved consideration over the rich, the handicapped were to be favored over the well, the mad were to take precedence over the sane. We established those rules at the outset, and *given the nature of New York’s streets, it was not very difficult to follow them*.[309]

All in all, Auster uses New York City, one of the most significant symbols of America, as a starting point for a social critique that aims at the foundations of the American ethos - and at the American “experiment”. The critique pervades *Moon Palace*, and comes to a dramatic culmination in Charlie Bacon’s critical rehash of American post-World War II history:

> First it was Big Boy, the one they dropped on Hiroshima with Colonel Tibbets. […] Destruction on that scale is God’s business. Men don’t have the right to meddle in it. […] The way I see it, they wouldn’t have done it if those Japs were white. They don’t give a damn about yellow people. […] What do you think we’re doing over there in Southeast Asia right now? The same stuff, killing yellow people wherever we can find them. It’s like slaughtering the Indians all over again. Now we have H-bombs instead of A-bombs.[310]

The monologue may seem somewhat rambling and paranoid, but it takes place, significantly, on a trip to the Statue of Liberty which is the focal point in *Leviathan* and Benjamin Sachs’ critique of America:

> All in all, there are some hundred and thirty scale-model replicas of the Statue of Liberty standing in public places across America. They can be found in city parks, in front of town halls, on the tops of buildings. Unlike the flag, which tends to divide people as much as it brings them together, the statue is a symbol that causes no controversy. If many Americans are proud of their flag, there are many others who feel ashamed of it, and for every person who regards it as a holy object, there is another who would like to spit on it, or burn it, or drag it through the mud. The Statue of Liberty is immune from these conflicts. For the past hundred years, it has transcended politics and ideology, standing at the threshold of our country as

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[308] *Moon Palace*, p. 149.

[309] Ibid., p. 206. (Emhasis added.)

[310] Ibid., p. 224.

> an emblem of all that is good within us. It represents hope rather than reality, faith rather than facts, and one would be hard-pressed to find a single person willing to denounce the things it stands for: democracy, freedom, equality under the law. It is the best of what America has to offer the world, and however pained one might be by *America's failure to live up to those ideals*, the ideals themselves are not in question. They have given comfort to millions. They have instilled hope in all of us that we might one day live in a better world.[311]

In this discussion of Auster's alleged humanism and social critique we may seem to have strayed far from the "crowd" which was the starting point for this section. The crowd, however, is exactly the focal point of Auster's humanism since, as Effing explains, this is where we find the "anonymous strangers"[312], the people who make up the downtrodden masses of the commercial City. There is a sense in Marco that the crowd is a dangerous place, but when handing out money in the streets, Marco and Effing come across no threatening situations. Even with this in mind, however, Marco has trouble re-evaluating the crowd and letting go of the notion that the streets are dangerous:

> Some people broke down and cried when I gave them the money; others burst out laughing; still others said nothing at all. It was impossible to predict their responses, and I soon learned to stop expecting people to do what I thought they would do. There were the suspicious ones who felt we were trying to trick them - one man even went so far as to tear up the money, and several others accused us of being counterfeiters; there were the greedy ones who didn't think fifty dollars was enough; there were the friendless ones who latched on to us and wouldn't let go; there were the jolly ones who wanted to buy us a drink, the sad ones who wanted to tell us their life stories, the artistic ones who danced and sang songs to show us their gratitude. *To my astonishment, not one of them tried to rob us.* That was probably due to simple good luck, although it must also be said that we moved quickly, never lingering in one spot for very long.[313]

Although Marco tries to make up an excuse for the fact that he and Effing do not get robbed in the streets, the development in the crowd motif in *Moon Palace* deflates, all in all, the modernist myth of danger in the crowd. The "new urbanized crowd"[314] that Lehan talks about in connection with the early modernists does simply not exist in *Moon Palace*. In Auster's novel, the idea persists that "the crowd is capable of bestial and violent behavior, mindlessly following a leader"[315], but it remains an unsubstantiated myth. Rather than being a threat to the life of the individual, the crowd is presented as another "place" where personal regeneration becomes possible. In this sense, Auster is working against many of the clichés created in modern and post-modern writing about the crowd and the City. These clichés have been solidified so often that literary criticism has often overlooked the positive potential in Auster's City images and automatically transferred the negativity of other contemporary writers on him. For an instance of this, we may simply refer to Willet who groups Auster with Pynchon when examining their representations of the City. In an interview with Annette Insdorf, Auster has explained how he approaches these clichés:

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[311] *Leviathan*, pp. 215f.

[312] *Moon Palace*, p. 204.

[313] Ibid., p. 207. (My italics.)

[314] Lehan, op. cit., p. 52.

> I also know that terrible things go on in Brooklyn, not to speak of New York as a whole. Wrenching things, unbearable things - but by and large the city works. In spite of everything, in spite of all the potential for hatred and violence, most people make an effort to get along with each other most of the time. The rest of the country perceives New York as a hellhole, but that's only part of the story. I wanted to explore the other side of things in *Smoke*, to work against some of the stereotypes that people carry around about this place.[316]

This working against stereotypes seems to be inherent in *Moon Palace* as well, and the significant notion of the City, as presented by Auster, is exactly that the City "works". This does not mean that there is nothing wrong with the City, as the previous sections have demonstrated, but it does mean that Auster directs his critique elsewhere. New York is not to blame for the terrible things that happen in the City, neither are the New Yorkers to blame. This is, in fact, one of the key notions in Auster's critique of the "American experiment", for, as Auster has often pointed out, the fault seems to lie in America's failure as such to live up to the American, democratic ideals.[317]

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[315] Ibid.

[316] "The Making of *Smoke*" in Paul Auster, *Smoke and Blue in the Face: Two Films* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 14f.

[317] Cf. *Leviathan*, pp. 215f.

Conclusion.

This chapter has looked at the presentation of the City in *Moon Palace*. The Frontier is fairly well-established as a motif in the novel, but the City often slides into the background. This does not mean that urban space is unimportant in *Moon Palace*, however, because we must remember that the City is often the frame surrounding the Frontier. With the notable exception of the “real” West, the Frontiers in this novel are actually contained within the City; Central Park, the Western films etc. All are part of the larger complex composing the City. When the City is used as indirectly, and yet consistently, as we see it in *Moon Palace*, it becomes important to look to Auster’s other works as well as to the tradition of City literature in order to see fully the “meaning” of the City.

The previous sections in this chapter have demonstrated how the City in *Moon Palace* is connected with various forms of inverted tradition. The use of up versus down in this novel demonstrates how Auster inverts a classic City motif. Verticality in *Moon Palace* is devoid of moral absolutes; up and down are merely two ways of experiencing the City. Both have their advantages and disadvantages, but they are inseparable, mutually dependent and equally useful in “reading” and using the City. *Moon Palace* also exhibits a partial inversion of a modern/postmodern genre, the synoptic novel, that is the genre in which the City is the protagonist.[318] *Moon Palace* is anti-synoptic in the sense that the City often recedes into the background and strangely remains a focal point nevertheless, but also in the sense that the novel is not about New York as such, but about the relation between a group of characters and their place. In this sense, all of Auster’s books are anti-synoptic although there has been a tendency among critics to regard particularly *The New York Trilogy* as synoptic. None of Auster’s novels present the City as an entity on its own terms, they are always concerned with reflecting the City as it influences a central consciousness.

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[318] Lehan, op. cit., p. 237.

The relationship between characters and place is central not least in *Moon Palace* which demonstrates how the relationship between character and City is greatly influenced by economic factors. The City is less democratic than the Frontier, since money is a significant influence on a character's perception of the City. We see this, for instance, in Marco's changing relationship to the crowd.

The preceding sections of this chapter have also revealed a degree of social critique inherent in the presentation of the City in *Moon Palace*. The critique concerns the distribution of wealth in America and the failure of the nation to live up to their ideals. This critique is, in fact, yet another inversion of the conventions of modern City literature. Instead of presenting the crowd as dangerous and hostile, the crowd is actually almost absent from *Moon Palace*. To the degree that the crowd is present at all, Auster demonstrates how the hostility of the crowd is a myth, and how it is actually inhuman to have a crowd that consists of the elements forgotten by the commercial City.

The social critique is one point that is connected with the City in *Moon Palace*, but the relationship between a character and his or her City is of far greater significance. If Auster seems to turn against the commercial City, he does turn *toward* the spiritual City of the past. Before the City developed into the a commercial place, it was a place of sanctuary and spirituality. Before there was ever a marketplace, there was a church or a sacred centre.[319] Auster seems to let his characters search for this spiritual centre which turns out to be no longer in the City as such, but in the characters themselves. Lehan concludes about Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* that: "[i]t is when the city internalized that its force is most powerfully felt."[320] The same notion applies to *Moon Palace*.

In order to find their spiritual centres, Auster's city dwellers take various approaches. One method is the peripatetic which is a method Auster connects with a type of character called the flaneur. In many of Auster's works, walking is synonymous with thinking as well as finding insight and inwardness. The flaneur motif in *Moon Palace* is also inverted, however. Walking no longer equals thinking, but leads to places where a character must rest in order to find his or her spiritual centre. Walking is a means, not a goal, because the Indian wisdom proposed by the Blakelock painting in the Brooklyn Museum is stretched to cover City space as well. If man can live peacefully in his surroundings, life becomes imbued with holiness.

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[319] Ibid., p. 26.

[320] Ibid., p. 204.

Being lost is normally construed negatively, but Auster inverts this as well. To the characters in *Moon Palace*, it is only when they are lost that places may be transcended and true spirituality achieved. The City is the maze where man is most easily lost[321], and thus the City is potentially a perfect place for finding one's spirituality. This is the "inward turn" that links Auster to the modernist tradition of Joyce and Eliot, but Auster's use of the City as a kind of text links him with the postmodern tradition:

> Such a city is at once a physical reality and a state of mind: to read the city is to read an urbanized self, to know the city from within. Once we lose a transcendental signifier, the totalizing process is called into question and the city turns into a place of mystery: chance and the unexpected dominate, a romantic sense of the uncanny becomes exaggerated, and the city takes on the meaning of pure text, to be created by each individual and then read.[322]

Auster's City is precisely that: a place of mystery where chance dominates, minor characters in the plot turn out to be the protagonist's close family, and everything seems coincidental and yet predestined. The City is a place of mystery, a place for personal recreation and redemption. Auster's City may very well be described as a state of mind.

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[321] Cf. Auster's description of Amsterdam in *The Invention of Solitude* (pp.85-87).

[322] Lehan, op. cit., p. 287.

Conclusion and Perspectives.

The preceding chapters have examined the Frontier and the City as they are expressed in Paul Auster's novel *Moon Palace*. The guiding principle has been founded on a notion of national literature, and the goal has been to examine Auster's proposed Americanness. In an examination of what he calls the *geographical imagination* in contemporary American culture, Brian Jarvis has demonstrated how geography plays central role in the American imagination, and how:

> [m]any of the key words in the discourses of American history and definitions of that nebulous entity referred to as 'national identity' are geocentric: the Frontier, the Wilderness, the Garden, the Land of Plenty, the Wild West, the Small Town, the Big City, the Open Road.[323]

Several of the categories proposed by Jarvis are somewhat overlapping. The Wilderness, the Garden, the Land of Plenty and the Wild West are all aspects of the Frontier[324], whereas the last three categories are distinctly different. In the preceding discussion of *Moon Palace*, the Small Town and the Open Road have not been treated because their role in the narrative is limited or non-existent. The Small Town plays a significant role in Auster's *Mr. Vertigo*[325], and the Open Road is the core material of *The Music of Chance*[326], but *Moon Palace* is restricted to the Frontier and the Big City as spatial poles of the American "experiment".

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[323] Brian Jarvis, *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1998) p. 6

[324] Cf. Lutwack, op. cit., pp. 144ff.

[325] Paul Auster, *Mr. Vertigo* (London: Penguin, 1994; 1995). The novel is the picaresque story of Walter Clairborne Rawley. It takes place in the late 1920s and centres itself around the opposition between small town America and urban America.

[326] Paul Auster, *The Music of Chance* (London: Penguin, 1990; 1991). This novel is the story of Jim Nashe and Jack Pozzi. It draws much of its strength from the road narrative genre described so well by Primeau, op. cit.

The analysis of these poles of the spatial spectrum in *Moon Palace* has demonstrated that Auster's use of place is "mythically" based. This is seen most clearly in connection with the Frontier since this place is no longer a physical reality in America, but a myth. As we have seen, Auster knows his mythic material and draws interpretative strength from it: Turner, Thoreau, Scott, Moran, Pocahontas and many other names connected with the Frontier are incorporated into the narrative in which they help create the sense of the Frontier which becomes a leitmotif in *Moon Palace*.

The use of the City in *Moon Palace* is also based upon a set of literary conventions, but Moran's idea that space needs to be understood in relation to the Frontier emphasises the mythic basis of the City as well. The preceding discussion of verticality, the flaneur and the crowd in *Moon Palace* has emphasised how Auster's presentation of place relies heavily on literary tradition, and how much of the signifying potential of the City must be drawn from the inherent parallels to the literary canon and to Auster's other works.

Two archetypal American places, the Frontier and the City, are the compound material in the setting of *Moon Palace*, but as the novel progresses, these places take on a much greater significance than mere places of action. In connection with Kitty Wu, for instance, we have seen how the setting becomes a determinant in the movement of the plot. The Frontier and the City are also integrated in the ideological structures pervading the novel - an ideology that deals with matters of transcendence and inwardness. The link between place and ideology hinges on the idea that a character is able to make place dissolve into "nowhere" or "anywhere" and hence make the essence of any given place coequal to any other place.

Turner's suggestion about the disappearance of the Frontier is revealed by *Moon Palace* to be true, but Auster takes the idea a bit further and lets the City dissolve into nothingness also. To this end, the City is essentially similar to the Frontier. That is: they are both places in which a character may get "lost", which is a positive state of being in Auster's works, and (re-)discover his or her inner nature. The endlessness of the City, and the elusiveness of the Frontier are, therefore, not threatening as some critics have indicated.[327] Instead, endlessness and elusiveness expand the boundaries of potential meaning and the possibilities of action and existence within the fictional universe.

Auster has explained in *The Invention of Solitude* how he sees puns as "a secret path to the truth".[328] In connection with the spatial theme discussed in the previous chapters, much interpretative strength is contained in the pun inherent in the word "nowhere" which may also be read "now here". It is, then, only when place dissolves into an anywhere or a nowhere that a character is able to be *now here*. Only when we realise that place is of no real significance, do we get a chance to find ourselves.

This notion is central to Auster's poetics, because place is not important in itself, but only in its relation to the individual. The Pascal quotation from *The Invention of Solitude* is contained in Marco's reading of the Indian in Blakelock's painting which has been discussed previously. In a sense, that painting becomes the hermeneutic fissure in the novel from which the overall theme emerges: "[i]f men can live comfortably in their surroundings […] then perhaps life on earth becomes imbued with a feeling of holiness."[329] Only when Marco has let place recede into the background and come to the geographical end of America is he able to live truly, therefore:

> I had come to the end of the world, and beyond it there was nothing but air and waves, an emptiness that went clear to the shores of China. This is where I start, I said to myself, this is where my life begins.[330]

Marco has realised that, given the conformity of the world, a home can be constructed anywhere. In fact, just like any other place in *Moon Palace*, home may easily be presented as a state of mind. This idea lies at the core of the spatial duality in

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[327] Cf. Willet, op. cit., p. 9.

[328] *The Invention of Solitude*, p. 160.

[329] *Moon Palace*, p. 139.

[330] Ibid., p. 306.

Auster's works since it has been demonstrated above that place contains both the possibility for destruction and redemption. Any place can be made into a home, and any place may be turned into a hell. John Milton expressed it perhaps most clearly in 1667:

> The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.[331]

Milton's neatly arranged chiasmus emphasises the fluidity of spatial characteristics and points out how the attributes of any given place are *not* inherent in the place itself. Instead, they are an inscription of the mind upon that place. This has also been indicated by Leonard Lutwack who has pointed out how literature and literary tradition are among the factors that solidify the valorisation of place.[332] In his testing of literary conventions connected with the Frontier and the City, Paul Auster has recognised the truth of this claim and demonstrated how these values are essentially devoid of significance in a world where the essence of place is in the eye of the beholder.

When every place becomes a state of mind, the essence of man's relation to place resides in his or her ability to transcend the "place of the mind" and create a "heaven" anywhere. This is, significantly enough, also the point of Thea Astley's *Vanishing Points* which has been referred to in connection with Thoreau: "Paradise Is Where You Find It."[333] According to Marco, this is the essence of all art, because "art's purpose is 'penetrating the world and finding one's place in it.'"[334] In a traditionally Romantic vein, thus, the artist becomes the person who carries the solution to the basic existential problems, but since "[e]very man is the author of his own life"[335], each person carries the key to his or her personal salvation. As we have seen clearly, there are many ways of expressing this notion, but they all refer to one basic theme in Auster's poetics: *transcendence of place*.

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[331] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: Penguin, 1667; 1996) p. 14.
[332] Lutwack, op. cit., p. 35.
[333] Astley, op. cit., p. 177.
[334] *The Art of Hunger*, p. 287.
[335] *Moon Palace*, p. 7.

The preceding analysis of *Moon Palace* has demonstrated how it is *not* true, according to Auster, that place is unimportant to Americans.[336] In fact, Auster has not only demonstrated how the two archetypal American places examined in *Moon Palace* are very important in an understanding of the American "experiment". He has also pointed out that the incessant search for the "right" place, the search that is at the core of the Frontier quest and the "American dream", is so pervasive in the American ethos that it becomes destructive instead of formative.

Auster's characters are all searching for that perfect, American place, but it is only when they discover that the "right" place is a matter of spirituality that they are able to be free and happy. The incessant quest only leads to restlessness, which Auster presents as an archetypal American condition. The notion that restlessness is a particularly American phenomenon is further emphasised by Lutwack who says that "[t]he United States is offered as a prime example of rootlessness"[337], by Turner who has emphasised the fluidity inherent in the American character[338] and by social statistics about America that tell us how "the average American family moves about twice in each decade."[339]

The idea of restlessness as an American characteristic seems to be commonplace along with the idea of American mobility which is also emphasised by Turner and others. These two characteristics seem to go hand in hand, but whereas mobility is often presented as a positive ability, Auster presents restlessness as a kind of disease: lunacy. Turner perceives American character as being dominated by "perennial rebirth".[340] To Turner, this is a positive force, but Auster demonstrates how constant rebirth is actually a kind of stasis; how a continual quest is also destructive.

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[336] Lutwack, op. cit., p. 177f.

[337] Ibid. p. 215:

[338] Cf. previous chapter.

[339] David Nye, *Contemporary American Society* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1990; 1997), p. 20.

In the preceding discussion of *Moon Palace*, many references have been made to what has been termed the Austerian poetics. The term is somewhat ambiguous, but it has been used here to refer to the guiding principle behind Auster's works. The term covers much of the etymological ground covered by more "old-fashioned" term: intention. There are several reasons for preferring the term *poetics* rather than *intention*, though. First of all, *poetics* covers more than just intentions. Secondly, *poetics* does not carry the political implications that are inherent in the term *intention*. Finally, *poetics* need not be explicitly conscious whereas *intention* does. When it is possible at all to talk about a poetics behind Auster's works, this is due to the recurrence of certain themes and motifs in the totality of his works. The works of Paul Auster are not separate entities with no bearing on each other. Instead, they deal with many of the same themes.

Some critics have chosen to focus on the theme of chance in Auster's works. The focus in the preceding analysis has been somewhat different, though. The examination of two spatial metonyms for America, the Frontier and New York City, has revealed how Auster turns against the restlessness that is presented as a truly American phenomenon. In an interview, Mark Irwin has asked Paul Auster the following question:

> Is that distinctly American to chuck everything at the blind turn of the card? It seems American somehow….[341]

Irwin's question returns us to our initial question regarding Paul Auster's proposed Americanness. According to Lutwack, abandoning everything to start anew *is* a truly American phenomenon. He links this trait to Washington Irving's short story

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[340] Turner, op. cit., p. 2.

[341] *The Art of Hunger*, p. 337.

Rip Van Winkle[342] which he says is "the prototype of a central myth in American culture."[343] According to Lutwack, the American hero is not static: "The man who stays on the land is no hero."[344] In his answer to Mark Irwin, Auster takes caution on the issue of national character, but he seems willing to explore the notion:

> I don't know. I tend to think of it as human. But since we're in a country without a long past, a place in which most people have obliterated their connection to the past, maybe it's easier for Americans to do such a thing than it is for people from other countries. I wouldn't want to insist on that idea, though. It's dangerous to talk in generalities, to make assumptions about national characteristics. On the other hand, we're all products of a particular place. I've grown up here, I've spent almost my entire life here, and undoubtedly America has settled into my bones.[345]

Restlessness may be a general characteristic of modern men and women, but with its firmly established links between America and the notion of "lunacy" *Moon Palace* works with the theoretic connection between Americanness and restlessness. The novel, in this sense, is Auster's examination of the American "experiment" - of what it means to be American.

The analysis has demonstrated how the connection between America and restlessness/lunacy is tested on several occasions in *Moon Palace*. We cannot be sure whether Auster is criticising restlessness as part of American national identity or as part of a more international modern identity, however. This uncertainty is based on the retrospective mode of narration in *Moon Palace* which, as Barone has indicated, allows the narrator (a persona in the "present") to view the narrated ego (a persona in the relative "past") through several layers of self-irony.[346]

It is indicated in the novel, however, that America is particularly "lunatic", and parallels to other works by Auster dealing with restlessness in America emphasise Auster's willingness to examine the connection. In *Moon Palace*, this connection is investigated just as thoroughly as the other myths regarding America with which

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[342] Irving, op. cit.

[343] Lutwack, op. cit., p. 154.

[344] Ibid.

[345] *The Art of Hunger*, p. 337

[346] Barone, op. cit., p. 20.

Auster deals. There is no absolute answer regarding the supposed connection between America and restlessness, but restlessness in *Moon Palace* is strictly linked to the archetypal American places employed as setting. Along with the social inequality in American society that Auster reveals in *Moon Palace*, this restlessness is condemned by the narrative and its implications.

The way to fight restlessness proposed by Auster's works is through transcendence of place which has been described thoroughly above. According to Lehan, postmodernists have attacked transcendence which is presented as a modernist phenomenon. Lehan does say, however, that "the modernist mind never quite died".[347] In connection with Paul Auster's spatial poetics, this is quite true since Auster seems to reinstate the modernist "inward turn"[348] towards subjective reality and transcendence of the physical limits of the "real" world.

The inward turn proposed by Auster is not merely a modernist phenomenon, however. Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury have revealed "a legacy of self-scrutiny"[349] initiated by the Puritans that runs through American literature like a latent leitmotif. To the Puritans, the transcendent experience was intrinsically bound up with the Frontier[350] as we see it expressed often in *Moon Palace*. According to Ruland and Bradbury, the transcendent theme is strong in American literature, but the quest for "artistic self-examination"[351] is particularly strong in Jewish-American writing after World War II. All in all, Auster seems to fit nicely into the tradition of post-war Jewish-American writing:

> No longer predominantly a literature of immigration, the new Jewish-American writing concentrated on the nature of the American Dream, the rise of materialism, the experience of the modern city, the bonds that linked person to person in the moral chain. It documented alienation and disaffiliation but spoke, too,

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[347] Lehan, op. cit., p. 162.

[348] Ibid.

[349] Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature* (London: Penguin, 1991; 1992) p. 18.

[350] Ibid., pp. 26f.

[351] Ibid., p. 380.

> of new American opportunities and possibilities. It drew not only on the intellectual heritage of American writing and the line of naturalism, but on the Modernism of Europe[…][352]

In an interview, Joseph Mallia has asked Auster about the “religious undertones” in some of his books, and Auster refutes the notion thus:

> “Religious” might not be the word I would use, but I agree that these books are mostly concerned with spiritual questions[…][353]

The eponymous moon is an epitome of this reflection of “inner knowledge”[354], and the archetypal American places in *Moon Palace*, the theme of restlessness, the use of the Western genre, the plea for transcendence and the implementation of American points of reference in the narrative[355] make *Moon Palace* a very “American” novel. The adjective is put into quotation marks because national identity is a theoretical construct which functions largely on the basis of a mythic complex.

Moon Palace seems to be a very “American” novel, when we look at the thematic constructs and the motifs that pervade the novel. The preceding interpretation has even demonstrated that Auster uses his fiction to question the notion of American national identity and criticise the restlessness and social inequality that seems to pervade America in *Moon Palace* and several of Auster’s other works. It could be claimed that Auster’s novels are not attempts at the “Great American novel”, but this claim would be based on a more genre oriented approach to Auster which might emphasise his tendency towards the *roman-fleuve* mode prevalent in European fiction. This is, arguably, a very interesting approach to Auster, and it will hopefully be dealt with in the near future.[356]

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[352] Ibid., p. 376.

[353] *The Art of Hunger*, p. 280.

[354] Protas, op. cit.

[355] This is a detail that has not been examined fully in the analysis above. In *Moon Palace*, however, the narrative voice makes constant references to events, places and characters in American history and culture. Some of these have been mentioned in the analysis, but others have not: the moon landing (p. 1), Neil Armstrong (p. 18), the Vietnam War (p. 32), Woodstock (p. 46), Chappaquiddick (p. 62), the Black Panthers (p. 62), Custer’s Last Stand (p. 139), the Sacco-Vanzetti Case (p. 188), McCarthy (p. 197 et al.), the A-Bomb program (p. 224), the Great Depression (p. 253) and several others.

However, if the reading of Auster's works is more thematically oriented, which has been the case above, Paul Auster emerges as a very American author since "[o]ne might posit a whole conception of American literature turning on the conflict of the desire to remain fixed in a paradisal place and the impulse toward motion."[357] This conflict is the archetypal conflict in Auster's characters, and the clash between the Frontier and the City which is also prevalent in *Moon Palace* is, according to George Santayana, at the heart of American identity:

> the American will inhabits the skyscraper and the American intellect inhabits the colonial mansion.[358]

In the introduction to this thesis, it was made clear how Auster views America as "an invented country", an "experiment" with which Americans are still trying to come to terms. *Moon Palace*, then, takes a significant place among Auster's works because it is the novel in which Auster is dealing most explicitly with that experiment. Not only is it the novel in Auster's *oeuvre* that is most heavily rooted in America[359], it is also Auster's most explicit critique of America:

> The moon is many things all at once, a touchstone. It's the moon as myth, as "radiant Diana, image of all that is dark within us"; the imagination, love, madness. At the same time, it's the moon as object, as celestial body, as lifeless stone hovering in the sky. But it's also the longing for what is not, the unattainable, the human desire for transcendence. And yet it's history as well, particularly American history. First there's Columbus, then there was the discovery of the West, then finally there is outer space: the moon as the last frontier. But Columbus had no idea that he'd discovered America. He thought he had sailed to India, to China. In some sense, *Moon Palace* is the embodiment of that misconception, an

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[356] During the research for this thesis, I gave a short lecture at the Institute for Comparative Literature at Copenhagen University. The lecture was delivered to a class dealing with Auster's *Leviathan* and it led to a discussion with the teacher, Bo Tao Michaelis, who emphasised Auster's incompatibility with the American narrative tradition. It has not been possible to examine the conflict between Auster's narrative method and his themes here, but we can only hope that this will be examined in the near future. It seems to be, presently, one of the most intriguing aspects of Auster's works, one that deserves investigation.

[357] Lutwack, op. cit., p. 62.

[358] Quoted in Lehan, op. cit., p. 290.

[359] Cf. *The Art of Hunger*, p. 280.

> attempt to think of America as China. But the moon is also repetition, the cyclical nature of human experience. There are three stories in the book, after all, and each one is finally the same. Each generation repeats the mistakes of the previous generation. So it's also a critique of the notion of progress. And if America is the land of progress, what are we to make of ourselves then? […] Fogg wends his way among all these ideas, this pinball machine of associations, struggling to find a place for himself. By the end of the book I think he manages to get somewhere. But he only reaches the beginning, the brink of his adult life. And that's where we leave him - getting ready to begin.[360]

That is where we leave Marco Stanley Fogg and *Moon Palace*: with a strong image of America in our minds and with a powerful sense of what Paul Auster is criticising in the American experiment. *Moon Palace* is a novel about finding one's place in America, and at the very end of the narrative the symbolically significant moon does just that: it finds "its place in the darkness."[361]

Birkerød, February, 2002.

Bo Clausen.

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[360] Ibid., p. 324.

[361] *Moon Palace*, p. 307.

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In the cases when several publication dates are given, the first date refers to the first edition of the text - regardless of publisher etc. - and the second refers to the edition used in this thesis.

Dansk Resume.

Nærværende speciale har med udgangspunkt i Paul Austers roman *Moon Palace* fra 1989 forsøgt at undersøge den amerikanske stemme i Austers forfatterskab. Eftersom nationalitet er nært forbundet med et specifikt geografisk sted, er der blevet taget udgangspunkt i de to steder i romanen, hvor handlingen udspiller sig, nemlig Byen (i dette tilfælde New York City) og den amerikanske Vest (*the Frontier*).

Analysen af *Moon Palace* demonstrerer, hvorledes Auster benytter sig af disse to steder, der hævdes at fremstå som metonymier for Amerika udødeliggjort i for eksempel Western-genren og den amerikanske storbyfortælling. Både Vesten og Byen fungerer konkret som de steder i romanen, hvor handlingen finder sted, men de fungerer også på diverse abstrakte planer i fortællingen. Det bliver i analysen demonstreret, hvordan Vesten kommer til at fungere som et referencepunkt, i forhold til hvilket Amerika skal ses og forstås. Det ultimative Vesten, *the Frontier*, gled ifølge historikerne ud af virkeligheden og ind i mytens domæne omkring 1890, men i *Moon Palace* dukker Vesten op i et væld af referencer, der alle er forbundet med en form for søgen.

Denne søgen efter et selv, en fader, en gerningsmand eller bare et "sted", hvor man kan være sig selv, er typisk for Paul Austers personer. Dette demonstreres gennem paralleller til andre værker af Auster, der påpeger, hvordan denne søgen ligeledes er forbundet med Byen. Således bliver Vesten og Byen i Austers fiktionsunivers hovedsageligt et udtryk for denne søgen, og vigtigheden af sted som sådan ophæves.

I Austers bøger bliver et sted ofte af personerne i fiktionen fortolket som et neutralt område, et *nowhere* eller et *anywhere*, og det er kun når denne fortolkning indtræder, at personerne er i stand til at frigøre sig selv, transcendere abstraktet *sted* og blive lykkelige. I *Moon Palace* præsenteres dette som en primitiv, mystisk viden, som ikke besiddes af den hvide amerikaner, men udtrykkes af indianeren i Ralph Albert

Blakelocks maleri *Moonlight*, der tager en fremtrædende rolle i de tematiske strukturer i bogen.

Parallellerne til Austers andre værker understøtter denne læsning af *Moon Palace* og fremhæver, hvorledes Auster skaber sig en egentlig poetik, der har med sted at gøre. For at finde sig tilpas, må man transcendere sted, vende sig mod sit indre og indse, at det perfekte sted er en psykisk tilstand mere end noget andet. Eftersom dette motiv går igen i flere af Austers værker, bliver det læst som udtryk for en bredere poetik, der vender sig imod den rastløshed, der hævdes at være en del af den amerikanske nationalkarakter.

Auster kritiserer den rastløshed, som præger Amerika i hans bøger, og som han i interviews eksplicit tilskriver det moderne menneske som sådan, og måske amerikaneren i særdeleshed. Den amerikanske stemme i Austers bøger opstår altså hovedsageligt med udgangspunkt i de ærke-amerikanske steder, som Auster i sin fiktion undersøger. Den rummes imidlertid også i den grundige måde, hvorpå Auster gransker den amerikanske nationalkarakter, det amerikanske etos og den Amerikanske Drøm. I sidste ende fremstår Auster som en meget amerikansk forfatter med meget på hjerte om, hvad det vil sige at være amerikaner. Auster er imidlertid ikke en fane-viftende nationalist; han er en kritisk humanistisk forfatter.