



HAL
open science

”From you to you, and conversely”

Jean-Louis Claret

► **To cite this version:**

Jean-Louis Claret. ”From you to you, and conversely”. *E-rea - Revue électronique d’études sur le monde anglophone*, 2019, 17 (1), 10.4000/erea.9026 . hal-02563642

HAL Id: hal-02563642

<https://amu.hal.science/hal-02563642>

Submitted on 5 May 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

Paul Auster, *Report from the Interior*.

“From *you* to *you*, and conversely”

Jean-Louis Claret

Maître de Conférences HDR, Aix Marseille Univ, LERMA, Aix-en-Provence, France

Jean-louis.claret@univ-amu.fr

Résumé:

L’usage très particulier du prénom personnel *you* dans *Report from the Interior* de Paul Auster place le lecteur dans une situation d’intimité à la fois dérangeante et séduisante. En effet, ce procédé produit une fusion inhabituelle entre le narrateur et le lecteur qui semblent partager un parcours de vie commun que le premier accueille par le souvenir et que le second découvre par la lecture. Les récits enchâssés dans ce texte achèvent de désorienter le lecteur qui suit un guide évanescant. L’utilisation d’une série de photographies, placées à la fin de l’ouvrage, propose un regard différent et complémentaire sur le parcours du personnage principal et permet d’établir un dialogue subtil entre texte et image. Bien qu’aucune des photographies en question ne représente le héros, son regard reçoit une forme d’incarnation qui contribue à renforcer la fusion entre le narrateur et le destinataire du texte.

Abstract :

In *Report from the Interior* by Paul Auster the personal pronoun *you* is used in an unconventional manner as it places the readers in a position that is both uncomfortable and delightful. As a matter of fact, this unconventional process causes the narrator and the reader to coalesce and to share a common life experience that they either piece together through remembering or discover through reading. The embedded narratives that stud this text put the finishing touch to the disorientation of the readers who follow an ethereal guide. The presence of a series of photographs at the end of the book provides a different and complementary point of view that prompts a subtle dialogue between text and image. Though the protagonist is never represented, the gaze he included in the text may be interpreted as some form of incarnation that strengthens the link between the narrator and the reader.

Mots clef:

Autobiographie. Souvenirs. Récit. Image. Photographie.

Key words:

Autobiography. Memories. You. Narrative. Image. Photographs.

Auteur

Jean-Louis Claret est Maître de Conférences HDR à Aix-Marseille Université où il enseigne la littérature élisabéthaine. Il s'est par ailleurs spécialisé dans les rapports entre textes et images et co-dirige un Thème de son unité de recherche consacré au Visible. Il a publié essentiellement sur le théâtre élisabéthain et sur la peinture flamande de la Renaissance.

Report from the Interior by Paul Auster enables the readers to hear a voice that comes from within, as the title of the book suggests, and that reaches the reader who feels s/he is directly called upon by the narrator. The constant use of the personal pronoun *you* is instrumental in establishing this close connection. The present article hinges on the various meanings of this word though the following demonstration cannot be described as being related to the field of linguistics. It is definitely literary. A subtle borderline is crossed, even denied, as the story unfolds and the readers feel they are going through a very special experience that links them to the narrator while leaving them at a certain respectful distance. The use of *you* in this novel is incredibly far-reaching. It also refers to the inter-changeability of the selves, to the very notion of identity and calls into play other subtle phenomena that contribute to making Paul Auster's text so enjoyable. In it, *you* is given the all-ranging capacities dreamers can achieve in their dreams insofar as it seems to be both private and universal. The first part of the present study is focused on the connection Paul Auster's text establishes with the readers. But *you* is also the other one the window of images contains and represents. When the image is involved, *you* takes on a new

dimension that deconstructs the all-including process at work in Paul Auster's autobiographical text. What is done with words is actually undone by the visual facet of this literary piece, as the second part of our analysis will demonstrate.

1. Budding you.

The beginning of Paul Auster's book corresponds to birth in the main character's world. The first line of the text is: "In the beginning, everything was alive" (3). The tone is unmistakably biblical and what the readers are invited to attend is the slow birth of an individual self. The progressive disenchantment of the world that used to feature so many anthropomorphic creatures goes hand-in-hand with the fashioning of a perceiving subject that learns to position itself at the right distance from the surrounding and still partly undiscovered reality. Though the possessive adjective *your* appears twice in the first paragraph ("your bowl" and "your parents' car"), *you* does not, not yet, as if the readers' mental eyes were not supposed to catch sight of the little child's silhouette. But as early as the second line of the second paragraph, the character's presence as a seeing entity begins to body forth: "You could see his face looking down at you from the night sky" (3). The third paragraph sets the tone of the whole book insofar as *you* and its variations (*your* / *yourself*) turn up eleven times in a ten-line unit. It is no accident if the sudden profusion of these words corresponds to the introduction to the character's mind. The use of incomplete sentences, as for instance "Your earliest thoughts, remnants of how you lived inside yourself as a small boy", at the beginning of the third paragraph, is probably meant to make the readers feel that they have penetrated the boy's mind. An intimacy is thus already established between the reader and the narrator.

The features of the beginning of the text enable the readers to feel from the very start how specific Paul Auster's narrative is. Conventionally, narrators use *I* or *s/he* to refer to their main character as Gérard Genette duly recorded (*Discours du récit*, 164-171). By doing so, they position themselves as guides who lead the readers all through the narrative, focusing their mental eyes on such or such necessarily distant elements and shutting them on others. The fictional world is, as it were, reached by proxy and this distance from the events and emotions is

made clear by the more-or-less-wide gap between the characters and the narrator. In an autobiographical essay written in 1982, *The Invention of Solitude*, though he similarly resorts to a biblical sounding *incipit* (“One day there is life”, 5), Paul Auster uses a conventional *I* in the first part of the book which he devotes to the recent death of his father. The readers are placed in the comfortable position of readers perusing a text and feel they have to take the hand of a narrator whose features correspond roughly to those of the main character. They follow the narrator that refers to himself as *I* and writes about his own life. In *Report from the Interior*, a very different process is at work: as early as the second paragraph, as I have just demonstrated, the link between the guiding voice and the readers is established by a somewhat destabilizing *you*. Even though *I* may be someone else, as Philippe Lejeune—and Arthur Rimbaud before him in his famous letter to Paul Demeny—declared, it remains rather reassuring insofar as it makes it clear that the narrator is not the reader. Some distance is preserved and the reader feels that his or her inner self cannot coincide with the narrator’s. The story they are beginning to read is told by someone else, someone who is speaking in his own name, and the *I* that is used is necessarily at a certain distance from the reader’s *I*. *Report from the Interior* sweeps this distinction away insofar as the generic *you* that springs to life in the opening paragraphs soon gives way to a personal pronoun that seems to turn the readers into the heroes of the narrative. The sentence: “No doubt influenced by the cartoons you loved to watch, you thought there was a pole jutting out from the North Pole,” for instance, seems to be expressing the reader’s imaginings, rather than Paul Auster’s. After all, if we premise that *you* refers to any child at the beginning of the text, why not suggest that every reader is now reading about his own young age fantasies? Indeed, all men and women once believed that the world was an enchanted place where objects had a soul and could lead a life of their own. Yet this seductive hypothesis is soon denied by the text:

Your circumstances at the time were as follows: midcentury America; mother and father; tricycles, bicycles, and wagons; radios and black-and-white televisions; standard-shift cars; two small apartments and then a house in the suburbs; fragile health early on, then normal boyhood strength; public school; a family from the striving middle class; a town of fifteen thousand populated by Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, all white except for a smattering of black people, but no Buddhists, Hindus, or Muslims; a little sister and eight first

cousins; comic books; Rootie Kazootie and Pinky Lee; “I saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus”; Campbell’s soup, Wonder Bread, and canned peas; souped-up cars (hot rods) and cigarettes for twenty-three cents a pack; a little world inside the big world, which was the entire world for you back then, since the big world was not yet visible. (6)

This paragraph makes it quite clear that the little boy at issue is no other than Paul Auster. An identity card has indeed been issued, which implies that the readers now have to admit that the author is re-creating and addressing the boy he used to be. *You* actually corresponds to Paul Auster addressing his former self as an *alter ego*. It is a monologue an almost seventy-year-old man wrote about the child he used to be and the adult he has become. The density of *you* is so great that the author talks to himself as being both the subject of the book and the author of it. As in a dream, as Jorge Borges defined it in his *Lectures* (52), Paul Auster becomes the actor, the spectator(s), the theatre and the plot of a story that is both himself and a fiction: “Your purpose” the text indicates “is to chart the workings of your young mind, to look at yourself in isolation and explore the internal geography of your boyhood, the fact is that you didn’t live in isolation” (45-6). The whole story appears as an effort to piece together elements from the past by the writer’s faulty memory. “The chronology has blurred,” he confesses in an aside (23). The imperfect confession is meant to be ‘overheard’ by the readers whom the author seems beguilingly to be addressing throughout. Once this pattern has been understood by the readers, the whole text takes on the dimension of a confession. And the readers are put in the position of the confessors who can make an inroad into the confessing character’s report from the interior. Unless they feel they have become the ‘exterior’ Paul Auster whom the ‘interior’ Paul Auster is addressing by proxy. The author turns each reader into his exterior self so that the silent exchange between inside and outside can take place.

Paul Auster knew that this use of *you* as a guide was uncommon and that it would destabilize the readers. This choice seems to be commented upon by the text itself when the narrator remembers that he once enjoyed a book by Stevenson:

You adored the much simpler *A Child’s Garden of Verses*, however, and because you knew that Stevenson was a grown man when those poems were

written, you were impressed by how deftly and persuasively he employed the first person throughout the book, pretending to write from the point of view of a small child, and you understand now, suddenly, that this was your first glimpse into the hidden wheelworks of literary creation, the mystifying process by which a person can leap into a mind that is not his own. (26)

The readers catch themselves admiring Paul Auster's capacity to "leap into their minds" by using *you* as a stepping-stone. They become the little boy who discovers the world around him and accepts to be part of its history.

Once the readers have got used to the haunting presence of *you*, the narrative reaches the day when the ten-year-old protagonist goes to the cinema to see *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, the 1957 science-fiction film directed by Jack Arnold. The film is turned into a story the narrator tells the reader. It deals with the lives of Carey and his wife, Louise. The metadiegetical narrative is carried out in the present tense and the two of them are unsurprisingly and profusely referred to via the personal pronoun *they*: "They are both young and attractive, they are in love, and when they aren't kissing, they talk to each other with the playful, teasing banter of lifelong soul mates" (107). Then the focus shifts to Casey who is referred to as *he*. When *you* turns up in this embedded account, it refers to the ordinary spectator in the cinema and the reader of the present memoir. The two coalesce: "You can already sense where the story is going, and it is almost too much for you to bear" (110). But the reader is in for a surprise insofar as the last lines of the paragraph I have just quoted draw an unexpected parallel between the reader / spectator and the character in the film, turning the initial duet into a trio: "You pray for a miracle and hope you are wrong, hope that some scientific mastermind will step in and figure out a way to arrest the shrinking of the shrinking man, for by now Scott Carey is no longer just a character in a film, Scott Carey is you" (110). The larger process at work in Paul Auster's autobiographical project seems to contaminate the embedded story. *He* is *you* so to speak, and *you* is, as we have seen, both Paul Auster and the anonymous reader. And even when he refers to the age he was when first seeing the film ("You are old enough to understand that Grant Williams, the actor who plays the shrinking man, has not grown smaller, that the effect has been created by a clever production designer who has built an enormous chair, a chair that could easily accommodate a twelve-foot

giant, but the impact you feel is nevertheless wondrous and uncanny” 115), the narrator also appeals to the reader as s/he could have responded to the scene as a child. The confusion reaches an even higher level when the main character’s wife talks directly to him: “It’s over, Scott. You’re going to be all right...” (117) The loop seems to be looped at that stage. In addition, the narrator’s description of the film, the voice-over narration mentioned in this very description, and the book written by the inset character also overlap. Yet the narrator sticks to *you* as a way to refer to the hero in the movie. Though the spectators of *The Shrinking Man* and the readers of *Report from the Interior* become one the latter never ‘becomes’ the hero of the movie.

The second film Paul Auster mentions introduces a different process. Indeed, the narrator refers to another major event in his life: The “next cinematic earthquake of (his) life” (135) was *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, a 1932 Warner Bros production. Once again, the main character, Allen, is referred to as *he*. *You* only turns up in free indirect speech instances like the following: “We’ll be reading about you in the newspapers, I bet” (137). This time, the account of the story is much longer than in the case of *The Shrinking Man*: When the summary of the first film covers 25 pages (106-131), the narrative of the second one stretches across 40 pages (135-174), time enough for the readers to lose sight of the story that embeds the narrative-within. In other words, the inset story occupies so much narrative space that it causes the readers to lose sight of the main story and to find themselves in the conventional position – denied by the larger biographical account – of fiction readers.

Paul Auster makes a point of blurring the lines separating the various layers of meaning that make up his very substantial *you*. At the beginning of the chapter entitled ‘Time Capsule,’ he refers to his early wish to write a journal and to the confusion that eventually led him to give up the idea may shed light on the process at issue. He says:

The problem with the journal was that you didn’t know what person you were supposed to be addressing, whether you were talking to yourself or to someone else, and if it was yourself, how strange and perplexing that seemed, for why bother to tell yourself things you already knew, why take the trouble to revisit things you had just experienced, and if it was someone else, then who was that

person and how could addressing someone else be construed as keeping a journal? You were too young back then to understand how much you would later forget – and too locked in the present to realize that the person you were writing to was in fact your future self. So you put down the journal, and little by little, over the course of the next forty-seven years, almost everything was lost. (179)

The problem raised by the journal which the narrator was not able to write echoes the fundamental questions raised by *Report from the Interior*. But the text at issue irons out the difficulties inherent in journal writing: the presence of an anonymous reader makes the difference as it turns the conversation with a distant self into a dynamic trio. One's past self, the text indicates, becomes "a stranger," "so alien, so deformed" (181), which makes the use of *you* to refer to one's former self quite relevant. The narrator is using *you* to refer to his former dissolved self because he cannot recognize any more the person he used to be (182) though he acknowledges the link between the two. This connection is made clear by such sentences as: "That was the school you had wanted to go to, not only because it was an excellent college with a strong English department, but because it was in New York, the center of the world for you back then, still the center of the world for you" (184). The narrator is two steps away from the hero of his report: the young Paul Auster is growing and his growth leads to the mature Paul Auster writing the story as a suspended entity that considers the move and the estrangement from the younger character to the older one.

You tells himself the story of his life. And suddenly *you* comes across a series of letters *he* had written to his former wife, Lydia. The narrative is suddenly interrupted by the contents of these letters that he wrote using a conventional *I*.

2.The image of you

Once they have read the whole book, inattentive readers bump into an album of photos. As it was not announced in a foreword, this series of images may indeed have gone unnoticed by an

inattentive reader. It consists of 107 pictures that appear as a substantial addition to the book. Surprisingly, none of these images represent the author, though the text mentions photographs that, the narrator insists, were the only surviving items from his early childhood to his mid-thirties (177). One could have expected Paul Auster to step directly into the narrative and to include private images that would have helped him “fill in gaps, confirm impressions, offer proof where none had existed before,” as he had done at the beginning of *The Invention of Solitude*. In this 1982 autobiographical text, the narrator reports that he found hundreds of old photographs and he focuses his attention on two of them: one is a trick photograph of his father dating back to the Forties (33) and the other an old family picture taken in Kenosha (35) that had been torn into two parts then clumsily mended: his grandfather had actually been cut out of the image. In the Faber and Faber edition, the former image appears on the cover of the book and the latter is wedged between an introductory quotation from Heraclitus and the very beginning of the story. Placing images at the beginning or at the end of a novel radically modifies their function: either they pave the way for the budding narrative or they cause the readers to think back on the text. No such inclusion occurs in *Report from the Interior*, since most of the photographs are coupled with a brief excerpt from the text written in italics, which seems to indicate that they serve as illustrations. By flipping through these pages, the reader is sent back to the various phases in the report from the interior s/he has just read and that suddenly emerges as something rather exterior. The fact that the captions sometimes begin and/or end with dots gives the impression that some sort of visual summary of the story is involved. This effect is reinforced by the use of dots before, after and within the captions, as is the case with image 12: “...*low-budget Westerns from the thirties and forties, Hopalong Cassidy, Gabby Hayes, Buster Crabbe ... clunky old shoot-'em-ups in which the heroes wore white hats and the villains had black mustaches ...*” The very first image is from the famous 1902 film by George Méliès, *Le Voyage dans la Lune*, that featured a pale moonlike plate with a black rocket sunk into its right eye. The caption, “There was no problem in believing that/the man in the moon was an actual man,” is precisely the opening sentence of the second paragraph of the book, that the readers are consequently quite likely to remember. Then a strange experience begins as the readers go through the larger story again via this new medium: the second image is a puzzling sketch (an engraving) in a rectangular frame representing, in the foreground, a somewhat terrifying cat playing the violin to an attentive dog whose tongue is sticking out. Behind them is a dish seemingly running after a legged spoon. In

the sky a huge cow is floating close to a minimal crescent moon. This image echoes unmistakably an early allusion in the text:

There was no problem in believing that the man in the moon was an actual man. You could see his face looking down at you from the night sky, and without question it was the face of a man. Little matter that this man had no body—he was still a man as far as you were concerned, and the possibility that there might be a contradiction in all this never once entered your thoughts. At the same time, it seemed perfectly credible that a cow could jump over the moon. And that a dish could run away with a spoon. (3)

A dialogue thus begins to take place between the text and the image that suddenly calls it back to memory and, thanks to the immediacy of visual works, encapsulates the narrative. The literary image that first appeared as a daring invention by the writer may after all have been conjured up to his mind by the real engraving he had kept in mind and that he included in his book. In other words, the engraving representing the cow and the running dish certainly came first. What first appeared as an adult's endeavor to recapture childish free-running imagination might have been primed by the recollection of an old engraving that is described in the Photo Credits section as coming from the Bettmann/CORBIS image data bank. This, by the way, stamps the visual images as real. Or is it an image the grown-up Paul Auster came across years later and regarded, in retrospect, as a good example of the childish enchantment he was striving to recapture? No clue is given and the readers—now turned into observers—are left wondering. The sure thing is that Paul Auster did not draw this image—nor did he have it drawn—as an illustration for his text. Here the text was definitely born from the picture.

The link between the images and the brief captions that run below them is not always clear, as is the case in plates 3, 4 and 16 for example. The use of an ancient representation of the cosmos, with its Latin quotes and its nine circles-within-circles, to comment on the idea that “[w]hen someone tried to explain to you that the earth was a sphere, a planet orbiting the sun with eight other planets in something called a solar system, you couldn't grasp what the older boy was saying” (Plate 3) – a rather lengthy caption—remains a bit puzzling, and so does the NASA image representing our galaxy, supposedly making it clearer that “[s]tars, on the other hand, were

inexplicable.” Picture 16 is puzzling (a rabbit looking embarrassed is mysteriously related to the dropping of a cup) and the readers may be at a loss to remember what the point was in the narrative. Looking for the corresponding passage in the book may then seem necessary yet fastidious. In this respect, this specific combination of an image and its accompanying text may put one in mind of the cryptic Renaissance emblems whose meaning was driven home by the close connection between a few words—often a poem and a title in Latin—and an image.

Pictures 5 to 8 are from Felix the Cat cartoons. The Photo Credits indications are necessary to get some inkling of what plate 5 is about and even when the information is given—“Felix the Cat in ‘Oceantics,’ Bard Sullivan Cartoon”—it remains puzzling. Pictures 6 to 7 are uncommented on while picture 8 encapsulates the argument: “you are convinced they are real, that these raggedly drawn black-and-white figures are no less alive than you are.” The real images from the cartoons replace and concretize the readers’ memories of the cartoons at issue that they had striven to summon up as they read: They *show* what the readers had endeavoured to *remember* so far. Accordingly, the image positions itself as the next step in a process the book had initiated: from *conjuring* to *showing*, from *remembering* to *seeing* at last, as it were.

The ordering of the pictures follows the chronological unfolding of the story: the images related to childhood give way to those that represent animals (a squirrel, Plate 9) or vegetables (tomatoes, Plate 10), and the pictures from cartoons give way to pictures from films. What happens then in the readers’ minds is that the real images from the movies mentioned tend to wipe out the mental images the narrative had conjured up.

The presence of a series of portraits of famous novelists (Poe, Stevenson) or scientists (Edison) is rather disconcerting. As a matter of fact, the memoir gave little if no place to the description of these people whose achievements were mentioned (73). Also disconcerting are the photographs representing American soldiers involved in the Korean wars, pictures surprisingly framed by images representing baseball players. After reading the book that follows a chronological pattern, the readers find themselves a bit lost when coming across a miscellaneous flow of images whose immediacy strikes a sharp contrast with the necessarily linear unfolding of the text: newspaper headlines rub shoulders with war scenes, photos of cans, radio sets, paintings, rock singers, propaganda documents, a colonial mansion, Bible illustrations, supersonic jets and ancient paintings. The coherence is restored when a new set of images – eleven images from picture 68 to picture 78 – focus the attention on the story of the shrinking man. Then the readers who had not

seen the film at issue may determine for themselves whether or not the mental projection they had produced when reading the story was in keeping with the real thing the images actually assert. This process imposes a fixity that is fundamentally at variance with the mental process at work in all works of fiction: reading a book implies the private projection of mental images on the screen of our minds. Each reader introduces variations that he or she owes to their culture and personal story. The presence of the images from the film tends to deconstruct and annihilate the process that may be regarded as the salt of fiction reading: the readers' visions are here replaced by a set of pre-existing scenes whose presence may fill the readers with some degree of frustration.

The juxtaposition of images from real-life events and others from films is quite destabilizing too. As one flips through the pages, one may be under the impression that no major difference is to be made between reality and fiction, and this ambiguity even applies to the period that stands beyond the narrator's young age. This levelling effect is made even more powerful by the fact that a series of harrowing scenes representing the burning of Freedom Riders' buses, a recently beaten black man and the destruction of shacks is wedged between pictures from *The Shrinking Man* and *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*. Fiction and reality come together and it takes an effort from the observer to determine when the one ends and the other begins.

The link between images and words that I have tried to highlight in this analysis may be established in a discreet though powerful way at the end of Paul Auster's *Report from the Interior*. As a matter of fact, the last part of the narrative consists of a long and disconcerting series of letters the protagonist wrote to Lydia, his girlfriend, using *I* instead of the regular 'you.' These letters are sometimes interspersed with a few lines featuring the conventional *you* indicating that the embedding narrative is back. Of course, in the fabric of the letters, *you* refers to Lydia and no longer to the writer. Interestingly, in the footnotes accompanying the letters, *you* is used to refer to the *I* who wrote the letters. Despite the apparent complexity of this series of changes the readers are never lost and know perfectly when they are reading letters or following the now vanishing narrative. The process of dissolution of the narrative voice may be explained 'from the interior' by the mention of the narrator's personal state of "absolute disintegration."
(241)

The letter dated June 11 (243-5) consists of a surprising list of miscellaneous items introduced by numbers from 1 to 20. Entry 19 is bound to strike the reader's attention. It reads: "Please find drawing enclosed" (245). Obviously, this is an allusion to a drawing Paul Auster sent to Lydia but one may also suggest that a drawing is part and parcel of the written text: A drawing could indeed be "enclosed" in the text and not simply in an envelope. The drawing in question could be a special letter. It could be the one dated August 23, 1969 that covers a bit more than 17 pages. It is introduced by a paragraph in which the narrator mentions its unique quality: "The longest one you ever wrote to her" and "the only one composed on a typewriter" (253). It is indeed "a curious document" (253) and the narrator acknowledges that it was the only time in his life when he made an active effort to "shut (his) eyes and jump – without worrying about where he landed" (253). One may suggest that the narrator landed in some sort of textual image, or at least that the last letter may be viewed as an effort to create some sort of image via the use of words. This theory could be endorsed by an allusion embedded in the letter: "For me the problem of the world is first of all a problem of the self, and the solution can be accomplished only by beginning within and then ... moving without" (260). *Report from the Interior* begins within and moves without: it begins with words and ends with images. Also the man who wrote the letter "discovers what it means to be an artist, to be the man who becomes the artist by turning himself inside out" (260). After all, the man who becomes the artist could be the writer deciding to move away from words and to turn towards images. The last letter may be the hinge between the two irreconcilable modalities words and images stand for. It consists of one single paragraph and, like the early morning song sung by the birds going wild (271), it is "ecstatic and abundant" and it was written with "love and fatigue" (271). This one-paragraph letter that keeps the readers breathless may remind the reader of the literary experiment carried out by Samuel Beckett in *L'Image* (1950): The Irish author (whose influence on young Auster was so strong that the latter once confessed that he "couldn't see [his] way beyond it", Mallia 257) wrote a ten-page text in French that consists of one single sentence and deals with the confused memories of a dying man. Like Paul Auster's letter, it is a single and somewhat autonomous paragraph. "J'ai l'étrange impression que nous me regardons,"¹ the narrator says in Beckett's text, which may echo Paul Auster's play with pronouns in his autobiographical volume. The last words of Beckett's lengthy sentence are: "Je reste comme ça plus soif la langue rentre la bouche se referme elle doit faire une ligne droite à

¹ « I am under the strange impression that we are looking at me. » *My translation.*

présent c'est fait j'ai fait l'image" (18). The American writer may also have "made the image" with his final letter as it stands as a gateway to the album of photos with which it rubs shoulders. The "uncanny symmetry" (270) the narrator relates to his double encounter with Henry K. in his letter may also very well apply to the relation between words and images.

Report from the Interior deals with a solipsistic approach to a period that makes and unmakes the self that perceives it. It is a unique literary experiment, a laboratory in narrative approaches that connects irretrievably interior with exterior as well as words with images. Paul Auster demonstrates that the view from inside is a means to inform man about the outside appearance. This is what Maurice Merleau-Ponty, one of the authors Paul Auster liked particularly and whom he refers to in *Report from the Interior* (193), asserted in *Le visible et l'invisible*:

De tout ce que je vis, en tant que je le vis, j'ai par-devers moi le sens, sans quoi je ne le vivrais pas, et je ne puis chercher aucune lumière concernant le monde qu'en l'interrogeant, en explicitant ma fréquentation du monde, en la comprenant du dedans. (53)²

Letters, memories and images are some of the elements that must be gathered by those who, like the American writer, try to relate the various phases in the successive beings they were during their lifetimes in order to put together a complete vision of themselves and of the world.

WORKS CITED

Auster, Paul, *The Invention of Solitude*. Faber and Faber, 1982. Print.

———. *Report from the Interior*. Henry Holt, 2013. Print.

Beckett, Samuel, *L'Image*. Éditions de Minuit, 1988. Print.

Borges, Jorge Luis, *Conférences*. Gallimard, 1985. Print.

Genette, Gérard, *Figures I*. Seuil, 1966. Print.

———. *Discours du récit*, Paris: Seuil, (1972) 1983. Print.

² « Everything I experience, and that my experience defines, presents to me its meaning without which I could not experience it and the light I can get about the world is provided by my questioning it, by making my connection to the world explicit, by understanding it from within." *My translation*.

Lejeune, Philippe, *Je est un autre: l'autobiographie de la littérature aux médias*. Seuil, 1980. Print.

Mallia, Joseph. « Interview with Joseph Mallia ». Paul Auster, *The Art of Hunger*. Sun and Moon Press, 1992. Print.

Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*. Gallimard, 1964. Print.

Rimbaud, Arthur, “Lettre à Jean Demeny du 15 mai 1871”.

<https://www.deslettres.fr/lettre-darthur-rimbaud-a-paul-demeny-dite-lettre-duvoyant/>