

## Auster's *Man in the Dark*: Human Existence and Responsibility for Creating Possible Worlds

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Possible worlds, governed by known or unknown cosmic rules, if ever they existed, do ontologically exist in the realm of the imaginary and relate to the human potential to imagine beyond what we recognize as reality. This cognitive potential, tinged with postmodernist narrative techniques, can create alternative histories through which to contemplate the possible scenarios of the potential reality that could have happened depending on whether certain events did or did not happen. As far as Auster's *Man in the Dark* (2008) is concerned, imagining possible worlds has found an outlet not only through what could happen existentially, but also in terms of quantum physics. As one of Auster's contributions to alternative fiction, *Man in the Dark* presents us with a portrait of the underlying currents of world affairs and how they are interrelated through the very basic rules of existential philosophy and astrophysics.

Keywords: imagination; *Man in the Dark*; Paul Auster; parallel worlds; quantum physics; Sartre

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### *Man in the Dark*, de Auster: la existencia humana y la responsabilidad de crear mundos posibles

Los mundos posibles, gobernados por reglas cósmicas conocidas o desconocidas, si es que alguna vez existieron, existen ontológicamente en el reino de lo imaginario y se relacionan con el potencial humano para imaginar más allá de lo que reconocemos como realidad. Este potencial cognitivo, teñido de técnicas narrativas posmodernistas, puede crear historias

alternativas a través de las cuales se contemplan los posibles escenarios de la realidad potencial que podría haber ocurrido dependiendo de si sucedieron o no determinados hechos. En lo que respecta a *Man in the Dark* (2008) de Auster, concebir mundos posibles ha encontrado una salida no solo a través de lo que podría suceder existencialmente, sino también en términos de física cuántica. Al igual que alguna otra aportación de Auster a la ficción alternativa, *Man in the Dark* nos presenta un retrato de las corrientes subyacentes de los asuntos mundiales y de cómo se interrelacionan a través de las reglas más básicas de la filosofía existencial y la astrofísica.

Palabras clave: imaginación; *Man in the Dark*; Paul Auster; mundos paralelos; física cuántica; Sartre

## I. INTRODUCTION

*Man in the Dark* (2008), henceforward *MD*, is Paul Auster's third contribution to the genre of "alternative fiction," after *Moon Palace* and *Travels in the Scriptorium*, in so far as he presents us with a possible world that could historically have happened. *MD* is "about civil war in an alternative America," which is inspired by the 2000 presidential election (Auster and Siegumfeldt 2017, 258). The terms "alternative or alternate history," "allohistory," "uchronia" or "counterfactual history" have been used by several historians and critics, including Steven H. Silver, Gavriel D. Rosenfeld and Evelyn C. Leeper, to describe a type of novel in which "the consequences of real events and the underlying historical facts are shown by hypothesizing alternative worlds" (González 2011, 21). Likewise, in *MD* Auster, combining "historical facts with historical fiction," has tried "to create a fictional world presented as a parallel America" (González 2011, 22), playing mainly with the question: What if the U.S. had not experienced 9/11 but, instead, experienced a momentous historical shift brought on by the 2000 presidential election?

Many critics call *MD* "a post-9/11 work" (Benziman 2013, 462), or refer to it as being "heavily influenced" by 9/11 and the "war on terror" (Rodenhurst 2009, 156), and dealing with the after-effects of 9/11 on American life. However, Auster has stated that *MD* is not a response to 9/11 but rather to the 2000 presidential election that led to "tremendous frustration and outrage" after G. W. Bush, henceforward G.W.B., usurped the government "through political and legal manipulations" (Auster quoted in LaGambina 2008, 193). Auster speculates about "[h]ow different the world might have been had Al Gore become President" (McGlone 2008), presenting the world in *MD* as "a parallel world, a shadow world" where "Al Gore is finishing his second term as president, there's no war in Iraq, and there might never have been 9/11" (Auster quoted in LaGambina 2008, 193).

In *MD*, Auster's approach to 9/11 through parallel worlds theory, which is a free practice of the imagination in so far as one is essentially free to imagine whatever one desires, is tinged with Sartrean existential concerns with humanity's essential freedom in both imaginal and physical worlds. Although several studies highlight Sartre's influence on Auster's early fiction (Shiloh 2002; Oberman 2004; D'Urso 2006), exploring *MD* through the Sartrean concern with the freedom of consciousness and its role in creating possible worlds can provide us with a new perspective on Auster's philosophical investigation into the impacts of historical events on humankind. In this light, Sartre's observations in *The Imaginary* (1940) and *Being and Nothingness* (1956) on how we can recognize our essential freedom through consciousness and how the act of imagining possible worlds on the part of the minority can lead to particular consequences for the majority provide the underlying framework of this study.

Auster's *MD* elaborates upon the power of the imagination to create plausible worlds within the context of two integrated worlds, the real post-9/11 world of Auster's protagonist and a parallel world where 9/11 never happened as narrated by the protagonist's hero in a frame story. To serve his ends, Auster draws upon existential

themes and postmodern narrative techniques, enriching them with metaphors linked to quantum physics, to argue for the existential possibility not only of a world that is as good as it could be but also parallel worlds that are either imaginary or physically plausible. It is in this context that August Brill—mourning the recent death of his wife, his crippled feet, his son-in-law's betrayal and the death of his granddaughter's boyfriend in the Iraq War—distracts himself with thoughts about other possible worlds that are better than the one in which he lives. In particular, the death of Titus, his granddaughter's boyfriend, which alludes to the beheading of the American freelance contractor Nicholas Evan Berg by Al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2004 (Hughes 2004), plays an essential role in August's imagining of a possible world without 9/11. In the context of the frame tale August begins to tell himself in the dark, his dark room at night time, the world without 9/11 befalls Owen Brick, August's protagonist in his tale, who wakes up in a hole, finding himself in another world with its own story in which neither G.W.B.'s presidency nor 9/11 have ever happened. Auster hereby presents us with "a political parable with an independent, external meaning" (González 2011, 30), one which speculates that 9/11 and the consequent wars could have been stopped if the Americans had had a different president at the beginning of the new millennium.

In what follows, Auster's existential investigation into parallel worlds will be discussed in two separate but connected sections about the role of imagination in waging wars around the globe and the ontological possibility of parallel worlds in light of quantum physics where literature meets philosophy and science, *MD* being used as a case in point.

## 2. IMAGINATION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF NO WAR

The political aspect of *MD* is directly related to the 54<sup>th</sup> U.S. presidential election, 9/11 and the consequent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. The U.S. of August Brill, Auster's principal narrator in *MD*, is a country where 9/11 has already happened, while he initially situates Owen Brick, the protagonist of his story, in a version of the country where Al Gore is the president, and 9/11 has never happened. It is later revealed that Owen has a double identity as he in fact travels through a portal between his own post-9/11 world and the (parallel) one without 9/11. Although 9/11 is unknown to the parallel world, the Democrats and the Republicans have waged war against each other just because a warlord, whose political tendency is unclear, is merely thinking about war. This warlord, who happens to be August Brill, must be stopped since it is the only way to establish peace in the U.S. However, as the agent ordered to assassinate August the warlord, Owen is still August the writer's man, his creation, and is in danger of being annihilated by him as his creator. In other words, we are dealing with an impossible but imaginable situation in *MD*, that of a writer (August) in a realistic world creating a fictional character (Owen) in a story (an imaginary parallel world) in which a warlord named after the writer (August) should be killed by Owen. This imagined situation, however, must be ultimately undone as the fictional Owen has no

possibility of leaking out of his fictional realm to assassinate August the writer, hence his death or cancellation in August's mind.

The significance of 9/11 and the consequent conflicts relating to it are most revealing in the context of Auster's speculation about war in *MD*. Since 9/11, many politicians worldwide have argued that G.W.B. deceived everyone, helped by the media (Gleich 2014), in order to justify his war against Afghanistan and Iraq. "Some argue that [George] W [Bush] told us a story so he could involve us in the actuality of the war in Iraq," says LaGambina to Auster. "Yes," Auster replies, "that's [...] a fiction creating reality" (Auster quoted in LaGambina 2008, 194), suggesting that G.W.B.'s 'story' of war became a reality, just as the war in the parallel world in *MD* becomes a reality of that world when August the creator of that world imagines it, a thought experiment alluding to G.W.B.'s fictionalization of the Middle East and the wars he waged there during his presidency. In this light, the question is, how is it that illusions can become real? "Everything looks real," Owen initially reflects about his situation in the parallel world which is involved in a war. "Everything sounds real. I'm sitting here in my own body, but at the same time I can't be here, can I? I belong somewhere else" (Auster 2008, 68). Owen's speculation, in the second part of the quotation above, points to his double life as a man stuck between his real post-9/11 world and a parallel world that did not experience 9/11. Meanwhile, his apparent comfort with being the man tasked to kill the warlord and stop the war brings to mind G.W.B.'s reflection in his speech about the 9/11 attacks a week after they happened:

Bush explained in a White House press conference a week later that his reaction that fateful morning was one of slowly comprehending shock: "I'm sitting in the midst of a classroom with little kids, listening to a children's story and I realize I'm the Commander in Chief and the country has just come under attack." (*History.com*)

Owen's disinterest in his mission to stop the war thus resembles G.W.B.'s playfulness in addressing his presidential duty to protect his country. Is a country "under attack" a "children's story"? Or is "the Commander in Chief" as playful as "little kids" on hearing the news of 9/11? G.W.B.'s playful tone is somewhat reflected in Owen's seemingly inscrutable speech on realizing his mission to save the U.S., a duty not seriously taken by G.W.B. When August stops Owen from fulfilling his mission by having him killed, he essentially withdraws back to his own post-9/11 world with all its calamities. The scene in a way recalls G.W.B.'s decision to wage post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with all their calamities instead of killing his imagination of war just as August does. Even if the above-mentioned portal could be left open, it is logically complex to imagine whether Owen could ever exist to murder August his creator. August the narrator chooses to erase Owen to untie the loop, August and his thinking abilities remaining intact. A narrative play in Auster's hands as it is, August's story-making plays with the idea of scenario making for the world by those in power, just as Auster-August quasi-homophony in *MD*

highlights the role of the storyteller as a creator. Likewise, finishing his second term, G.W.B. seemed to have erased 9/11 and its aftermath from his memory—just as August obliterates Owen and his world—as if neither 9/11 nor consequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had ever happened. The question is, did G.W.B. and his like-minded leaders imagine a catastrophic episode in the history of the world, help it into reality, and then abandon it after several years? Commenting on 9/11 and its naming, Derrida (2003) speculates on whether this catastrophe as an “event” was predictable and could have been prevented or not. In so far as an event happens with/without a certain human being knowing about it beforehand and afterwards, the question is why it should happen at all. Regarding “a bombing attack against the Twin Towers a few years” before 9/11, Derrida argues that “it was not impossible to foresee an attack on American soil” by “terrorists,” and catastrophes such as 9/11 were not therefore bound *not to happen* (2003, 91). To some extent, 9/11 is, “in many respects, a distant effect of the Cold War” since the U.S. “provided training and weapons, and not only in Afghanistan, to the enemies of the Soviet Union, who have now become the enemies of the U.S.” (92). In another way, however, 9/11 is a by-product of American “autoimmunity,” that is, its paradoxical behavior as “a living being, in *quasi-suicidal* fashion” working “to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its ‘own’ immunity” (94, italics in the original). As an illustration, the U.S. trained the hijackers who simultaneously were responsible for “two suicides”: their own suicide via the crashing of the planes and those “of those [the Americans] who welcomed, armed, and trained them” (94). Derrida emphasizes the fact that the U.S. “had in effect paved the way for and consolidated the forces of the ‘adversary’ by training people like ‘bin Laden,’” initially “creating the politico-military circumstances that would favor their emergence and their shifts in allegiance (for example, the alliance with Saudi Arabia [...] in its war against the Soviet Union or Russia in Afghanistan)” (95). As the people who hired the hijackers are believed to live freely among us, since we do not know whether they have been identified and indicted, there is “the open threat of an aggression capable one day of striking [again]” (98). So Auster’s hypothesis that 9/11 would not have happened if G.W.B. had not been the president seems redundant since a quasi-9/11 could have happened as the U.S. had already paved the way for such events, although the quality and quantity of damage might have been different. The political undertone of Owen’s story thus serves to address Auster’s existential question about war: what is war and where does it originate? The theoretical evidence is that, as the war in *MD* is basically happening in August the warlord’s imagination, a war in the real world is either prompted or ignored by the officials in power whose global decisions can affect the fate of nations. Whether war in itself exists as some objective entity in the world and involves human agents to fight against each other or is merely intended to happen by a conscious individual is therefore of primary concern in interpreting *MD* as a message for proponents of war that even thinking about war can let it happen in due time.

Whether the realm of consciousness, which is in essence abstract, and its imagining ability have the power to affect the physical world is a significant question dealt with by

Auster in *MD*. To explore consciousness in this light, Sartre can be helpful, specifically considering his influence on Auster. “All consciousness is consciousness of something,” Sartre says (1956, lx), suggesting that consciousness has “a special kind of *directedness*” at all times since it has “an object towards which it is directed” (Føllesdal 1981, 394, italics in the original). Consciousness, being “a relationship to the world that exists only in so far as it *intends* something” (Cox 2008, 110, italics in the original), is directed toward “transcendence” or beyond itself towards the object of intention as we imagine/intend the object in a certain situation (106)—consciousness is always *of* something *beyond* itself. Consciousness might, however, have a problem making sense of its object of intention when the latter does not exist *per se*. What are we then to do with our consciousness—thoughts, opinions, ideas and imagination—when dealing with the nonexistent? The paradox is that the nonexistent does exist, in its *imaginary* form, in our mind and, therefore, we are conscious *of* it, as Sartre would say, although it has no physical shape and there is no *perception* of it. To consider abstractions as objects or, better said, “quasi-objects contained within consciousness” (Cox 2008, 106), is to be deceived by what Sartre calls “the illusion of immanence,” that is, the *illusion* that abstractions exist by themselves in that we “have an idea” of them (Sartre 2004, 5). Seen under this light, the parallel world in *MD* is a world of war in its totality, born of a mind that imagines what the U.S. could have been had Al Gore won the 2000 election. In Webber’s (2004) words, while perception involves the gradual “observation of the object perceived” in order to understand its function, the imagined thing appears in the mind as a totality. Moreover, in perception, our experience of an object is followed by our knowledge of it—we use a thing after knowing about it—“whereas in imagination knowledge is prior to experience,” as the imaginary thing has no corporeal form to be explored yet, hence we “form images” based on “false beliefs” (Sartre 2004, xxi). The question for Auster in *MD* is, therefore, would the U.S. have gone through an imaginary civil war had Al Gore won the election? “If we accept the illusion of immanence,” Sartre declares, “we are necessarily led to constitute the world of the mind from objects very similar to those of the external world and which, simply, obey different laws” (2004, 6)—namely, different worlds have different laws. Falling into “the illusion of immanence” thus implies the existence of “two complementary worlds” of “things” and mental “images” in such a way that “each time one [thing or mental image] is obscured the other is thereby illuminated.” This assumption superimposes the world of imagined things onto the world of concrete objects, “giving both the same type of existence,” making it impossible to distinguish the concrete from the imaginary (43)—“Everything looks real,” Owen says, stuck in his parallel world in *MD* (Auster 2008, 68). So we are left believing that the U.S. could have experienced some conflict even if G.W.B. had not won the election.

Irrespective of worlds where the events and consequences of 9/11 happened or not, imagining *per se* is not a problem in the world of *MD*, “[a]s long as we are the victims of the illusion of immanence” or images rendered “with a type of existence rigorously identical to that of things” (Sartre 2004, 180). The excursion into imagination, if

followed by “an unwillingness to escape the imaginary attitude,” plays a significant role in Sartre’s discussions of “bad faith.” People in “bad faith” use various strategies to dupe themselves into believing what they want to believe. When “bad faith” has no corporeal outlet—like when trying to skillfully play a professional waiter in a restaurant although it is not important (see Sartre’s example in *Being and Time* 1956, 59)—it takes the form of “the imaginative apprehension” of the role rather than its “perceptual apprehension” (Webber 2004, xxv). In other words, the “illusion of immanence” stands for our existentially wrong attempt to conceive of what does not literally exist despite the fact that we can imagine it. August in *MD* imagines a civil war merely out of a weak hypothesis that Al Gore’s victory would have led to the waging of a war between Republicans and Democrats. However, in so far as such a realistic event is imaginable and could have happened under certain circumstances, why not imagine it?

Human consciousness is freely “capable of imagining” what it desires, Sartre asserts (2004, 179), whether the imagined thing is possible or impossible in the real world. Consequently, one’s situation in the world, according to one’s understanding of the world imagined in a particular way, establishes “the situation of consciousness” which motivates “the appearance of a certain particular imaginary” (Sartre 1956, 627). Put differently, one’s situation in the world shapes one’s imagining of the world, which in turn shapes one’s world. However, although one’s situation in the world may not change—being born paralyzed, for example—imagination has no restriction and can even negate what it imagines for “other possibles” (627). “If consciousness is free,” Sartre argues, it has in itself the “possibility of negation, at each moment and from each point of view, by means of an image.” Each image is “a negation of the world from a particular point of view,” negating something as what it is not (Sartre 2004, 185). In this light, with negation at the core of consciousness, consciousness can essentially nihilate the world by submitting to the imaginary:

There is an infinite number of realities which are not only objects of judgment, but which are experienced, opposed, feared, etc., by the human being and which in their inner structure are inhabited by negation [...]. We shall call them *négativités* [negativities]. (Sartre 1956, 21)

The human subject can, therefore, potentially negate the world through consciousness, that is, it can always negate the world by considering other possibilities of being and action. Likewise, August’s imaginary civil war replaces 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with another set of events as he comes to negate his real world in his imagination. The baffling question is why August still imagines a war-torn country when he could imagine a country without war. It can be argued that August’s “*situation of consciousness*,” discussed above, affects his imagination: his moaning the death of Titus in Iraq following G.W.B.’s questionable presidential election. Wars may affect individuals most when it is a conflict between fellow countrymen, a fact that makes



*MD* “a deep critique of the logic of war and violence, which becomes all the more powerful because it is brought to home ground” (González 2011, 30). As such, Auster’s imaginary civil war in *MD* implies “a warning,” that is, “the American people may feel safe because the current war [the war between the Republicans and the Democrats in the United States of the novel] is not fought on home ground, but racial or political division can bring about a civil war” (30). Indeed, the 1967 Detroit Riots, George Floyd’s brutal death on May 25, 2020, and the occupation of the U.S. Congress on January 6, 2021, are cases in point that in theory could lead to national important concerns for which every U.S. citizen is responsible in the Sartrean sense:

If I am mobilized in a war, this war is my war; [...] I deserve it first because I could always get out of it by suicide or by desertion; [...] it is a matter of a choice. [...] [W]e must agree with the statement by J. Romains, “In war there are no innocent victims.” If therefore I have preferred war to death or to dishonor, everything takes place as if I bore the entire responsibility for this war. [...] I have decided that it does exist. (Sartre 1956, 554)

Interpreting Sartre, Føllesdal argues that being responsible for a war does not necessarily mean complying with warlords; helping with the context or “the world in which this war occurs” also counts (1981, 398). In *MD*, August is the one who thinks about war and war happens just because of that, while Owen actually serves as August’s conscience to remind him that he can use his imaginative power for better causes, just as G.W.B. could change his war-oriented mentality toward other scenarios to avoid 9/11 and the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. “The war is mine,” Sartre reemphasizes,

because by the sole fact that it arises in a situation which I cause to be and that I can discover it there only by engaging myself for or against it [...]. To live this war is to choose myself through it. [...] In this war which I have chosen [...] it is I who bear the responsibility for this. (1956, 555)

Upon entering the parallel world, Owen is informed by the war agent Frisk that “he [August] owns the war. He invented it, and everything that happens or is about to happen is in his head.” He then orders Owen: “Eliminate that head, and the war stops.” He also emphasizes that August is “not God”; he is “just a man” and can be stopped (Auster 2008, 10). Auster, holding that a warlord is *not God*, is overtly alluding to the global silence that let G.W.B. act with impunity, as he suggested in an interview:

This country has gone way off track. How different the world might have been had Al Gore become President—9/11 might not have happened because they had the intelligence about it and it was ignored. Bush has disgraced America in the eyes of the world. [...] I put all of that into *Man in the Dark*. Why isn’t Bush in jail? Why isn’t Cheney in jail? (Qtd. in McGlone 2008)

Each choice a person makes, according to Sartre, brings responsibilities “at an absolute date” which “is perfectly unthinkable at another date.” So asking “what I should have been if this war had not broken out” is nonsense, since “I have chosen myself as one of the possible meanings of the epoch which imperceptibly led to war” (1956, 555). Owen comes into existence as August’s alter ego in another world in order to kill August, although before he can carry out this mission, Owen is killed by August. August in fact *de*-constructs his imagined world to accept his fault in imagining war, reflecting the Sartrean notion that consciousness can negate/nihilate its creation. As part of the society in which they live, the ultimately free individual is “undistinguishable” from others with whom their destiny, particularly during wartime, is entwined. This led Sartre to declare: “We have the war we deserve,” and that “I am as profoundly responsible for the war as if I had myself declared it, unable to live without integrating it in my situation” (555). In this light, even consciousness of war, war as an incident that may happen among humans under certain conditions, might have its own catastrophic consequences: war theorists helping a war happen just after their imagined war takes shape in their minds. Through stopping the war in Owen’s world by removing him and his world altogether, August comes to recognize the social responsibility that each individual—either as a theoretician, a warlord, a soldier or a victim—has before a war. Although August ultimately acknowledges the truth of his (post-9/11) world, his exploration of the human imagination highlights the Austerian motto throughout his oeuvre that “anything can happen” (Auster quoted in McCaffery and Gregory 2013, 14), with its scenario imaginatively conceived.

### 3. SARTREAN POSSIBILITIES AND AUSTERIAN PARALLEL WORLDS IN LIGHT OF QUANTUM PHYSICS

The possible existence of many worlds beside the one we live in derives from the ideas of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), whose theory of infinite worlds is introduced in *MD* through Frisk: “if God [...] and [...] the powers of God are infinite, then there must be an infinite number of worlds” (Auster 2008, 68). From this perspective, the possible worlds that human beings may imagine have the potency to change their real world. In Sartre’s view, by using a metaphor from astrophysics:

If, they say, a single one of the atoms which constitute the universe were annihilated, there would result a catastrophe which would extend to the entire universe, and this would be, in particular, the end of the Earth and of the solar system. This metaphor can be of use to us here. The For-itself [humanity with its potentials] is like a tiny nihilation which has its origin at the heart of Being; and this nihilation is sufficient to cause a total upheaval to happen to the In-itself [everything except humanity]. This upheaval is the world. (1956, 617-618)

That is to say, the human imagination is conscious of a range of possibilities of being, not only for humans but also for the world, and each possibility, when it happens, can negate/nullify/neutralize others while being prone to negation by other possibilities when they are realized. As such, each possibility has the potential to generate a sequence of phenomena that lead to the creation of a world or desired outcomes, just as the “butterfly effect” explains the sequence of different outcomes that derive from one single cause (Lorenz 1963, 130-141), reflecting the reliance of various phenomena on original causes in quantum physics (Heller 1993).

Sartre’s “metaphor” above is tinged with issues derived from quantum physics, which explores natural phenomena “at the smallest scales of energy levels of atoms and subatomic particles” (Feynman et al. 1964, 11). According to Hartle and Hawking, “particles—such as electrons—can be in multiple states at once, for example, being in many places simultaneously. We only observe them in a definite state or location once we make a measurement” out of them (qtd. in Stuart 2018, 19), that is, when we are able to measure them through particular tools. From a theoretical perspective, when two events happen simultaneously at this level, with the same source of energy but in different spatiotemporal settings, they are called “quantum events” (20). For clarification, Schrödinger in his famous thought experiment or hypothetical situation, first theorized in German in November 1935, holds that:

A cat is penned up in a steel chamber, along with the following device [...]: in a Geiger counter, there is a tiny bit of radioactive substance [...] that perhaps in the course of the hour one of the atoms decays, but [...] perhaps none; if it happens, the counter tube discharges and through a relay releases a hammer that shatters a small flask of hydrocyanic acid. If one has left this entire system to itself for an hour, one would say that the cat still lives if meanwhile no atom has decayed. The first atomic decay would have poisoned it [the cat]. (Qtd. in Trimmer 1980, 8)

This system, imaginary as it is, includes simultaneously both the dead cat and the living one—as if they are two sides of the same coin rotating at high speed—while the cat is blind to this possible bifurcation. Under each condition, the cat is ignorant of the other one. “It is typical of these cases,” Schrödinger says, “that an indeterminacy originally restricted to the atomic domain becomes transformed into macroscopic indeterminacy [in the realm of large objects like a cat]” (qtd. in Trimmer 1980, 8). “Uncertainty” is thus the basis for all quantum experiments, replacing the “deterministic scope of classical physics” and its “absolute” knowledge to make room for “probability” (Coale 2012, Ch. 1). Accordingly, Stuart tells us, “[e]very quantum event” essentially has the power to splinter the universe into “multiple copies—or branches—where all possible outcomes play out” (2018, 20), where the inhabitants of one copy/branch have no knowledge of the others, just as the two sides of a coin are there but without knowledge of each other.

The plethora of worlds arising from quantum events have in common the “many-worlds interpretation (MWI),” that is, all possible worlds are in fact real or “our reality is just one in an infinite web of infinite timelines” and it is for this reason that an action always “cause[s] a split in the universe,” with different “timeline[s]” (Hamer 2017a, par. 4). For example, I woke up at 7 a.m. today and did my morning activities, but there would have been another course of events for me if I had woken up at noon and lost the chance to do my morning activities. Hence, reality includes “infinite versions” of us “living in infinite alternate timelines” (Hamer 2017b, par. 5), and MWI imagines our historical reality as infinitely branched since history could be otherwise (Gardner 2003). MWI proponents claim that any physically possible event happens on the multiversal level, theoretically generating highly impossible timelines. “Superposition” stands for the assumption that “[a]ll the worlds are there, even those in which everything goes wrong and all the statistical laws break down” (DeWitt 1973, 163). However, Albert and Loewer argue that it is illogical to think of an agent, like Schrödinger’s cat, indeterminately watching his/her/its infinite states of being since “[i]ndividual minds are not quantum mechanical systems; they are never in superpositions” (1988, 207). So each conscious being can have an infinite number of mental states, although they cannot experience all of them simultaneously. MWI is thus related to the “quantum consciousness theory” where “*consciousness* is a macroscopic quantum phenomenon” (Wendt 2015, 5, italics in the original), implying that “two of the deepest mysteries confronting modern science”—interpreting quantum theory and explaining consciousness—are “two sides of the same coin” (31). Wendt goes on to explain that the “many-minds interpretation” of quantum physics highlights the existence of many worlds by distinguishing between them in the observer’s mind (68), while exploring the involvement of consciousness in imagining each one of these worlds in isolation or possible integration. Hence, discovering the actual function of the quantum world becomes partly “connected with the process of perception” (Ghirardi 2005, 450), since human consciousness is potentially able to conceive what the world could be.

Excursion into quantum physics and the essential possibilities at work in quantum events have affinities with Sartre’s existentialism, such as *the quantum philosophy of human consciousness*. Sartre assumes, as mentioned earlier, that the real world of things and the imagined world of mental images reciprocally exist, one observed by the eyes and the other by the mind’s eye, in a way that when one is blurred the other lightens. Sartre thus puts images “on the same plane as things,” bestowing them with the same kind of being (Sartre 2004, 43), so that images find some realistic manifestation, hypothesizing that images could exist. The possibility of creation inherent here, added to Sartre’s arguments about consciousness in the previous section, make him “a quantum thinker” in that Sartre “imagined parallel worlds” and “saw the Real as a giant acceleration chamber in which particles collided with unpredictable results” (Martin 2012, Ch. 2). Sartre gives two examples about imagining possibilities, both tinged with quantum physics in so far as they involve quantum events: playing tennis and deciding to visit a friend. A tennis player cannot be simultaneously at several positions to hit the ball; moving to

any one position nullifies the possibility of moving to others, each position probably contributing to the player's loss or victory. Likewise, visiting or not visiting a friend at a point in time can change the events that follow thereafter (Sartre 2004, 182), just like the waking up example above. In quantum terms, the agents in these examples occupy the position of an observer whose mind is acting prior to the unfolding of the quantum event. That is, one's consciousness, having the power to choose what to be conscious of, can choose what course of action to follow while all the possibilities exist superimposed upon each other. Accordingly, there are "active" and "passive" approaches to our "social entanglements": the "active mode" is directed towards "a desired reality," while the "passive mode" is what we do not instantly desire but *could* desire (Wendt 2015, 269). A good example, also highlighted in *MD*, is the Iraq War, in which, Wendt argues, the *active* units of power were the American "leaders, combatants, and supporters" who created war through "their decisions," while the *passive* units were "everyone else" in America who "were not actually at war with Iraq" but who were passively observing what their leaders were choosing for them (269-70). In a Sartrean way, I could choose not to choose war as a possibility by ignoring my consciousness of war, as a quantum event, which could be prevented from happening by not being chosen.

When we talk about "decisions to make war," in Wendt's view, there is a distinction between the leaders who speak for their nations and the laity—leaders mostly ignore acquiring the laity's consent. In quantum terms, this is best represented by "a system of entangled particles in which, by virtue of its internal structure, [...] the choice of how to respond is not made locally by the particles on the spot, but centrally by the leader" (270), or the observer who chooses a probable course of action to follow, ignoring others. Since the observer's "intentions and character" determine "which policies are realized," Wendt elaborates on the presumption that Al Gore's probable election in 2000 could prevent the Iraq War (270). Auster likewise reflects, writing to Coetzee, that "[w]ithout the Clinton sex scandal, probably no Bush. And with no Bush, perhaps no 9/11—which would mean no Iraq, no Afghanistan, no illegal torture" (Auster and Coetzee 2014, 206): hence August's parallel world without 9/11. Echoing the butterfly effect discussed above, Gribbin argues that "some systems [...] are very sensitive to their starting conditions, so that a tiny difference in the initial 'push' you give them causes a big difference in where they end up" (2004, Introduction). Put simply, Coale reflects, "[s]imple acts result in monumental consequences" (2012, Ch. 1). Based on the same logic, G.W.B.'s decision nullified the other possible changes to the world and thus war befell the world. Wendt considers quantum analysis "as the basis for a quantum conceptualization of structural power" (2015, 270), just as the present political state of the world is a consequence of one single decision at a moment in human history.

Auster's quantum perception of the world, reemphasized in his letter to Coetzee, and the sudden appearance of a possible other world in *MD* have affinities with postmodern indeterminacy as a dominant feature in his fiction. As Hayles argues, quantum theory has developed the "postmodern consciousness" and postmodern texts which elaborate on

that kind of consciousness “do alter our culture’s relationship to reality” (1991, 79). Coale (2012), acknowledging Hayles and associating quantum mysteries with the concept of indeterminacy in postmodernist fiction, states that “the uncertainty” haunting the quantum world makes us ask: “Why does everything appear so randomly? How does it challenge our ideas about cause and effect? How have statistical probabilities replaced our ‘classical’ notion of how things happen?” These questions have challenged conventions about “time, space, particles, force fields, and waves” and have “clearly influenced” such novelists as DeLillo, Pynchon, Didion, Patrick O’Brian and Auster. That is partly why “general anxieties and ontological uncertainties” are part of postmodern skepticism (Coale 2012, Intro). Coale further suggests that “the uncertainty principle,” based on which “it is impossible to determine at one and the same time the position and velocity of a particle,” becomes in such authors’ minds “a broad vision of uncertainty and open-ended ambiguity and entanglement that permeates their fiction,” making room for “episodic structures, quirky isolated incidents, and mysteriously appearing events” (Ch. 2).

This quantum interpretation of postmodernist fiction, when applied to Auster and his existentialism, has affinities with Sartre’s ideas on imaginary possibilities and their manifestation. Since the quantum world itself has so far been merely imagined as a possibility, significant connections between quantum mechanics, postmodern consciousness and Sartre’s existentialism are worth mentioning. The world “refers to us exactly the image of what we are,” Sartre says, and that it “necessarily appears to us as we are,” as “we choose the world, [...] in its meaning, by choosing ourselves” (1956, 463), as we imagine the world the way it seems to us. As to August’s parallel world in *MD*, rendering a parallel world follows his essential need for a different world, for a different choice of being. Characters in postmodernist fiction “do not enter a quantum-like world until a major disruption such as death or loss occurs in their everyday, commonsensical world,” Coale argues (2012, Ch.1). When their expectations fail, Coale notes, “a new world, often an abyss of nihilism, meaninglessness, uncertainty, and dread” threatens their existence. Coale suggests that such disturbance implies “a symmetry breaking in the quantum world,” and characters may then “struggle to bring a new order out of chaos” or watch “what may emerge from chaos they are experiencing around and within them” (Ch. 1). As August reflects in *MD*:

Put a sleeping man in a hole, and then see what happens when he wakes up and tries to crawl out. [...] [T]he man in the hole will be unable to extricate himself from the hole once he opens his eyes. (Auster 2008, 3)

This “sleeping man” is Owen, who indeed wakes up in a hole, as if within the darkness of August’s consciousness before becoming conscious of its object, recognizing that he is in another world, reflecting the power of consciousness to imagine the world anew, wiping off the old world and its problems. Coale attributes this mystery to “the coming into existence of a quantum cosmos” (2012, Ch. 1). In so far as the postmodernist fiction

is concerned, according to Coale, with its “interweaving of reality and dream, [...] of hallucination and history,” it questions “the ontological existence of the world we half-observe and half-create.” And to this end, “everything is contingent and relational, as in the quantum realm” (2012, Ch. 1), a fact which helps us with deconstructing absolute knowledge about the world. Owen feels powerless to exit the hole, to enter a new world, “unless he is equipped with a set of mountaineering tools” (Auster 2008, 3), the tools symbolizing August’s power of imagining parallel/possible worlds in which his miseries do not exist. The dark hole can now meaningfully symbolize a wormhole, its darkness standing for the invisible “dark matter” between heavenly beings (Crookes 2015, 17)—a wormhole to a parallel universe in which 9/11 has not happened. Moreover, the dark hole, with its potential to help Owen into a new world, also stands for August’s dark room which gives him space to create—just as God created the world from darkness—even foregrounding the title of the novel, *Man in the Dark*.

August, reflecting Auster in his fictional renderings, is a quantum writer; what happens to Owen, in August’s mind, is essentially a fictional manifestation of quantum events. “[H]ow could you be sure it [your real world] was the only world?,” Frisk asks Owen on his arrival in the parallel world in *MD*, to which Owen replies: “because it was the only world I ever knew” (Auster 2008, 68). Owen’s claim is actually August’s critique against his real world, assuming that there could exist another world without 9/11. As Coale says: “Many quantum theorists already recognize that how you set up an experiment to measure something determines what it is that you will measure” (2012, Ch. 3). Postmodern novelists develop this idea to suggest that “what we see and experience is what we observe” as “tainted” by our imagination and situation in the world, and that “perception, consciousness, and imagination may in fact be entangled with one another at all times” (Ch. 3). Owen is thus a Schrödinger’s cat tested by August in two parallel/possible worlds, except that he can freely move between them, thus playing a conscious cat that possesses the status of observer, just like August, in imagining the *what if* of existential possibilities. In other words, August, through Owen, is that observer who wants to get involved with a world where 9/11 has not happened. This is to some extent an Austerian contribution to “forking path narratives” in which an alternative set of events is “chosen in preference to all the other forks that might have been chosen instead,” leading to different results and histories. The question then would be “what if one of the other forks had been chosen?” (McHale 2004, 61). Likewise, Auster’s question would be: what if 9/11 had not ever happened?

Recalling Bruno’s theory of infinite worlds, Frisk tries to convince Owen that “[t]here are many realities[,] [...] many worlds, and they all run parallel to one another, worlds and anti-worlds, worlds and shadow-worlds” (Auster 2008, 69). The result, according to Trofimova, is “purely rhizomatic” (2004, 21), as Auster’s cosmic web in *MD* unfolds through bifurcations and forking paths. In Coale’s view, Auster’s novel “with its many levels and layers of tale, memories, quirky episodes, sudden horrors, and various objects” (2012, Ch. 3) essentially “subscribes” to the *many worlds* notion. Thus, every tale “exists

in its own world, creates its own world in the mind of the teller" (Ch. 3). Frisk continues that "each world is dreamed or imagined or written by someone in another world" (Auster 2008, 69), ranging from the world God made for us, which could, of course, be different, to the ones we imagine during our lives. The worlds in *MD* thus make Auster resemble:

a quantum physicist facing the quantum realm: it is a similar, postmodern, unnerving, and compellingly skeptical perspective that illuminates the human pursuit of knowledge, the unrelenting recognition of unpredictability no matter how sound and circumspect your theory of existence and the cosmos, and the accompanying realization that the self as an "entity" or self-conscious creature is itself permeated by such unpredictability and mystery. (Coale 2012, Ch. 3)

Owen's death terminates his excursions to the parallel world, which is essentially a world *sous rature*, "under erasure" or "physically canceled, yet still legible beneath the cancelation" (McHale 2004, 100). A fictional world *sous rature* inherently retains the potential nullification of its plotlines, each event susceptible to cancellation at each moment. Characters, with their worlds thus eradicated, are thereby erased since it is via "projected people" that a fictional world is grasped (103). This process has a quantum quality to it: "an elementary quantum event appears suddenly and disappears almost as soon as it appears" (Malin 2001, 145). August, likewise, nullifies his imagination to face reality; he *chooses* to erase Owen from his mind since his story is "as dark as his [August's] own anxieties and sense of dread" (Coale 2012, Ch. 3). This nullification, as Owen declares on recognizing that August has created him to kill August himself, is "a suicide" (Auster 2008, 70). August's transworldly excursion into his own story through *mise en abyme* is, then, an ontological game of worlds *sous rature*, or a quantum play of flickering events. Erasing Owen just as he is to kill August, August shoots Owen/himself as if in a mirror—"their [family] names[,] being nearly homophonic and homographic[,] reinforce the mirroring" (Deshmukh 2014, 284). August ultimately returns back to reality to face his condition although he does not deny imaginary worlds altogether: "Thoughts are real, even thoughts of unreal things" (Auster 2008, 177).

August's de-constructing of his story by erasing it highlights Auster's unwillingness to have (a sense of) closure in *MD*, which makes it a "shadow narrative," as Reising would put it, since its loose end, as in many American narratives, "exacerbate[s], problematize[s], and sometimes explode[s] exactly the issues which generates" its narrative (1996, ix). In so far as August repeatedly remarks on his real life, his excursions into a parallel story with no closure but sudden annihilation makes it a shadow narrative with an encoded message. August's shadow narrative underlines Auster's oppositional stance against the politics of the U.S. around the world, based on which "real or alleged conditions" could make it possible for not only 9/11 but also a civil war, if 9/11 had not happened, to befall the U.S., as Derrida argues:



One can thus condemn *unconditionally*, as I do here, the attack of September 11 without having to ignore the real or alleged conditions that made it possible. Anyone in the world who either organized or tried to justify this attack saw it as a response to the state terrorism of the United States and its allies. (2003, 107, italics in the original)

In this light, “[e]ven if we are right about which events did happen,” according to Morson (1996), “we may be mistaken in tracing straight lines between them. If we had a more accurate picture of the past, the significance of present configurations might look quite different” (119). Auster’s revisionist treatment of 9/11 thus points to an America that would be in civil war if 9/11 had not happened, while his freedom with the narrative ends up wiping out the parallel story altogether, a sense of relief at this being expressed by August and his daughter in the very last line of the novel: “the weird world rolls on” (Auster 2008, 180). In other words, August emphasizes the openness of worldly events, although initial causes may be fixed, “sideshadowing” any conclusion for the world. As Morson (1996) holds, “sideshadowing,” as “the antithesis of foreshadowing,” is “a way of understanding and representing the plurality of possibilities” that might befall the world (117). Morson argues that

[i]n an open universe [...] [a]lternatives always abound, and, more often than not, what exists need not have existed. *Something else* was possible, and sideshadowing is used to create a sense of that “something else.” [...] Along with an event, we see its alternatives; with each present, another possible present. [...] While we see what did happen, we also see the image of what else could have happened. In this way, the hypothetical shows through the actual and so achieves its own shadowy kind of existence in the text. (118, italics in the original)

In “sideshadowing” we can thus see “one possibility that was actualized and, at the same moment, another that could have been but was not,” inviting us to ask “what if, if only, had it not been, were it not for—what would have taken place then?” (118). Auster’s hypothetical/imaginary world thus sideshadows the actual one, each being another version of the other. Derrida’s argument that a terrorist event—9/11 or any similar attack—was possible due to American autoimmunity is in line with Morson’s “sideshadowing” in which “apparently simple events ramify into multiple futures” (163), but with a similar nature—all being terrorist in nature. Auster’s hypothesis is that G.W.B.’s presidency led to 9/11, while that of Al Gore, while probably evading that catastrophe, could have led to a civil war between supporters of the major parties in the U.S. *MD* thus provides us with a set of shadow narratives that not only move in parallel lines with each other but also converge at certain points, August being the juncture: 9/11 encourages August to imagine a shadow/parallel/possible historical narrative in which he assigns Owen to assassinate August the warlord who is the cause of the civil war in the U.S. following Al Gore’s victory; Al Gore’s victory could probably prevent 9/11 from happening; Al Gore’s failure was due to G.W.B.’s victory which led to 9/11;

9/11 encourages August to imagine a shadow/parallel/possible narrative in which he assigns Owen to assassinate August the warlord who is the cause of the civil war in the U.S. following Al Gore's victory, *ad infinitum*. Auster thus feels free with how he handles the subject of his investigation, that is, the history of the U.S. after the 2000 election, reemphasizing his catchphrase that *anything can happen*, contributing to alternate histories in terms of sideshadowing, shadow narration and narrative open-endedness.

Imagining possible worlds, even being engulfed by a desired one, does not necessarily guarantee redemption: "Whatever our being may be," Sartre says, "it is a choice; and it depends on us to choose ourselves as 'great' or 'noble' or 'base' and 'humiliated'" (1956, 472). August's imaginary world of war, for this reason, represents his mental turmoil of being unable to make peace with himself. He is in Sartrean "bad faith" in that he is escaping his problems rather than facing them, in order to make a new history. Stories "might not add up too much," August says, "but as long as I'm inside them, they prevent me from thinking about the things I would prefer to forget" (Auster 2008, 2). In the same vein, Auster holds that "[t]he story that [Owen] Brill thinks up is as much about Brill's state of mind as anything else. It can be read as a psychological portrait of a man through the medium of a story" (Auster quoted in LaGambina 2008, 196). When Owen looks for August's biography online to find out about him, it is as if August is critically observing himself, since it was he who created Owen. Owen is to some extent acting as August's "reflective consciousness"—that is, the situation where, Sartre would argue, someone is conscious of the fact he is conscious of something (1956, 40)—trying to remind him who he is. Thus, the fractal model of the story is that: August is conscious of a punishing agent or consciousness who, in turn, is conscious of the fact that he, the agent, is going to punish August, *ad infinitum*. As such, the killing mission that August sets against himself in the imaginary world is in fact a metaphor for his revenge against his willy-nilly status at the edge of two possible worlds, and the story he is telling himself is to recall his true self psychotherapeutically. Auster thus says,

[August] Brill is thinking about a character flaw in himself. This is a sort of self-psychoanalysis. I think many of us have the feeling that we're living to the side of our own life, that we're not truly experiencing anything, that we're a little dead to ourselves and to other people. (Auster and Siegmundfeldt 2017, 263)

The situation of "Owen Brick in a hole" is in fact a manifestation of August's own situational "confinement" (Deshmukh 2014, 280). The imaginary civil war in Owen's story is, then, "the war August has with himself," and which he declares through "a metanarrative confession" (Alina-Oana 2014, 213), as August himself explains:

The story [that August is going to tell] is about a man who must kill the person who created him, and why pretend that I am not that person. By putting myself into the story, the

story becomes real. Or else I become unreal, yet one more figment of my own imagination. (Auster 2008, 102)

What lies at the core of this loop of parallel worlds and links them together is the idea that “Life goes on, [...] even under the most painful circumstances” (116). To “learn to live” with problems as the solution to them is “not an evasion” but “a fact” (151-52). Trying to live within this loop, August wants his family to understand it as well, although they resist it, ignoring August’s recommendation to “try to start living again” (167), because there are always (better) possible worlds to imagine, and imagination is an inevitable part of reality. “Thoughts are real,” August believes, “even thoughts of unreal things” (177). In the last pages of the novel, August is not able to distinguish between the real and the imaginary, just like a quantum event resists stability: “an image from the distant past, perhaps real, perhaps imagined, I can barely tell the difference anymore. The real and the imagined are one” (177).

Recalling the image of the writer as creator, Auster’s possible worlds to a certain extent draw on his interest in *doppelgänger*s. As Trofimova (2004) has written:

Assembled from a conspicuously similar set of elements and placed in similar narrative situations his characters on the surface level all appear alike. So whenever I think of a writer like Quinn (*City of Glass*), I also think of August Brill (*Man in the Dark*), Paul Benjamin (*Smoke*), Peter Aaron (*Leviathan*), Paul Auster and “Paul Auster,” the A. (“The Book of Memory”) and even “you” (*Winter Journal*), who all smoke and typewrite, and live in New York, and struggle with crises of sorts. (4)

This argument suggests a quantum fact: imagine Auster in the position of an observer trying to follow Schrödinger’s cat on its path of either life or death, that is, the different storylines in Auster’s fiction. Auster’s characters thus resemble each other, as if living in each other’s possible worlds—imagine all the Pauls and Peters that repeatedly appear in Auster’s novels as if through transworld excursions. Auster’s postmodern worldview or postmodern philosophy toward the world and human existence mainly involves “an overwhelming lack of cognitive certainty, foundational indeterminacy, ontological skepticism, and the open play of story” (Martin 2008, 103). Martin considers that, in this way, Auster highlights “the lack of certainty associated with contemporary life” since many of his protagonists are deeply affected by “contingent occurrences” and cannot evade the function of “random events” in their lives (34). In other words, Auster’s protagonists are as flickering as quantum particles entangled within ontological boundaries between two possible but contradictory courses of events. Mostly, Auster’s protagonists, who face a variety of existential (unexpected) crises, realize that they must grasp the opportunity for salvation whatever it is, otherwise they may fail or die. Martin points out that the protagonist’s acceptance of “the unexpected” as “a means of personal salvation,” in so far as contingency and chance determine one’s existence, “can be rationalized” on the basis that

“each action influences every subsequent reaction” in the Austerian world (34). Bearing this mechanism in mind, one can, in retrospect, see a series of accidental events that have led to a certain effect, pointing to Auster’s fascination with “what could have beens” and “what ifs” in the majority of his writings, as he himself confirms in an interview:

{T}hink of all the moments [...] when you’ve made a choice, [...] the things that can happen to you, not to speak of all the circumstances around you that are completely out of your control; [...] the things that can [...] change our lives abruptly[,] [...] those alternative realities [,] [...] parallel lives. [...] [T]hey’re happening simultaneously but they all can’t happen to any one person; you only have one life and what happens to you is what happens to you. But it’s [...] impossible not to contemplate other possibilities. (Wagner 2017)

#### 4. CONCLUSION

August’s parallel world in *MD* is a minimally better version of his real one, where G.W.B. has not won the 2000 presidential election and there has been no 9/11 or its aftereffects—including the death of Titus in Iraq—although the civil war that befalls his parallel world could have also happened in reality if Al Gore had won the election. Manifesting the freedom of consciousness to imagine possible worlds out of a quantum event, in the Sartrean sense of consciousness, the shadow narrative provided by August as Auster’s homophonous spokesperson stands for a possible scenario that the U.S. experiences when the election is contemplated as a quantum event with a range of possibilities. Nevertheless, August’s possible scenario is not utopian either, given that the sideshadowing at work in the parallel story leaves us with an open history for the U.S. when the frame plot is suddenly erased all in the midst of the civil war. August stops the war he has imaginatively made happen, as he is existentially conscious of the possibility of a war-free world with all its benefits, by depriving the warlord he has created of his position. Being conscious of the possible existence of two opposing worlds, one active and the other passive, recalls the fundamental role of quantum events in the creation of possible worlds of which only one finds the chance of being while the other has to be nullified, the change of position always being possible between them.

The Sartrean existential standpoint holds that human beings literally have the power to choose from different possibilities of being so as to make differences in their lives in so far as they can imagine such possibilities and their consequences. Likewise, quantum physics hypothesizes that different worlds *can* happen following different initial causes and quantum events which are essentially willy-nilly possibilities and might lead to no further effect. In the same manner, literature has the potential to provide us with superimposed narratives about a certain set of events, highlighting the fact that our present condition in the world is always subject to change and contradiction by shadow or parallel narratives that could be actualized. This fact makes us all potent observers to choose among the possibilities that the quasi-quantum structure of our

consciousness can conceive in imagining a certain world, just like a writer in creating a story world. As human beings, our consciousness is *of* something, in part, *of* choosing or not choosing something. And each choice gives birth to a sequence of events which might be blocked by other interfering choices. The quantum thinker and the quantum physicist thus have much in common. Both consciousness (including the world of the imaginary) and the quantum world are yet to be comprehensively explored, but they point to similar concepts about possible worlds. In this light, postmodern novelists have much to contribute to the other story/stories of the world by recounting possible worlds either through certain narrative techniques or the potentials of certain literary genres that bestow them with imaginary journeys in time that can change the origins of this world. Although we do not know whether a parallel world was born along with our present universe in terms of cosmology so that we can make sense of our present being in the world, the fact that we always have many possibilities when we need to choose a particular course of events is imaginable and the question of *what if* is always there to challenge our here and now. What is human existence if parallel worlds exist? What would have befallen the world if a quantum event other than the one behind this world had been activated back in the day? “The weird world rolls on” since “anything can happen,” Auster would reply.

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