"Jolted into Submission": Masters and Slaves in Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo*

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Abstract: In Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo*, characters who resemble free individuals turn into slaves. In both novels, the major characters find meaning in life by willingly submitting to a superior power. Both characters who exhibit traits of passivity become slaves as they experience weightlessness or levitation. This article uses a qualitative approach and thematic analysis to identify and analyze the theme of slavery in the two novels. It explores Nash's reliance on chance, his fear of freedom, and his potential for becoming a slave, and examines the relationship between master and slave in *Mr. Vertigo* from a liberal humanist point of view. This study is the first of its kind to explore the theme of slavery in Auster's novels. Furthermore, it delves into the metaphoric meaning of levitation. While Walt and Nash appear as free agents, they are in fact slaves. Instead of clarifying the real imbalance in the relationship between the characters, the texts conceal and romanticize their master-slave associations. Paradoxically, the masters are portrayed as comic characters in *The Music of Chance*, and Nash feels free when he is imprisoned. Moreover, in *Mr. Vertigo,* the master who tortures Walt physically and mentally is portrayed as a father figure and a sympathetic character. The texts valorize weightlessness, passivity, and submission to a superior power, and thus can be considered reactionary.

Keywords: Paul Auster**,** chance, Erich Fromm, freedom, Hegel, master, *Mr. Vertigo*, slave, *The Music of Chance*

Introduction

Submission to and Fascination with Authority

Submission to and fascination with authority is a recurrent theme in Paul Auster's novels. In most of his novels, this theme manifests in the way a minor

or weaker character attempts to transform into a stronger character, an attempt that results in the loss of identity or an identity crisis in either one or both characters. Quinn's fascination with Stillman in *The City of Glass,* Blue's obsession with Black in *Ghosts*, the unnamed narrator's doubling of Fanshaw in *The Locked Room,* Fogg's inexplicable patience with the domineering Effing in *Moon Palace*, Peter Aeron's strong attraction to Benjamin Sach in *Leviathan*, David Zimmer's admiration for Hector Mann in *The Book of Illusions*, Trause's dwarfing of Sidney Orr in *Oracle Night,* and Adam Walker's strange relationship with Rudolf Born in *Invisible* exemplify such power relations. In two novels by Paul Auster, *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo,* the psychologically weaker character allows himself to be enslaved by the stronger character; the major characters, Nash, and Walt, are passive subjects who accept their plight as inevitable. Both find meaning in life in willingly submitting to a superior power and both seemingly enjoy a state of servitude. In *The Music of Chance*, Nash experiences euphoria and weightlessness, which is remarkably similar to Walt's levitation in *Mr. Vertigo*. In these novels, "weightlessness" and levitation are valorized, but as Eagleton argues, this is no cause for celebration: "An electron has no fixed positionality either, but we do not congratulate it on its emancipated position … the postmodern subject is … strangely free-floating, contingent, aleatory, and so a kind of caricatured version of the negative liberty of the liberal self" (Eagleton 1996, 89).

The present study uses qualitative analysis to analyze and identify power relations and the theme of slavery in *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo*. This study is the first to investigate slavery in Auster's novels. While slavery may be abolished in various parts of the world, it still exists in the human psyche in covert forms, which is why the subject is important. The argument of this essay, which incorporates library research, focuses on Fromm's thesis about man's fear of freedom, overt authority, anonymous authority, and the mutual dependence of the master and the slave. Although there are frequent references to postmodern thinkers in this article, the argument is based on the essentialism of liberal humanist critics. Postmodernism's distrust of logic and reason has made it politically impotent and unfit to pass moral judgments. As Richard Wolin observes, postmodernists "overarching pessimism about prospects for progressive political change… seems conductive to resignation and inaction" (Wolin 2004, 12). As liberal humanism provides value judgments for discussing the themes of fascination with power, freedom, slavery,

agency, and contingency, the writers have selected it to juxtapose the romanticization of the master-slave relationship that prevails in these two novels. The romanticization of the master-slave relation could have social ramifications like susceptibility to an abuse of power in social and political circumstances. The present study aims to explain the passivity of the major characters in *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo* and find an answer to the question why they willingly embrace slavery. It also explores the relation between the master and the slave in the novels and tries to relate it to a larger political context to find if the valorization of passive characters and an appreciation of their weightlessness can be read politically.

The Power of Chance

Chance dominates *The Music of Chance*. Steven Belletto sees the thematization of chance in the novel as the persistence of the power of the Cold War, which "concerns some of its key tropes_ totalitarianism versus democracy, control versus freedom, the individual and the state…" (2012, 130). Belletto also observes that "American visions of reality could be authored in ways reminiscent of Soviet reality" (2012, 29), thus challenging the notion that American democracy equals personal freedom.

In studying the phenomenon of chance in Auster's novels, Steven Alford finds a connection between reliance on chance and epistemological assumptions about the meaninglessness of the universe (1995, 615). Meanwhile, Eyal Dotan foregrounds chance and its relation to gambling as popular entertainment in capitalist America. He observes that all characters have gained wealth by chance, which can only happen in a capitalist society (2000, 164). Observing that Nash vacillates between agency and contingency, Brenden Martin maintains that embracing the contingent creates a chance of victory and salvation for the individual. In other words, it is important to embrace what chance has in store for the individual (2008, 64–65). Auster, himself, emphasizes the role of chance in life. In an interview with McCaffery and Gregory, he states, "The very day I finished writing *The Music of Chance* – which is a book about walls and slavery and freedom – the Berlin Wall came down. There's no conclusion to be drawn from this, but every time I think of it, I start to shake" (2013, 17).

The Music of Chance: A Critique of American Capitalism?

Many critics consider *The Music of Chance* to be a critique of American capitalism. (Woods 1995, 145; Varvogli 2001, 114; Shiloh 2002, 196; Colebrook 2010, 146). Warren Oberman, who concurs with Woods and Shiloh, views Auster's depiction of gambling as a means of criticizing the enslavement of modern people (2004, 199). However, as the text romanticizes and justifies Nash's indifference and irresponsibility, his irrational decisions, his reliance on chance, his unwillingness to confront authorities, and his submission to superior power, its capacity as a critique of American capitalism appears somewhat debilitated.

Nash is unwilling to confront authorities; it is only Pozzi who resists and objects. Nash reaches the extremity of perceiving Pozzi as the real source of danger. Because he is unwilling or unable to make moral judgments, Nash finally reconciles with Pozzi's murderer. This reconciliation, however, is not frowned upon by all critics. Christopher Donavan, for example, hails Nash's relationship with Murks as displaying "the most redeeming human moments" (2004, 76). Clara Sarmento also expresses a similar critical vein when she compares Nash with Auster and the act of building the wall to the process of writings, acts which imbue the lives of the author and character with meaning (22–23). Donavan's positive view about the relation between Nash and the murderer of his best friend show a general tendency of Auster critics to either ignore the real relationship between characters or to romanticize the relationship. Pozzi and Nash are the victims of Murks and the slaves of the millionaires. It is very unlikely that there could be a foundation for friendship between a master and a slave. Similarly, Sarmento sees the absurd task of building the wall as Nash's search for truth and meaning. This shows how the critic is willing to ignore Nash's servitude and his deliberate submission to the authority of the millionaires. Perhaps fear could explain the motivation of the victim to befriend the master and to find freedom in slavery.

Nash's fear of authorities increases to such an extent that, even in his dreams, he cannot escape. After his attempt to escape fails, Nash has a recurrent dream. He dreams that he leaves the trailer and walks toward the fence. However, every time he comes to the fence, the dream stops. When he tries to analyze the dream, he gradually remembers a part of this recurrent dream that had previously failed his memory: Murks is pointing a gun at his back and gently pulling the trigger. This explains Nash's unwillingness to confront authority. Nashe's overriding

fear has impinged on his logical thought and moral behavior and he is desperately trying to protect himself.

Philosophical Perspectives on the Master-Slave Relationship

Many philosophers have addressed the master-slave relationship. To throw light on the complicated relationship between the masters and the slaves in *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo*, this study takes advantage of the views of diverse philosophers such as Hegel, Kojève, Nietzsche, Fromm, Foucault and Agamben. Due to their profound insights into power dynamics, human consciousness and social structures, these thinkers are essential in understanding the master-slave relationship. Each philosopher builds upon the ideas of his predecessors to offer unique perspectives on the complexities of domination and submission. Studied chronologically, the perspectives offered by these philosophers show the evolution of thought on the master-slave relationship. Hegel's examination of the struggle for recognition between master and slave as a driving force in the development of consciousness, Kojève's conception of men as eternal masters or eternal slaves, Nietzsche's division of morality into master morality and slave morality and Fromm's study of the psychology of authoritarianism and freedom will be briefly reviewed. Although the study depends mainly on the views of the humanistic philosopher Erich Fromm, it also takes advantage of the views of poststructuralist philosophers Michael Foucault and Georgio Agamben. Foucault's analysis of power dynamics and how they shape social institutions provides a critical perspective on the dynamics of domination and subjugation. And Agamben's examination of the ways in which power can strip individuals of their humanity and subject them to a state of exception or slavery throws light on the way power operates.

Hegel's Master Slave Dialectic

Nash's unconscious fear of death evokes the fear the slave experiences in Hegel's discussion of the relation between master and slave in the master-slave dialectic. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel gives a detailed account of how the human spirit or mind can move from a simple state of consciousness of things to "absolute knowledge". Basically, the dialectical movement occurs inside the mind: the mind first gains a consciousness of itself and then transcends to a higher

level of consciousness. The dialectic being metaphoric, Hegel chooses the names Master and Slave to show the conflict between these states of consciousness. The master represents simple consciousness, and the slave stands for the new consciousness. Consciousness wants recognition not only within itself, but also in other consciousnesses. Hence, the application of the master slave dialectic to the social realm. To Hegel, the entire process is based on a conflict:

> The Master relates himself to the Slave mediatory, through the independent existent, for this is what captures the Slave; this is his chain, from which he could not free himself in [mortal] battle. The Slave thus proved himself to be dependent consciousness, which has its "independence" only in Thinghood. The Master, on the other hand, is the power in charge of this independent existence, for he proved in battle that such existence has only negative worth for him […] the Master has the Slave under his power. In like manner, the Master is related mediately through the Slave to the Thing: the slave orients himself in principle as a self-consciousness, and thus is related negatively to the Thing […] (1994, 58–59)

What makes the master dominate the slave is his independent existence and what makes a slave subordinate to the master is his dependent existence, ruled by his fear. However, Hegel asserts that in the battle between the master and the slave, none is the winner. The slave depends on the master for his existence, but the master is not entirely independent of the slave for his existence; he too, needs the slave to extend a sense of self. The confrontation between the two consciousness levels inevitably results in a death struggle. In this battle, the master finds out that the recognition he was seeking is not possible because it is offered by an "object" that is not free to offer it. However, the struggle ends when the slave "works the thing over" and consents to being a slave. It is only when this agreement is achieved that the "negation of the Thing" occurs. The two consciousnesses, the subject and the object, live on in a dialectic and dynamic relation that provides the possibility of change where the slave overcomes his fear of death and frees himself. There is also the possibility that the difference is dissolved, and the master and the slave acquire the realization that they are equal. The struggle between master and slave is essential for the development of self-consciousness and freedom.

Hegel's master slave dialectic throws light on the relationship between Nash and Pozzi, on the one hand, and Murks and the Millionaires, on the other hand. As a slave, Pozzi overcomes his fear of death, confronts the masters and faces death. Nash's relation with Murks and the millionaires shows the mutual need of the master and the slave for each other, although Nash's inevitable death shows that the conflict is dissolved.

Commenting on Hegel's passage on mastery and slavery, Alexander Kojève[1] departs from the Cartesian definition of the individual as a thinking thing. Kojève views the master-slave relationship as a fundamental dynamic in human history and the pursuit of recognition. For Kojève, "man is never simply man. He is always, necessarily, and essentially, either master or slave" (1980, 8). Kojève gives an elaborate interpretation of this either/or situation. Nichols, for instance, argues that Kojève's emphasis on desire as the sole motivation of the self draws a distinct line between master and slave. The master or the "thinking self" is driven by superior desires and is ready to risk his life for recognition, but the slave is driven by animal desires motivated by the instinct for self-preservation (2007, 25–26). Shadia Drurin agrees that Kojève sees men as eternal slaves or eternal masters. The slave is the loser in the battle of consciousnesses because he is overwhelmed by a fear of death to such an extent that he accepts any condition set by the master who, on the contrary, has overcome his fear of death. Hence, the slave accepts the dependent life granted him by the other, content to live the life of a slave. The master, on the contrary, is the real consciousness that exists for itself, with no need for the consciousness of the slave, which is one with "the natural world of Things" – the animal life. Thus, the slave is a "bestial being" for not being able to risk his life for freedom, while the master has already achieved the status of human because of his fight with the fear of death and by his overcoming this fear (1994, 27). In *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo*, the masters remain masters until the end, and the slaves seem to be born into a state of bondage. The fixed social roles for the characters reduce the possibility of change to zero.

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1 In *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics*, Mark Lilla considers Kojève an intellectual, who like Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers, Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, has gone astray. Lilla criticizes Kojève for his Napoleonic, end of history, end of philosophy, lack of class consciousness, anti-enlightenment view and "refined philosophical neutrality" in the face of war (2006, 115–136).

Admiration for the Master Morality

Kojeve's discussion of the master-slave relation invokes Nietzsche's conception of master-slave morality where Nietzsche divides morality into master morality and slave morality and admires master morality. To Nietzsche, destruction, opposition, and conquest in slave morality epitomize evil qualities. On the contrary, opposition, danger, and struggle are considered positive qualities in master morality because they result in power. The master regards security and harmlessness as negative slave values. Nietzsche believes that slave morality advocates being humble, selfless, and kind only because slaves are weak and think of self-preservation. Judeo-Christian myths which offer the advocates of slave morality the possibility of a better afterlife, Nietzsche observes, show that slaves are as obsessed with power as masters are; only their revenge is a "most spiritual revenge" (1967, 33–34). According to Nietzsche, "there are absolutely no moral phenomena, only a moral interpretation of the phenomena" (2002, 64). This shows lack of a moral standpoint which results in romanticizing violence and admiring power.

Fear of Freedom

In his influential book, *The Fear of Freedom*, Eric Fromm explains a prevailing tendency in human beings, which explains a propensity in Nash. Fromm argues that we willingly part with our freedom by submitting to an authority or by complying with dominant norms because we are afraid of freedom. He elucidates that freedom in modern society becomes a "burden" because it brings feelings of loneliness, isolation, and anxiety (2002, 115–116). Furthermore, Fromm believes that this fear of freedom results in submission to an authority, "[…] modern man, free from Medieval ties, was not free to build a meaningful life based on reason and love, hence sought new security in submission to a leader, race or state" (Fromm 2001, x). Initially, Nash is totally free. This freedom is illustrated in his travelling across America in his car at a high speed. As he drives, "the music would carry him into a realm of weightlessness" (Auster 1990, 18). Adding to this form of freedom with altered states of consciousness, he has minimized his social and personal commitments. However, as his freedom increases, his ability to maintain it, decreases. He entangles himself in a situation that brings about his enslavement. Fromm calls this mechanism of escape "authoritarianism". This masochistic mechanism is prevalent in individuals who

suffer from feelings of inferiority, insignificance, and helplessness, thus creating a paradoxical dynamic between freedom and conformity.

> These persons show a tendency to belittle themselves, to make themselves weak, and not to master things. Quite regularly these people show a marked dependence on powers outside themselves, on other people, or institutions, or nature. They tend not to assert themselves, not to do what they want, but to submit to the factual or alleged orders of these outside forces. (Fromm 2002, 122)

Fromm identifies two types of authority: "overt" and "anonymous". He regards "overt authority" as the authority of an institution or a ruler who tells people what to do, directly. With the development of modern societies, external authority is supplemented by a conscience or common sense. Fromm calls this kind of authority the "anonymous authority" and considers it more dangerous because it works from inside the individual to satisfy the needs of the status quo (Fromm 2002, 143–144). Nash's case demonstrates both "overt authority" and "anonymous authority". "Overt authority" is the authority of the millionaires who remain inaccessible in a Kafkaesque castle. It is also represented in the authority of their agent Murks, who supervises the building of a wall, armed with a gun. However, Nash has internalized the logic of the dominant power and feels inwardly worthy only if he works like a slave. Thus, he perceives the hardships of the job as "a chance to redeem" himself, "a way to atone for his recklessness and self-pity" (Auster 1990, 127).

Nash is controlled by what Foucault calls "the inspecting gaze". Gaze is used in the Foucauldian sense in which the individual is subjected to various forms of social control. Even if Murks is absent from the scene, Nash will do his job automatically. The presence of the armed Murks is necessary only for Pozzi, who resists and objects to the injustice of the system. After Pozzi's murder, Nash never thinks about running away. He has transformed into his own overseer, caught in the system of surveillance that Foucault, in an interview with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot, explains thus:

> the system of surveillance involves very little expense. There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under

> its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be a minimal cost […] (1980, 154)

"Docile Bodies", "Bare life"

Barone observes that Nash and Pozzi live under the laws governing insane asylums or prisons (1995, 65). Foucault shows the erasure of the limit between the political subject and the living subject, which marks the biopolitical, through which modern sovereignty is manifest. According to Foucault, "discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these forces (in political terms of obedience)" (1995, 138). "Docile bodies" are individuals who have been subjected to disciplinary practices that regulate and control their behaviors. These practices shape individuals into obedient subjects who conform to social norms. The master exercises power over the slave, shaping the slave's behavior through coercion and domination. The slave becomes a "docile body" who obeys the commands of the master in order to avoid punishment. The slave internalizes the master's authority and adopts a submissive attitude in order to survive under the power of the master. Nash has become a docile body who is subjected to the discipline of the millionaires and has consequently become compliant. However, Foucault sees power as a force that is in constant circulation: "Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising its power" (Foucault 1980, 98).

Georgio Agamben's "bare life" is similar to the position of slave in the master-slave relationship. The slave is reduced to a state of bare life where his or her existence is reduced to mere survival. In this state, the slave is stripped of political and legal protections and treated as disposable, existing only to serve the master. Excluded from the protections and privileges of social life, the slave experiences reduced agency and humanity and is subjected to domination and control.

> The life caught in the sovereign ban is the life that is originarily sacred – that is, that may be killed but not sacrificed – and, in this sense, the production of bare life is the originary activity of sovereignty.

> The sacredness of life, which is invoked today as an absolutely fundamental right in opposition to sovereign power, in fact originally expresses precisely both life's subjection to a power over death and life's irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment. (Agamben 1998, 53)

Foucault's "docile bodies" and Agamben's "bare life" highlight the ways in which power operates on the bodies and lives of individuals, controlling their subjectivities and determining their status in the society. Both raise questions about the nature of power and the limitations of human agency.

The Distribution of Power

Foucault and Fromm are divided over the issue of power and its distribution. As a liberal humanist, Fromm is interested in how and why an individual willingly hands his freedom to superior power. This, Fromm purports, is done because people want to overcome their feelings of insignificance and powerlessness (Fromm 2001, 230). Foucault tries to find out how power affects individuals through complex structures (Foucault 1982, 784). Foucault neglects ethical issues in his consideration of power. *The Music of Chance* also lacks distinctions between good and evil: the cruel millionaires appear funny and pathetic, and the murderer Murks is so kind that Nash cannot reject his offer of friendship. In the novel, violence is normalized because of the funny and childish behavior of the millionaires. Shiloh, who compares the novel to *The Castle*, observes that Kafka and Auster represent a kind of violence that occurs around us and looks too normal for us to notice (Shiloh 2011, 108).

When the millionaires give a tour of the house, there is a foreshadowing of what will happen to the protagonists after the poker game. Flower shows off "the City of the World", a miniature scale-model rendering of a city with lifelike buildings and human figures: "If you look at the Prison, you'll see that all the prisoners are working happily […] that they all have smiles on their faces. That's because they are glad they have been punished for their crimes […]" (Auster 1990, 80). Like the prisoners in "the City of the World", Nash and Pozzi will have to work hard, "to recover the goodness within them". Hence, Nash first confronts the utopia of the millionaires in Stone's room and then experiences life in that "utopia". In reality, Nash becomes one of those wooden figures in the

prison of "the City of the World", thinking happy thoughts about his imprisonment and the redeeming effect of work. The bank, the library, and the hall of justice correspond to Althusser's "ideological state apparatuses", institutions that serve to perpetuate the injustices of a capitalist society. According to Althusser, the values these institutions represent could seem contradictory, but they all function to preserve the dominant power structures in society. However, unlike "repressive state apparatuses" – the army, for instance – there is no apparent use of force. By constantly exposing the subject to interpellation, these institutions assign diverse roles to the individual (Althusser 1993, 15–51).

Walt: Tortured but Happy

Apparently, there is nothing to link Nash to "Walt the Wonder Boy". Nash is a former firefighter in his thirties living in late twentieth century America. Walt is a man writing about his childhood and adulthood in early twentieth century America. However, the two characters are quite similar. Both are forced to slave for a master, both enjoy this servitude, and both experience a state of weightlessness, a weightlessness which results in Walt's levitation. In *The Music of Chance*, the millionaires make Nash and Pozzi slave for them, and in *Mr. Vertigo*, Master Yehudi exploits and enslaves Walt. Thus, money is a determining factor in both novels. Moreover, in both novels the major character's anger is misdirected at a boy; Nash hates Murk's grandchild, like Walt, who hates Yusef. Furthermore, the novels are similar in that the major characters travel across America. The most crucial parallels, however, are the novels' portrayal of master-slave relations and the depiction of slaves who are pleased with their servitude.

Master Yehudi tortures Walt mentally and physically. He buries him alive to teach him levitation. "You're no better than an animal […] a piece of human nothingness" (Auster 1994, 3). This is the first thing that Master Yehudi says to Walt and manages to destroy Walt's self-confidence:

> I didn't give a damn about myself anymore. That must have been how he wanted me to feel-all jangled up and lost inside. If you don't see any reason to go on living, it's hard to care much about what happens to you. You tell yourself you want to be dead […] (Auster 1994, 6)

As Walt narrated the story of his life at the age of 77, he is dead when the reader reads the story because he has given the manuscript to his lawyer to be presented to his nephew, Daniel Quinn.[2] Although Walt, the old man, narrates the story of his life, it is Walt the young boy who the reader confronts. When he writes about his childhood, Walt the boy is not only the narrator, but also the focaliser. He has prejudices against Black people, Indians, and Jews, and is thus depicted as a fallible narrator.[3] Walt tries to escape four times but is always found by the ubiquitous Master Yehudi. In his fourth attempt to escape, he reaches the neighboring town. Caught in a blizzard, he knocks at a door only to find Master Yehudi in the house. "The bastard was inside my head, sucking out the juices of my brain, and not even my innermost thoughts could be hidden from him" (Auster 1994, 27). Thus, the master is given supernatural characteristics and all possibility of escape is ruled out for Walt.

The Superhuman Master

Master Yehudi assumes superhuman proportions in the eyes of a boy. The realization that he is no more than a slave and can never run away from Master Yehudi makes Walt gravely ill. Referring to his illness, Walt says: "I had been *jolted into submission* […] crushed by the knowledge that I would never triumph against him […] and when I woke from the nightmare of my near death, the hatred festering inside me had been transformed into love (Auster 1994, 35). Like Nash, who cannot even dream of running away, Walt has internalized the master's gaze to such an extent that he can no longer think of running away. Besides, Walt yearns for the master's love and affection, "I needed the master

2 Daniel Quinn is the name of the major character in the first part of *The New York Trilogy*. However, this is not the only example of intertextuality in the novel. Walt and Master Yehudi spend more than one month at a small beach house on the Cape Cod shore in a place called Timbuktu. Timbuktu is the name Mr. Bones, a dog, gives to the "other world". Thus, the name foreshadows Master Yehudi's impending death. Although Auster wrote *Timbuktu*, after *Mr. Vertigo*, he must have incubated the idea of the novel long before he wrote it . In *The Country of Last Things* Auster recycles this name, Quinn, once more. This name appears in the passport Anna Blume retrieves. In *Hand to Mouth*, Auster writes that "I signed my articles with a pseudonym, just to keep things interesting. Quinn was the name I chose for myself" (Auster 1997, 61).

3 Walt's fallibility is an advantage for Master Yehudi. The master has saved the life of an Indian woman and a Black boy. The boy not only fails to understand the importance of what the Master has done, but also shudders at the thought of having to live in the same house with a Jew, an Indian woman, and a Black boy. This justifies the master's cruelty.

to love me again […] I hungered for the master's affections […]. I had learned that everything I was, flowed directly from him. He had made me in his own image […]." (Auster 1994, 57). Regarding the nature of this love, Fromm believes that "the tendency will always be to repress the feeling of hatred and sometimes even to replace it by a feeling of blind admiration. This has two functions: (1) to remove the painful and dangerous feelings of hatred and (2) to soften the feeling of humiliation. If the person who rules over me is so wonderful or perfect, then I should not be ashamed of obeying him (Fromm 2002, 142). Foucault refers to this tendency as "the fascism in our heads": "The strategic adversary is fascism […] the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us […]" (Foucault 2000, xiii). Agamben's "bare life" also explains Walt's situation. Constantly humiliated and tortured by Master Yehudi, Walt is reduced to a state of bare life and stripped of legal protection. As all his attempts at flight prove futile, he realizes that he his life is insignificant and he exists solely to serve the Master.

Walt remains faithful to Master Yehudi, even after the master's death. After he kills Slim, he finds another master, Bingo. Psychologically, it is evident that he cannot live without a master. However, the second master cannot help him overcome his feeling of emptiness,

> Master Yehudi was still dead, and all the Bingos in the world couldn't begin to make up for him. I strutted around Chicago as if I were going places, as if I were a regular Mr. Somebody, but underneath it all, I was no one. Without the master I was no one, and I wasn't going anywhere. (Auster 1994, 240)

Master Yehudi does not leave Walt even after he learns that Walt cannot levitate. Fromm explains that, although we expect a masochistic person to show signs of dependence, we hardly expect the sadist to depend on anyone. However, despite the apparent strength of the sadist, he is mutually dependent on his victim. The sadist needs his victim intensely, because the presence of the victim convinces him that he is strong (Fromm 2002, 125). Thus, the master needs Walt as much as Walt needs him, especially when he knows that cancer will not give him enough time to look for and train another slave. Fromm believes that both attitudes – submission and domination, which are rooted in man's need

to transcend his feelings of loneliness and worthlessness results in the loss of integrity and freedom of the individual (Fromm 2001, 24).

Father-Son or Master-Slave Relationship?

The novel masquerades the association between Master Yehudi and Walt as a father-son relationship. Most critics of the novel have viewed the relationship as between a father and a son. Varvogli (2001, 158–159), Brown (2007, 106, 109), and Arce (2016, 129), consider the association between the master and Walt as a parental relationship and mention their similarity to father, Geppetto and Pinocchio. In an interview with Applewhite, Auster himself emphasized the similarity between Master Yehudi and Walt to Geppetto and Pinocchio (Applewhite 2013, 97). The most extreme view is expressed by Barone, who maintains that Master Yehudi died so that Walt could live (1995, 21). Hence, the novel and popular critique perpetuate a perception of the relationship between master and slave as a family tie, while ignoring its dysfunctionality.

The Love-Hate Relationship Between the Master and the Slave

Undoubtedly, the slave-master relationship breeds ambivalence. Master Yehudi first asks Walt to pull the trigger, but Walt refuses to do so. Nor does he try to stop him. The only explanation for Walt's behavior could be his ambivalence toward the master. He loves the master, yet he hates him. After Walt's headaches, the master suggests changing Walt's name to Mr. Vertigo. On the surface, this refers to his actual vertigo after the performances. However, when he names his night club, Mr. Vertigo, the name takes on a symbolic meaning. Mr. Vertigo is Walt himself because he cannot make up his mind between love and hatred, submission and rebellion, captivity and freedom. Walt has no control over his life. Fromm fully agrees with Marx, who believes that a human being "does not regard himself as independent unless he is his own master, and he is only his own master when he owes his existence to himself" (Fromm 1994, 73).

The Master-Slave Cycle

Walt's alter ego emerges late in his life. Yusef awakens in him the feeling he must have awakened in the master: To dominate and to tame.

> The boy has the devil in him. He's brash and rude and incorrigible, but he's lit up with the fire of Life. Watching Yusef I now know what the Master saw in me [. . .] This boy has the gift too. If I could ever pluck up my courage to speak to his mother, I'd take him under my wing in a second. In three years, I'd turn him into the next Wonder Boy. He'd start where I left off and before long he'd go. farther than anyone else has ever gone. The problem is the thirty three steps […]. Even I'm sickened. by the thought of it. Having gone through all that cruelty and torture myself, how could I bear to inflict it upon somebody else? They don't make men like Master Yehudi anymore, and they don't make boys like me either: stupid, susceptible, stubborn. We lived in a different world back then […]. People wouldn't stand for it. They'd call in the cops, they'd write their congressmen, they'd consult their family physician. We're not as tough as we used to be and may be the world's a better place because of it. (Auster 1994, 291–292)

Walt admits that there was cruelty and torture involved in his training, yet he approves of the project, looking nostalgically at the past. At the beginning, there is a man and a young boy: a master and a slave. At the end of the novel, the pattern repeats: a man and a young boy and the possibility of a master-slave relationship. Although the relationship fails to materialize, this is what Walt wants. The circular structure of the novel suggests that the action is continuous and repetitive. At the end of the novel Walt, wondering if the harsh method used by the master was the only possible method, instructs the reader on how to levitate. Ideologically, this is the climax of the novel:

> Deep down, I don't believe it takes any special talent for a person to lift himself off the ground and hover in the air. You must learn to stop being yourself […]. You must let yourself evaporate. Let your muscles go limp, breathe until you feel your soul pouring out of you, and then shut your eyes […] The emptiness inside your body grows lighter than the air around you. Little by little, you begin to weigh less than nothing. You shut your eyes; you spread your arms; you let yourself evaporate. And then, little by little you lift yourself off the ground. Like so. (Auster 1994, 293)

Walt has an alternative to the master's cruel methods. He cannot do to Yusef what the master has done to him because it was too cruel. Walt's method is not cruel at all. He asks the reader to stop being herself/himself. Despite the difference in strategy, both methods mean the same thing: a state of non-existence. Levitation finds a symbolic meaning when it is explained as a state of nonexistence. Walt explains his first levitation as having "no more thoughts in my head, no more feelings in my heart. I was weightless inside my own body, floating on a placid wave of nothingness, utterly detached and indifferent to the world around me" (Auster 1994, 62).

Levitation

Contrary to what most critics say about the relation between Master Yehudi and Walt, there is no father-son relationship between the master and Walt. As the name Master and the master's cruelty suggest, it is the affiliation between a master and a slave. To learn levitation, Walt is subjected to all kinds of cruelty. The master wants him to stop being himself. He wants him to feel worthless. This is what every master expects every slave to do. Levitation could mean submitting one's will to the will of a superior power and becoming socially inactive, looking for the real in the air and seeing all that happens on the earth as unreal. In *Brooklyn Follies*, Tom, who has left his PhD dissertation unfinished to become a taxi driver, justifies his choice in words that could have been uttered by Nash or Walt: "Every destination is arbitrary, every decision is governed by chance. You float, you weave, you get there as fast as you can, but you don't have a say in the matter. You're a plaything of the gods […]." (Auster 2006, 30). Like Nash and Walt, Tom floats on the surface of existence.

Conclusion

The Music of Chance and *Mr. Vertigo* could be read as manifestos of submission: novels preaching passivity and inaction. This article draws upon Hegel's master slave dialectic to consider the relationship between Nash and the millionaires in *The Music of Chance*. Nash does not have to be coerced because he loves his servitude. He is initially controlled through what Fromm calls overt authority, but later becomes his own guard by internalizing the watcher's gaze. Fromm's "anonymous authority", like Foucault's notion of "gaze", explains why Nash has

become his own overseer. The novel normalizes bondage and slavery by disclosing how satisfied Nash is in prison. The novel also normalizes the violence of the millionaires because of their comic appearance. In *Mr. Vertigo*, the relation between Master Yehudi and Walt is portrayed as a father -son relationship. The master, who tortures Walt mentally and physically, is portrayed as a father figure. The article uses Fromm's insights about the relation between the sadist and the masochist to explain the relation between the domineering Master and the submissive Walt and their mutual dependence. *Mr. Vertigo* romanticizes Walt's levitation which is the result of incredible torture and pain. Similarly, Nash's aimless wanderings and his devotion to the absurd job of building a wall are romanticized and valorized. Nash feels free when he is imprisoned, and Walt develops such a devotion for his torturer that his life becomes meaningless without him. The weightlessness that both characters experience is symptomatic of the inability of the disheveled subject to stand on firm ground to embark on transformative action. Levitation, which could be read symbolically, is indifference toward what happens in one's immediate social context. Levitation could be translated to political paralysis and ethical stand-off. The ideology of the books could be considered reactionary because they invite the reader to silence, inaction, and submission. As the master-slave relationship is portrayed in a romanticized way the readers do not question the covertness and nuances of domination and submission in a society where such relationships are politically condoned.

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