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The concept of identity in postmodern literature: the urban  
subject in the dystopian city  
Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things*

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## Introduction

From the emergence of the term *Utopia* in Thomas More's book of the same name, many controversial and prolific discussions have appeared throughout time. These discussions involved not only cultural and sociological aspects, but also those concerned more with the inner dimension of the self: his desires, ambitions and transformations. What More really meant by using this term we have no certainty, because in it he refers to several different factors that have an effect in the life of the island portrayed in his book. In opposition to *Utopia*, meaning "a happy place where a person has nothing to worry about because his/her government provides everything they need", there is *Dystopia*, which could be defined as "a society being controlled by a repressive state, in both individual and collective ways". Starting from this point, the general topic that gives rise to the object of study in this work is the urban subject, Anna Blume in Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things*, immersed in a dystopian city nearly to be extinguished and conditioned by spaces that exert powerful forces on the prevalence of the self.

A discussion of the fragmented condition of the urban subject in postmodern societies and, especially, in postmodern literature will be developed throughout this work. More specifically, this concept will be associated with the topic of Dystopia; how the urban subject becomes less humanized by living in a devastated city, and how the memories and the presence of the past make an influence in the urban subject's actions.<sup>1</sup> This will be connected with the ways a subject can explore to evade reality and transform feelings into an "oblivious" technique in order to gain survival, for instance, desire in multiple expressions. Deeply connected to the preceding aspect, it will be studied the way in which dystopia, through fictional narratives, could be applied into modern life conditions, what people are going through nowadays as a society. Therefore, the final objective of this work

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<sup>1</sup> This point of the discussion is greatly connected to George Orwell's *Nineteenth Eighty Four*. In this novel, Orwell employs the past and the longing of better previous times in a similar way Auster does. Through the main character, Winston Smith, there is an obvious discourse in which memories are key parts in the construction of identity, or whatever can be built on these meager conditions.

is to determine, in the field of postmodern literature (more specifically in the novel of Paul Auster *"In the Country of Last Things"*) how dystopia is assimilated and focused in the treatment of the postmodern subject.

The first issue to be analyzed in connection to Dystopia is how the urban spaces (the streets Anna walks by and the spaces she wanders) exert an influence in the humanness status the character demonstrates in the novel. To be more precise, the human condition will be studied to the extent it makes noticeable these traces of alienation and destruction all over the novel.

Concerning humanness as a pivotal theme in this research, there will also be discussed how the past and memories a person has are manipulated by the ruling repressive government in Dystopias: the inevitable loss of memories, of suppressing the past and changing it to their convenience, has a significant effect on the dehumanization the subject suffers, the starting point of this investigation.

How do all these methods control a person's life?

This question now arises to introduce the capacity of subjects to find alternative ways of eluding the overwhelming reality they are living. In the novel, desire turns up to demonstrate how Anna, as an immersed subject in a dystopian society, translates both her despair and discontent with the present she is living. She also develops a strong desire of feeling the presence of another person next to her, and at a certain point she cannot stand this necessity. Her feelings are demonstrated through desire in several forms, for instance, when she eventually meets Samuel Farr, and they agreed to live together in Sam's room in the Library. In this case, both characters had experienced the necessity to talk to someone, and also to feel love.

To make noticeable Anna's feelings and actions throughout the novel, I will consider the way in which she presents to us the events she is living, has lived and finally, the events she will experience in a not so distant future. These processes will be possible when analyzing her enunciation, how is it that she connects her present situation with an actual existence of discourse in the world. In other words: *"Es esta presencia en el mundo que sólo el acto de enunciación hace posible, pues – piénsese bien– el hombre no dispone*

*de ningún otro medio de vivir el 'ahora' y de hacerlo actual más que realizarlo por inserción de discurso en el mundo.*" (Benveniste 86)

After going through the initial sections of this study, both dealing with dehumanization and the experience of desire, the final part is concerned with the many transformations an individual undertakes while experiencing urban dystopian sensibilities. All these transformations are not only concerned with inner emotions, but are also influenced by sociological, political, cultural and economic factors, to mention a few. Hence, the pivotal issue of this work is to analyze how all these aspects involved changes in Anna Blume's identity. In Hyvärinen's words: "*Austerlitz Anna Blume experiences a similar reduction of identity and damage to appearance, because she is otherwise "too pretty for daily contact with the streets" (59).*" (Hyvärinen 12)

In connection with the previous point, I will consider Anna's quest for place, not only for the place her brother might be, but for the place she locates her family ties and relationships as well. In other words, searching for her brother Anna is transferring her longings to find her past relationships, and therefore, to maintain her condition as a human being and also her identity. These yearned searches and desire to find her brother are, however, discouraged by the disintegration of the city and the lack of human relations.

Contemplating all this information, this investigation presupposes a re-visitation to the novel, in order to find the tracks to the objective in the remotest passages of Anna Blume's narrations. Therefore, as mentioned above, the analysis will be divided in three sections: the first one, devoted to the issue of dehumanization in the doomed city; the second one, to the presence of desire in the urban subject; and lastly, to the several transformations the individual suffered throughout time in dystopias.

The final part of the investigation proposes to create new standpoints when it comes to analyze the urban subject in the dystopian city, due to the particularities people are passing through in current times. Their human condition can be compared to previous novels working with Dystopia<sup>2</sup>, and then connected to what can arise from reality to a

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<sup>2</sup> More specifically, how the issue of Identity was treated in George Orwell's *Nineteenth Eighty Four*.

fictional world starting from current forms of life in postmodern societies. It is important also to mention that this research will be conducted in an analogy to the issue of identity in a not too distant future in the world we are living in. The theories about the end of the world in the year 2012 and the collective madness it creates sometimes could be very useful to this work. Anna Blume serves as an example of survival and strength to an urban subject in our society nowadays. In some way, we could find some traces of what lead to Auster to write this book by comparing the fictional world in the novel and the real world at the present time.

To validate this investigation I will sustain on works dealing with sources from many fields such as literary theory, psychology, philosophy, sociology and others. The main author I will work with is Paul De Man, with his studies on deconstruction, mainly based on the undisclosed interpretations of the novels from their mostly known themes, such as despair in the city, which can be deconstructed until getting into its bottom. Also, Raman Selden's theories on literature will be consulted, in order to get a closer insight on poststructuralist outlooks and their application on texts. More specifically, the text is to be analyzed as a completely current object, without neglecting any interpretation of the written. As Selden states: "*We cannot take up a neutral or objective position from which to make a judgement or to settle the meaning of a text. We, too, as speaking subjects are caught up in the interminable weaving, unweaving and reweaving of the fabric of discourse.*" (Selden 88)

Afterwards, from theories about urbanity and sociology, the work will be mainly centered on Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*. With Lefebvre, appropriate connections amongst the urban spaces and the novel will be pointed up, and how the outer factors, such as politics and social life, for example, have a bearing on the inner sensibility of the urban subject. In Wood's words: "*Lefebvre explores the "production of space," maintaining that space is produced and reproduced, thus representing the site and outcome of social, political, and economic struggles.*" (Wood 137)

In order to have a better understanding of several of the themes Auster deals with in his novel, I will draw upon Harold Bloom's *Modern Critical Views: Paul Auster*. Here,

Bloom delivers a lot of essays about the novel that are pertinent to this investigation, due to the fact that they are concerned with urban spaces, the postmodern characteristics present in the novel, and also with the narrative techniques Auster employs while creating the world Anna Blume was immersed in *In the Country of Last Things*. Some of these essays share a few characteristics that come to be useful to this investigation in relation to the representation of the city, not only in Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* but also in other novels by the author concerning with similar topics, such as experiencing loss and suffering, all of them leading eventually to dehumanization.



## Theoretical Framework

The main objective in this work is the conception of identity in the urban subject immerse in a destroyed city. This is why I will rely on different theoretical and critical perspectives to analyze what is related to identity in this research, such as dehumanization, the presence of memories and the past and survival in a postmodern urban environment. Literary, philosophic, sociologic and economic theories are very helpful along with the issue of the urban subject.

Firstly, it is important to keep in mind that Auster created this novel supporting his ideas on historical realities:

*“In the early period of its reception, the novel was often characterized as a dystopia [...] It is a novel about the present and the immediate past, not about the future. Anna Blume walks through the twentieth century. That was the phrase I carried around in my head while I was working on the book” (1997: 320)* (Hyvärinen 4)

It means that *In the Country of Last Things* was not considered as a dystopia by its author, he created the novel thinking about the society he was immersed in. This aspect will be one of the cornerstones on the development of this work.

While analyzing the novel, the attention will be put on the traces of irony and hidden meanings in the text. This is why I will focus on one particular approach to deal with the written, Deconstruction, more particularly with Paul de Man’s ideas.

In order to have a better understanding of how deconstruction is useful to this work, I will deliver some general features of this particular approach, and then I will focus on how they contribute to the object of study.

*“[...] ‘any reading of a text can be put in question, ‘ironized’, if you wish, by another reading,’ he is implicitly recognizing that his own ironic interpretations of texts can themselves be shown to be ironic; to contain implicit meanings which subvert their stated intentions” (Spikes 23).* What De Man states above embodies one of the main objectives of this research: to demonstrate the “subversion” to which all texts can be

exposed, more particularly, the transformations a subject's identity can undertake while being immersed in such peculiar conditions; that is, living in a dystopian society.

From the previous statement, irony arises as a fundamental aspect in the practice of deconstruction, according to De Man. To understand fully what the concept means, I will rely on De Man's attempts when defining irony: "*There is indeed a fundamental problem: the fact that if irony were indeed a concept it should be possible to give a definition of irony.*" (De Man 164) As De Man states, it is almost impossible to give a definition of irony, because it encompasses such varied areas of language and understanding that one can always lead to another not so apparent.

And it is this irony, present throughout Auster's *In the Country of Last Things*, what gives rise to the first theme to be treated in this analysis: identity as a secondary and not so evident issue in the novel, where economic and social themes resulted to catch more attention. Where social issues seemed to be crucial, there is always a covert indication of themes that seemed to be neglected by most scholars, such as identity, for example.

Taking into account the theme of identity, it is necessary to intertwine this concept to the ones that will give rise to this investigation: humanization, or more specifically the fragmentation of the urban subject (and therefore, alienation in the city), desire as a way of expressing the lack of something (in this case, feelings and the presence of another person), and finally how these transformations can be analyzed, more properly, deconstructed, to the extent they give the expected result in this research.

In order to embrace the first concept connected with identity, humanization, I will engage more specifically with dehumanization, one of the most recurrent themes present all over the novel. It is important to note that Anna Blume is struggling not only to survive in this decaying world, but also she is trying to maintain her "human" condition. Quoting DeLillo, Anna's most admirable characteristics is that she is able to survive: "*the most brutal realities, the most terrible social conditions, she struggles to remain a human being, to keep her humanity intact.*" (Donovan 80)

The concepts of humanization and dehumanization will be properly utilized in the direction this work is centered. By saying this, I mean they will be mentioned in the field of

dystopian literature, and in the effects they have on the urban subject's identity (in particular, in her struggle to maintain her condition as a human, and therefore, her identity). In order to support the idea of human beings losing their condition of "humanness", I will make use of George Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental Life", because in spite of being written on the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it delivers the appropriate tools to have a better understanding of the urban subject immerse in dystopian cities, due to the fact that it concerns personal relationships and the effects of the metropolis exerting its forces on the psychological status of people.

In the line of this discussion, a key term comes to light: *blasé*. According to Simmel, *blasé* stands for the indifference and incapacity of people towards certain situations in the city. This term will be useful in analyzing Anna's attitudes when trying to maintain her condition as a human being despite fighting against the unexpected and living in a world that is disappearing.

According to the previously mentioned, a key idea follows this line of thought: the role that memories and the presence of the past play in the urban subject at the moment of fighting for her survival.<sup>3</sup> In this investigation, the main character, Anna Blume, very often finds herself immerse in situations where the past has been obliterated in order to satisfy the needs of a current government.

Taking into account the manifold concepts mentioned above (dehumanization, memories, identity, desire, amongst others), my central aim is to intertwine this set of ideas into a unique and innovative approach when it comes to analyzing dystopian novels dealing with themes such as alienation, encompassing a whole set of concepts. After getting to this point, there will be possible to understand the fragmented condition of the urban subject in postmodern literature.

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<sup>3</sup> "When Anna learns that there can be no return voyage by sea to her own country, she alludes to airplanes and learns that not only have airplanes been absent from this country for some time but the very word is extinct. Oceania has always been at war with Eastasia." (Washburn, 168) Once again, there is a clear reference to Orwell's *Nineteenth Eighty Four*. There is a similar use of obliterating the past and the memories of people in order to gain benefits for the current government.

As the main aspect of this research is the fragmentation of the urban subject in postmodern literature, as stated above, the reading of the novel will be developed from a symbolic approach, that is, by making noticeable the purposes of the author when referring to those aspects.

These symbols in the novel will allow us to better appreciate the contrast and similarities between the fictional world of the novel and the real world to which the author referred. To make this point easier to understand, symbols such as the deaths of the Runners, the Leapers and the Euthanasia Clinics, will be analyzed further in order to comprehend the dystopian representation of the city the author delivers to us.

## **Chapter One: (De)Humanization and the Struggle for Survival**

*“When you live in the city, you learn to take nothing for granted. Close your eyes for a moment, turn around to look at something else, and the thing that was before you is suddenly gone. Nothing lasts, you see, not even the thoughts inside you. And you mustn’t waste your time looking for them. Once a thing is gone, that is the end of it.”* (Auster 2)

There is no certainty about the city in which Anna Blume is searching for her brother. In spite of this, it gives the sensation that this place could be anywhere, because cities share the characteristic of making people feel lost in thought, and therefore, lead to alienation.

At the beginning of the book, Anna addresses an old friend, telling him about the characteristics of the city, of the inclemency of the weather and the many ups and downs she must pass through in order to survive. These are the signs that lead to us to think that she will be caught in a labyrinth where she will have to arrange her feelings and wants in order of importance, to keep her condition as a human being in the destroyed city she is trapped.

These descriptions Anna gives of the city are in close relation to the treatment of spaces, due to the fact that she walks through the streets of the city, later on she lives in a small apartment with Isabel and Ferdinand for some time, and she also shares a room in the library with Samuel Farr. At this point, the theories on urban development Lefebvre employs in *The Production of Space* are pertinent to discuss some ideas. To be more precise, special attention will be put on social space.

Firstly, I will explore the relationships between language and spaces. The question Lefebvre expresses is the following: *“[...] does language – logically, epistemologically or genetically speaking – precede, accompany or follow social space?”* (Lefebvre 16) This question can be reformulated oriented to give an answer to Anna’s dilemmas when referring to “fantastic language”, the language people used to express their longing of the past and of a better present. In this particular passage, we can trace the use of language in order to create certain spaces in which memories and nonsense desires (according to the narrator, Anna) are totally irrelevant when it comes to accompany social space.

*“There are many other possible kinds of talks in this language. Most of them begin when one person says to another: I wish. What they wish for might be anything at all, as long as it is something that cannot happen. I wish the sun would never set. I wish money would grow on my pockets. I wish the city would be like it was in the old days. You get the idea. Absurd and infantile things, with no meaning and no reality. (Auster 10)*

More specifically, social spaces in the novel begin by being treated as something with no great importance, because the protagonist is greatly immersed in her anxiety to find her brother. But gradually, as events are becoming more stunning, such as having no money to survive and turn to scavenging in order to continue living, social spaces become a key factor in Anna’s struggle for survival. Her complete consciousness is transformed by the steady influence of spaces, as the following passage suggests: *“In this chameleon-like eradication of any sense of physical, emotional, or mental self, the reader is constantly reminded about how physical space structures social consciousness and activity”*. (Woods 144)

It is of paramount significance making a stop in this precise aspect of Anna’s narration to create parallels with society nowadays. Many times we have the chance to find the language we use subjected to the space we are located in, for example, in a conversation where people from different fields are interacting (for example, an engineer and a minister). But gradually, language has been developing its own tools and creating new techniques that attack in some way what we are trying to defend or represent. It is the vivid aspect of language, which we cannot control and sometimes acts in the opposite way we are intending.

Returning to the novel, clear examples of the use of language connected with social spaces are the descriptions Anna makes of the deaths of the “Runners”, the “Euthanasia Clinics” and the “Assassination Clubs”. *“Ironically, but to be able to kill yourself running, you must first train to be a good runner, otherwise nobody has the strength to get it far enough.”* (Auster 11) In order to have a better understanding of the hidden interpretations of these particular ways of dying, a more profound analysis will be developed on how Anna

describes these techniques and, therefore, makes use of language when creating social spaces.

When referring to these forms of ending with life, Anna always gives a description of what she feels when watching this and what she thinks people feels too. In other words, she gives a certain emotional touch to the description she is delivering, and this gives to her telling a story a turn of interpretation, because it had been very frequently analyzed in terms of social criticism only, as Donovan points out in the following lines: *“It is no stretch of interpretation, then, to read the novel as predominantly a work of economic and social criticism, in which the usual postmodern dilemmas of language, identity, and theory are secondary or else diagnosed and well-integrated”* (Donovan 65)

At this point, it is important to highlight the fact that all these descriptions Anna delivers of the city are in close connection to the creation of a particular space, or more precisely, in Lefebvre’s words, of a “mode of production”. In other words, every society produces a certain space, its own space, and this idea is translated into the particular dystopia studied here: it should be ruled under its own norms and creations. Because Anna walks through the streets of the city, then she passes several vicissitudes until finding a partial stability, she is at the same time producing a specific space. Moreover, these modes of production in a particular society give rise to a particular consciousness: *“[...] how a change in society’s modes of production changes social conceptions of space and how, in turn, space constructs, and is constructed by, individual consciousness.”* (Woods 138)

A key term in this investigation came to light in the previous quotation; that is “individual consciousness”.

As the result of the interaction of spaces or modes of production with language and society, the urban subject forms an inner individual consciousness that is influenced by how she (in this case, because it is Anna who lives these changes) experiences outer transformations. In the novel, Anna forms her particular consciousness by leaving aside what once made her feel as a human, because she dies in some way in order to survive:



*“That is the dilemma. On the one hand, you want to survive, to adapt, to make the best of things as they are. But, on the other hand, to accomplish this seems to entail killing all of those things that human. Do you see what I am trying to say? In order to live, you must make yourself die. That is why so many people have given up. For not matter how hard they struggle, they know they are bound to lose. And at that point it is surely a pointless thing to struggle at all.”* (Auster 14)

To have a better understanding of the connections between the subject’s individual consciousness and humanness, the main goal of this chapter, I would like to draw attention on the following line mentioned above: “[...] *to reach this implies to destroy all those things that once made us feel human.*” Anna is aware of all the transformations carried out in the city and in its connected processes, this is why she must choose what path to follow in order to survive, although she knows that no matter how hard a person fights, they will eventually lose.

Following the deconstructive approach developed by De Man, in the previous passages it is possible to find some traces of subversion of meaning, or in other words a different rhetorical reading that Auster employs to address the reader in a sort of mysterious way, delivering him the proper tools to find an interpretation of the text. What do I mean by saying this? I will develop an answer in the following paragraphs.

According to De Man: *“A literary text simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode and by reading the text as we did, we were only trying to come closer to being as rigorous a reader as the author had to be in order to write the sentence in the first place.”* (De Man, 7)

In other words, the reader must be open to all possibilities and not so rigorous in order to comprehend the text, otherwise he will not be able to get all the interpretations a text offers, as it happens in this case with *In the Country of Last Things*. By most scholars it is very often understood as a dystopia, but leaving aside all the pivotal aspects I am trying to involve in this research.

By making connections between the literary text, that is, Auster's novel, and then the author's intentions when interacting with the reader, there are multiple possibilities when it comes to have an understanding of the text. As one of the key objectives of this work, and the first one of them, is the discussion of humanization, more precisely, dehumanization and its effects in dystopian sensibilities, the debate will be centered in the interaction between the urban subject and its environment.

On the first place, there is the awareness of having to die in order to survive that Anna mentions above. It is a clear opposition of terms that leads to an ironic reading of the text, that the struggle for survival will have no effective consequences, because there is no hope. Then, a multiplicity of readings is developed, alluding to the following idea quoted by De Man in *Semiotics and Rhetoric*:

*“The sign is to be interpreted if we are to understand the idea it is to convey, and this is so because the sign is not the thing but a meaning derived from the thing by a process here called representation that is not simply generative, i.e. dependent on a univocal origin [...] it is a reading, not a decoding, and this reading has, in its turn, to be interpreted into another sign, and so on ad infinitum.”* (De Man, 4)

This first possibility leads to a second possible reading of the text, connected with the presence of the term *blasé*, introduced earlier by George Simmel in *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, in order to discuss the capacities of the urban subject of maintaining her condition of humanness in the city. Applying this concept to the novel, it can be understood as one of the techniques Anna employs more frequently while dealing with all the misadventures she sees involved in. Most of the time she says she was cold, dull to another people; her only aim was to continue, without knowing what could happen later but she knew she had to do it:

*“The first days were the hardest. I wandered around like a sleepwalker, not knowing where I was, not even daring to talk to anyone. At one point I sold my bags to a Resurrection Agent, and that kept me in food for an ample stretch, but even after I began working as a scavenger, I had no place to live. I slept outside in all*

*kinds of weather, hunting for a different place to sleep every night. God knows how long this period lasted, but there's no question that it was the worst, the one that came closest to doing me in. Two or three weeks minimum, perhaps as long as several months. I was so miserable that my mind seemed to stop working. I became dull inside, all instinct and selfishness. Terrible things happened to me then, and I still don't know how I managed to live through it.*" (Auster 43)

At a point she recognizes the processes taking place in the city (her sleeping outdoors in all kinds of weather, searching for a place to establish) turned her "*all instinct and selfishness*". This is one of the moments in the novel Anna finds herself closer to be dehumanized; she had no awareness of time neither. The *blasé* attitude is in its highest moment of apparition.

*"Her experience of the city occurs in a space without a history: her life is a spatial rather than temporal experience."* (Woods 151) As Anna finds herself unaware of time, of how many days have passed since her arrival in the city, the *blasé* attitude, the product of the metropolis, gives rise to the predominance of the influence of spaces over the temporal experience. Consequently, "*Blume's inability to overcome the urban alienation in the city overwhelms her*" (Woods 151), and it is this inability which is going to be totally overcome when Anna has the chance to find in other characters what she has embodied in the search for her brother.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the unfavorable conditions Anna's struggle for moving on seems to be, she is able to continue living in the doomed city she is located. Now, it is possible to establish some similarities between what it is that is disappearing, only things in the city or also humanness as a whole. Quoting Powell: "*It is not simply objects that are disappearing. Human things are on the wane too. Mr. Auster offers Anna nothing in the way of hope and wants her to make a generous, human account of it anyway.*" (Powell 164) This is one of the aspects I would like to point up about Auster's writing. As Powell indicates, Auster portrays Anna as a hopeless character; however, she overcomes these difficulties and gives us hope, not in a usual way, but otherwise by giving an image of suffering and addressing the reader as if this could happen to him in any moment of his life.

An example of strength and willingness can be taken from Anna's struggle. The image of suffering she portrays can be compared to a person who is in meager conditions and not supported by his/her government, and who nevertheless is able to keep moving although we have no certainty what will happen with this person in the future.

At this point of the novel, when Anna seems to be immerse into the edge of humanization and dehumanization, and fighting against the fragmentation of the self, her struggle for survival is going to be supported by one of the first characters that appear to establish a relationship with her: Isabel. Here, the description Anna makes of the space, more precisely of the environment when they met, is a key aspect when understanding her behavior in the city. *"That day the sun was shining so dazzling that turns things invisible, and the air was warm, I remember well, so warm that it annoyed you."* (Auster 26)

In this sense, the novel now considers the relationships Anna begins to establish both with Isabel, afterwards Ferdinand, and how it influences the appearance of desire as a pivotal factor in the maintenance of the condition of unity of the urban subject and survival in the doomed city.

## **Chapter Two: The concept of Desire in the Doomed City**

*“That was how I met Isabel. For better or worse, my true life in the city began at that moment [...] If not for that one irrational moment in the street, the story I am telling you would not be this one”* (Auster 45)

This is how Anna’s relationship with Isabel begins. Her relationship becomes a great support to Anna, not like the relationship she had with Ferdinand, who turns out to be a bad-tempered man who stubbornly refuses to talk to anyone and who also triggers a situation in the novel that will have enormous consequences.

From this point on, it can be proposed that Anna reaches a more stable condition of unity of the subject due to the fact that she encounters herself accompanied by more persons, she has a home; therefore, it can be said that she moves to the past because she remembers the days she was with her family and everything was alright. She enjoyed being with Isabel: *“Looking back on it now, I would say those days were the best days we had: the two of us out in the street before the day was up, roaming through the quiet dawns, the deserted alleyways, the broad boulevards all around.”* (Auster 56)

Here, the description Anna makes of the *“quiet dawns, the deserted alleyways, the broad boulevards”* seems to contradict to some extent her previous conception of the city landscape. This is supported by the fact that she longs for the past and she has not surrendered although the environment that surrounds her is not the best.

Concerning the presence of Isabel and Ferdinand in the novel, they are symbolically making reference to Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, the Catholic Monarchs of Spain. Their appearance might contradict the resemblance of the discovery of a new world. In the city Anna is immersed nothing seems to be new but all the opposite: everything is old and miserable.

The dichotomy between the appearance Isabel and Ferdinand have in the birth of the new world and the disappearance of this world Anna they live in can be analyzed from the deconstructive approach mentioned previously. Here, Auster is cleverly alluding to a hidden interpretation of the text, one that can only be discovered if the reader is aware of a previous knowledge about the discovery of America.

This allusion to historical characters in the form of fictional characters reinforces the fact that this is a story rooted on actual events that therefore might happen nowadays in the world, more than to consider the novel as a dystopia with fiction as its main component.

Gradually, the personal relationships Anna begins to establish with Isabel and Ferdinand give her a sense of stability among the chaos of the city. But even though the personalities of her companions seemed really stable at first, Anna found out they were as depressed as she was, or even worse. Ferdinand's words go straight to the point when referring to this: *"It's all death out there [...] There are sharks in those waters, and whales that can swallow you whole. Hug to the shore is my advice, hug to the shore and send up as many smoke signals as you can"* (Auster 52) In his words hopelessness can be traced, and negativity to the extent of staying at home and never go out, as he did.

Ferdinand made things impossible to Anna. His pessimism was the utmost representation of the forces which would not allow her to continue struggling to survive. What seemed to be a peaceful place to live in, next to Isabel, became a nightmare little by little.

At times Anna could not stand loneliness, and she began to look for some ways to escape from reality and the hellish conditions she was standing next to Ferdinand:

*"I would shut my eyes and tell myself to go to sleep, but my brain would be in such turmoil, heaving up images of the day I had just spent, taunting me with a pandemonium of streets and bodies, and with Ferdinand's insults fresh in my mind to add to the chaos, sleep simply would not come. The only thing that seemed to have any effect was to masturbate".* (Auster 62)

Chaos is present not only in the city, but also in Anna's thoughts. It increases her anxiety to escape from reality. Therefore, sexual desire becomes an effective tool that gives Anna momentary relief from the distress she was going through, but mostly, to escape from her loneliness.

A whole process which involves desire as the inception is going to be developed in Anna's inner subjectivity. Before finding Isabel and Ferdinand she was immerse in a search with no clear objectives after knowing her brother would probably be dead, then she found them and created a way to leave her desire, more precisely, her lack of feelings due to loneliness. At the point Anna transforms into actions what she has been for a long time

desiring, that is, letting her physical subjectivity act and react to certain stimulus, such as the moment in which Ferdinand throws himself above her to rape her.

This moment of the novel is of great importance, not only because it encompasses mixed feelings such as happiness when killing him and inertia to let him act and accomplish her purpose, but also because it refers to a metaphor of killing what made her feel anguished (in the person of Ferdinand) in order to reach freedom of acting and moving on with her objectives:

*“As long as I held on to Ferdinand’s throat, I was free. I was beyond the night, beyond any thought of myself. Then came the oddest part of it. Just when it became clear to me that a few more moments of pressure would finish the job, I let go. My grip around Ferdinand’s throat was like iron, and no amount of thrashing and kicking would ever have loosened it. What happened was that I suddenly became aware of the pleasure I was feeling.”* (Auster 65)

To analyze further this episode of the novel and its consequences, and the ruptures that are produced in the figure of the urban subject, attention will be drawn on Foucault’s words when referring to the uses of genealogy. Making a comparison with Anna’s experience through the novel, it can be proposed that she sacrifices knowledge, what she has gone through in the city, and it affects her because *“[...] it dissolves the unity of the subject; it releases those elements of itself that are devoted to its subversion and destruction”* (Foucault 163)

What this rupture in the figure of the urban subject represents, the refusal to maintain knowledge of the world surrounding her is the response to the fight against what is going to destroy her; to the unbearable environment the dystopian city keeps her immerse. Death seems to be the solution to the problem that maintains Anna so troubled (the attack she suffered by Ferdinand) but at the same time, she is no capable of fulfilling this purpose. There exists an internal fight between the pleasure that throttling him was giving her, and what this would finally provoke. The release of the elements devoted to destruction in this case is not accomplished, so the urban subject keeps herself in the same condition she was before, swinging between maintaining her unity, her stability of



emotions, and letting go what was troubling her, in other words, killing Ferdinand for what he had done.

As seen above, an inner conflict is taking place inside Anna's mind. It begins with her desire to satisfy her loneliness by using physical techniques, but it gradually starts to transform into a harmful tool, because it is what causes Ferdinand's death and then Isabel's death indirectly due to the fact that "*she was never really able to take advantage of life without Ferdinand*" (Auster 76)

From this point on, Anna must start a new period in her life; she has no companionship when she started her search. Again, Foucault's statements concerning history are pertinent at the moment of analyzing her state of mind. It is related to the "*systematic dissociation of identity*". After Isabel's death, Anna says: "*I was exhausted, you understand, and I had that blurring in the brain that makes you think you are no longer yourself, when you begin to drift in and out of consciousness, even though you are awake*". (Auster 81) It clearly defines how instable her mind is, it also gives a sense that she was not herself, due to the presence of the key word in this passage: consciousness. All this can be supported with the following idea: "*[...] this rather weak identity, which we attempt to support and to unify under a mask, is in itself only a parody: it is plural; countless spirits dispute its possession; numerous systems intersect and compete.*" (Foucault 161) At this precise moment, Anna's identity, which was trying to move on after being left alone without Isabel, was being attacked by multiple spirits that compose her whole condition of subjectivity and which also seemed to have more strength than she did when being immerse in the city she was living.

The question now arises concerning the way in which desire is exerted by the city itself, being part of the multiple spirits that to some extent attack Anna and the rest of the characters involved in the narration. It is by the forces the city puts on the citizens' emotions and thoughts, they become like pawns in a chess game, in which the city is the main thinking machine which plays with them to its "desire".

By medium of the government, the main symbolic image of power in the dystopian city, it is likely to notice the closed space in which the city keeps people tied to their

fancies. It creates the idea of wars outside, for example, making the only potential salvation for people the confinement in what would be known later as the Sea Wall Project:

*“It turned out that this was the Sea Wall Project, a public works enterprise that had recently been started by the new government. Governments come and go quite rapidly here, and it is often difficult to keep up with the changes. This was the first time I had heard of the current takeover, and when I asked someone the purpose of the sea wall, he told me it was to guard against the possibility of war.”*  
(Auster 86)

The very fact that “*Governments come and go quite rapidly here*” is another example of the huge and wide desire that city maintains over urban subjects. It represents a machine in which nothing is stable, and urban subjects become merely pins with no major significance.

Consequently, Anna finds herself in turmoil of emotions and search for identity, due to the fact that she is alone and must struggle, again, in order to survive. According to Woods: “*The city is not geographically divorced from the self, but is rather constitutive of the self: geography, topography, and subjectivity are intricately interrelated.*” (Woods 145) The city is once again employing its forces to make of the urban subjects whatever its desire is. This is how Anna arrives to the National Library and there meets Samuel Farr, who she had been looking to give her some piece of news about her brother.

A completely new way of desire is developed in the person of Samuel Farr. Anna stays to live with him, with the purpose of trying to survive together the Terrible Winter, but in a small room in which it was evident they were going to be involved in an emotional relationship:

*“I lived in the library with Sam, and for the next six months that small room was the center of my world. I don’t suppose it will shock you to hear that we wound up sleeping in the same bed. One would have to be made of stone to resist such a thing, and when it finally happened on the third or fourth night, we both felt foolish for having waited so long. It was all bodies at first, a mad crush and tangle of limbs, a splurge of pent-up lust. The sense of release was enormous, and for the next few*

*days we went at each other at the point of exhaustion. Then the pace died down, as in fact it had to, and then, little by little, over the weeks that followed, we actually fell in love” (Auster 107)*

The dystopian city offers to Anna a new chance to develop her desire but now in a more positive way, with Sam as his partner. Her release and positive feelings, the love she felt for him will bring the possibility of giving birth to a child in a not too distant future. Although Anna has the chance to find the replacement to the affection she received from Sam after her unfortunate meeting with Dujardin in Victoria, who saves her from the streets, it was not the same feelings she had for Sam.

All these relationships she establishes with men and women throughout the novel come to replace the desire she felt for the past, for the nice memories she had from her home. In this line of the discussion, another person who turns out to be important in Anna’s life is the Rabbi. His presence intimidated her to some extent, and his connection with Jewish people reminded her of the past as well: *“Perhaps he reminded me of how things had been when I was very young, back in the dark ages when I still believed in what fathers and teachers said to me. I can’t say for sure, but the fact was that I felt on solid ground with him, and I knew he was someone I could trust”*. (Auster 96)

According to Wood, the issue of the father is always present in Auster’s writing, but in Anna’s experience it gives her a sense of security that could be only experienced in the closed space of the Library. The presence of the Jew community inside this place *“steady Blume at this point of near collapse”*. (Woods 141)

It is possible to find traces of irony in these episodes when Anna is in the National Library and goes to live with Sam in his room in the building. This place is the core of safety and tranquility between a world full of chaos and instability. There she finds love in Sam, a spiritual guide in the figure of the Rabbi and also she creates life; she is able to conceive a baby in place where children have disappeared a long time ago. Here, her identity is restored to a great extent; she can again find a temporal stability that will, however, come to an end. The impossibility to maintain this condition of peacefulness is due to *“The destruction, collapse and resurrection of identity are crucial factors in the transience of the city, where this new metonymical arrangement causes alternative spatial*

*arrangements to emerge*” (Woods 144) There is a temporal resurrection of identity at the time when Anna is at the Library, but again she is unwilling to maintain this condition because the city is transient and will most of the time lead to a fragmentation of the self that she will fight against till the end of the novel.

Little time after Anna finds in Victoria “*a refuge for the other*” (Auster 156), and her identity seems to be reinforced by the fact that she leaves the past behind at this point:

*“Being with Victoria gave me pleasure, but it also gave me the courage to live in the present again. That was the thing that counted most. I no longer looked back all the time, and little by little this seemed to repair some of the innumerable hurts I carried around inside me”* (Auster 157)

Her fragmentation appears to be stuck, because in Victoria she finds relief and the concern for the past she did not have before. Thus, it is likely to perceive Anna’s condition of urban subject in the dystopian city as a vicious circle, in which she can struggle against the adversity, and then get over these problems, but at the end she will be overcome by the forces of the city. And there are these forces which are always exerting some influence on urban subjects’ actions, or, in other words, desiring to get something of them as they also want.

**Chapter Three: “The end has no end”: Transformations of the Urban Subject in the  
Dystopian City**

In the preceding sections of this work, the struggles for survival and the initial fragmentation of the subject were taken into account, in the first chapter, and then in the second one the theme of desire was explored to the extent of producing a way of escaping from the hellish dystopian city and to a lesser extent how the city itself manipulated urban subjects. Nevertheless, it was possible to have an awareness of the vicious circle in which the urban subject, in this case Anna, was not able to have any improvement regarding her self-unity. Why was this vicious circle produced is what this chapter will be devoted to, and to find the overall consequences and links to the imminent fragmentation of the self.

The fragmentation Anna will inevitably suffer will be also linked to the incapacity Anna must acquire to think positively<sup>4</sup>, and to the great deal she trusts on memories when trying to survive as well. Attention will be drawn on whether she is able to overcome this incapacity the city challenges her.

Regarding memories and the longing for the past, the episode of the airplane turns out to be useful at this point. It recalls a series of reflections and memories as well that reinforce her desire for the old good times:

*“You see what you are up against here. It’s not just that things vanish –but once they vanish, the memory of them vanishes as well. Dark areas form in the brain, and unless you make a constant effort to summon up the things that are gone, they will quickly be lost to you forever [...] Sometimes, when I find myself groping for a thought that has eluded me, I begin to drift off to the old days back home, remembering how it used to be when I was a little girl and the whole family would go up north on the train for summer holidays” (Auster 87)*

Thus, another element comes to be essential when deciding if the fragmentation of the self will be absolute or not. Besides the never ending struggle Anna finds involved at the beginning, her desire to find alternative ways to not experience the dystopian

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<sup>4</sup> The concept *Anhedonia* comes to be pertinent at this point. It means: “*the inability to experience pleasure from activities usually found enjoyable, e.g. exercise, hobbies, sexual activities or social interactions.*”

environment, there is also the role that memories and the past play when she feels inclined to the obliteration of reality.

Anna's first steps when living in the city were mostly related to fight against the condition of disintegration and disappearance of things; that not only implied losing objects and technology but also the fading of memories: "*Everything disappears, people just as surely as objects, the living along with the dead*" (Auster 113). Shortly after, she devoted her time to find stability by establishing personal relationships with people, when living with Isabel for example. However, nothing has lasted much. The only thing that seems to be engaged in the preservation of what is left of her identity is memories through storytelling, by writing this letter to her childhood friend. But also, there is an obvious allusion to the destruction present in the city and its relationship with storytelling: "*The mere transition from the chaos of the streets to the temporary shelter of Woburn House opens the gates of storytelling.*" (Hyvärinen 14)

Regarding this point, Benjamin's ideas in *The Storyteller* referring to Nikolai Leskóv's work with a nostalgic tone due to the disappearance of storytelling, can be applied to Anna's role as a storyteller even with more nostalgia due to the imminent disappearance of things: "*It has seldom been realized that the listener's naive relationship to the storyteller is controlled by his interest in retaining what he is told. The cardinal point for the unaffected listener is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story. Memory is the epic faculty par excellence.*" (Benjamin 370). Thus, there exists an interest of the reader to retain what was told, by medium of memory, as Anna is similarly doing in the novel, trying to maintain memories in order to continue her role as storyteller.

Throughout the novel, it is possible to find in Anna's narration the keys to understand what Auster wanted the reader to feel as if we were also immerse in a dystopian city. Factors such as memory, that was referred to previously, are of pivotal importance when it comes to analyze the speeches Anna delivers: "*[...] the novel tells very explicitly that Anna's letter, covering a period of several years, is supposed to have been written within a mere few days from the end of the novel. As regards memory, accuracy, reliability, and the committed speech act, the difference is far-reaching.*" (Hyvärinen 3)

Besides, connected to the issue of Anna's narration it is possible to find ironic traces when dealing with the fact that Anna goes to look for her brother in the city, who was supposed to report about the disappearing city. At the end, however, it is *she* who will have the mission to deliver the news about the city of *last things*. She transforms into a storyteller, which was not supposedly to be her mission; her quest for place in the search for her brother transforms her into a double-sided character: trying to survive in the dystopian city and telling the world about the disappearance of the city as well.

Making connections between what has been proposed about the urban subject and the forces that the city exerts upon him, it is possible to distinguish a never ending process of fragmentation of identity in the urban subject in the dystopian city. What does it mean that identity is fragmented? How is the reader able to encounter these aspects in the narration? In order to find answers to this a series of characteristics will be taken into account.

The first aspect that comes to mind about identity and its fragmentation is the fact that there seems to be no hope in the city; everything people were accustomed to, the plainest things have disappeared: "*But when hope disappears, when you find that you have given up hoping even for the possibility of hope, you tend to fill the empty spaces with dreams, little childlike thoughts and stories to keep yourself going*" (Auster 9) So, what appears as the greatest possible way to escape from this nightmare are dreams and memories, which have been mostly drawn upon according to Anna in her story.

Secondly, the idea that Auster submits about the non-fictional aspect of the novel comes to be hugely important in the field of this investigation. What Anna depicts as a character immerse in a city where there is nothing else but destruction and hopelessness, is of profound interest to the current state of societies in several places in the world. The "last things" make an obvious reference to: "*[...]a society which has not only ceased to invent and produce but which, for nearly two decades, has inflated the value of real property, objects of art, and fetishistic junk alike.*" (Washburn 167) It is a direct message to the consciousness of people, to leave aside banalities and to focus on what is really important:



personal relationships and its continuity in our lives in order to maintain the unity of the human condition.

Then, the significance that spaces have in the dystopian city is a pivotal factor in the fragmentation of the self. It is possible to notice throughout the novel that the city manipulates these spaces, the library, Isabel's apartment, Woburn House, thus creating an impossibility to stay at a steady place and this provokes, consequently, the manipulation of the minds of people as well. According to Anna, the city: "[...] *turns your thoughts inside out. It makes you want to live, and at the same time it tries to take your life away from you*" (Auster 2)

A key episode comes to mind when referring to the destruction the urban subject finds him/herself in the city. When Anna wakes up in Woburn House, after having escaped from Dujardin and his cousin, she realizes about the damage and the lack of memories about what had happened to her: "*Little by little, I am trying to tell you what happened. I can't help it if there are gaps in my memory. Certain events refuse to reappear, and no matter how hard I struggle, I am powerless to unearth them*" (Auster 125) This causes the impossibility to recall this episode in order to continue building her identity, because everything is mixed up in her head. Hence, the city provides no more facilities for the subject to reemerge from this meager condition; on the contrary, it creates situations in which it seems nearly impossible to find a way out.

In relation to destruction in the city, it can be said to diminish when Anna is at Woburn House. But it remains there, though to a lesser extent.

When dealing with the theme of destruction in the city and how it affects the unity of the urban subject, it is of vital importance to stop at the intertextual relation between the novel's epigraph: "*Not a great while ago, passing through the gate of dreams, I visited that region of the earth in which lies the famous City of Destruction*" from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Celestial Railroad*, and Auster's purpose when referring to this modern idea inserted in a completely postmodern world.

The first aspect that resembles the idea of modernity in the postmodern narrative is the great similarity of narrative styles both authors employed when depicting her characters. Hawthorne's narrative was highlighted by grim and dull descriptions, in which the characters absorbed that environment and transformed it into emotions with this same

status, although they were conscious when doing this. On the other hand, in Auster's *In the Country of Last Things*, Anna is portraying a fictional world embedded in grim physical and psychological environments, with the clear purpose of giving a message to the reader; its narrative voice wants to make the reader act and take part of what she is narrating about the world she is immerse in.

So, it is apparent that the author wanted the reader to keep in mind that the main character of the novel was sharing with Hawthorne's narrative the idea of gloominess, and that what made it more interesting of all was the fact that the characters were conscious to be delivering this image to the reader.

Now, returning to the main objective of this particular chapter, the intertextual relationship with Hawthorne continues to be pertinent to discuss some ideas. By quoting Hawthorne at the very beginning of the novel, Auster strengthens the notion of the vicious circle in which Anna has been caught, in which destruction will always be a constituent, from the beginning to the end of her days in the city, a cycle that will never finish, as she explains in the following passage: "*The end is only imaginary, a destination you invent to keep yourself going, but a point comes when you realize you will never get there*" (Auster 183)

The urban subject is able to transform its main feature of being caught in a world where the disappearance of things and persons where the greatest fact and where they would have to struggle against, and give it a turn to demonstrate that even though destruction of the city and its inextricable nature of imposing its willing on people would not be conclusive at all, because they can learn from the lessons the city wanted to give them.

One example of the capacity of the urban subject to stand up against the possible end is the episode when Anna realizes about the short messages Isabel wrote to her were not as simple as she had thought:

*"Most of the messages were quite simple –things like "thank you" or "water" or "my darling Anna"– but when I saw that frail, overlarge handwriting on the page and remembered how hard she had struggled to make the words clear, those simple messages no longer seemed very simple at all. A thousand things came rushing back to me at once. Without even stopping to think about it, I quietly tore*

*those pages from the notebook, folded them into a neat square, and put them back into the bag” (Auster 182)*

As Lerate states: *“This experience turns into an epiphany for Anna as it reveals to her and the reader that even in the depleted country of the last things, disinterested goodness, friendship and love –as exercised by Isabella, Sam or Victoria Woburn– are enough for sustaining one’s will to live endlessly. With this revelation Anna completes her painful initiation and acquires full growth”*. (Lerate 126) Thus, the vicious circle of degradation, disappearance and hopelessness in which Anna was immerse at the beginning, can be overcome by the minor but not least important presence of goodness and love in the novel.

To conclude, the dystopian characteristics which the city imposed on Anna, transform her in the literary archetype of strength in a place where the more we look at the end, the furthest it appears to be. Moreover, in this particular case Anna is capable of imposing her abilities on the city and neglecting the chance to become the city itself, without thinking or desiring positively, transforming into a “machine”, and thus leaving behind what seemed to trouble her at the beginning of her quest for place and therefore, of the maintenance of her identity as an urban subject.

## **Conclusion**

## Identity in the postmodern urban subject

When introducing the theme of identity connected to the dystopian aspect to be analyzed in this work, it was essential to have in mind the unstable condition of the main character of the novel. Anna Blume was lost not only in the city, but also in her emotions, longings, and deepest state of mind. The reason for this behavior was the physical environment which the city itself was confining urban subjects.

In this line of thought, the treatment of spaces came to be of pivotal importance in relation to the main purposes of this work, due to the fact that they are transforming the urban subjects in relation to the city's aims. Concerning this point Lefebvre's contributions about social spaces and language were of great significance to this work. It was possible to create an approach in which identity was not seen as one of the mostly discussed themes of the novel and give it a turn to transform it into the main objective of this study.

Gradually, Lefebvre's ideas came to reinforce the notion creating a social space that, by the way, created its own social sphere. And in this social sphere it was possible to trace the identity of the postmodern urban subject, who was struggling to maintain this condition in a world where there were no trails of persons or things.

Still concerning the theme of identity, Simmel's conceptions of the state of mind of the urban subject were useful in this field as well. The *blasé* attitude, which was concerned with the indifference of people towards certain situations in the city, allows us to interpret the behavior Anna was engaged in at times. In this way, Anna was imbued of different identities, since the places she was visiting in the city were also embedded of different qualities that in fact, constituted their identities.

Dealing with the issue of the fragmentation of the subject, identity was also present in the discussion of this topic. When starting to analyze Anna's incursion on the city, it was possible to discern the features of the instability of mind and actions due to the hellish condition of the doomed city. By reacting to certain stimuli the city presented to Anna, it was likely to lead to the inner fragmentation of the self and to its destruction along with the city. But these reactions which reinforced her identity were also the ones that made her survive to the doomed city and revive the hope that a future could be possible, in spite of being exceeded by the weight of the city's forces on the urban subject.

Throughout the novel the concept of storytelling was gaining significance due to the inevitable end Anna and the rest of the characters were going to experience. And it is by this process, storytelling that a plausible idea comes to light: Anna might have addressed this letter, trying to tell all her misadventures in the city to her former “self”, to the person she was before getting to the doomed city, in which the old good times were contributing to strengthen her identity.

The urban subject in the person of Anna Blume maintains the unification of the self, not to a lesser extent but in different terms only, although it seemed to lead to an imminent fragmentation. It portrays a major example of survival and partial recovery of the urban subject in this dystopian city which appeared to put an end to everything.

#### Auster’s ironic depiction of *In the Country of Last Things*

From the overall analyses of behavior, identity, desire and city-influenced processes Anna experiences as an urban subject in a dystopian sensibility, it is possible to draw as a conclusion the idea that despite the fact this novel is considered as a dystopia at the very beginning of the research, it has shown to be totally contrary to the dominant idea that gave rise to this study. It is essential for me to make clear I considered this novel as a dystopia and did not have any other idea about it, but when consciously reading it and going step by step I could be aware of the shocking similarities it presents with the current societies around the world. It is deeply rooted in the atrocious features of present situations.

Having complete awareness of this issue, it is possible now to project this idea in novels which might have undergone the same qualification Auster’s novel went through in the domain of dystopias. By saying this, I refer to the wide literary field that opens to us to analyze themes related to the notion of subjectivity, identity, and maintenance of the condition of humanity, mostly in postmodern literature which has centered its attention on analyzing social themes connected with literary issues. What I want to express through this idea is that the first interpretation and conception of an oeuvre might be analyzed further and get to richer and wider ideas about it, as was the particular case in this study.

Therefore, in the initial sections of this study particular attention was put to the introduction of the theme of humanity in the urban subject, and to the proper techniques concerned with survival in the dystopian city. The way in which the city manipulated people and the alternatives they found to elude the control imposed over them, gave multiple interpretations, thus making more prolific the results of this study.

In relation to the issue of the transformations of the self, of the “end with no end”, it is important to mention a couple of things. Firstly, the inceptive idea that the urban subject would inevitably suffer a fragmentation, gave a turn to the extent of producing the results obtained concerning the unification of this condition, and the overcoming of the difficulties imposed on the urban subject as well. Then, the treatment dystopias gave to the urban subject came to be pertinent in the field of producing destruction and disappearance of things and people, and hence, the inevitable fragmentation that in this case, was not effected, due to the rise of the urban subject against the dystopian condition.

The application of this model of the urban subject immerse in a dystopia, then, can be compared to the urban subject of present societies in the world. This idea is reinforced by Auster’s creation of a story with historical roots, in his own words. The meager conditions of people’s lives in the novel can be seen in people’s lives at some places nowadays, so Anna transforms into a model of survival and strength in literary terms, remarking her role as a storyteller and desire to preserve the idea of a better past in a world where not only things are disappearing; along with them people and memories are fading as well.

To conclude, and in relation to the epigraph of the novel, it is important to mention that in this literary domain, the intertextual feature of novels gives to this story another sense. Considering that it was a modern thought inserted in a postmodern sensibility, I can conclude by saying that the purpose of the author when referring to this was maintaining the validity of notions created in previous eras, and to give opportunities to react to this thought as well.

From this analysis, several other analyses in the field of sociological, urban and obviously, literary studies can be developed, due to the wide range it encompasses and to the philosophical conceptions of the urban subject as well.

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