

INVISIBLE ARMIES: PAUL AUSTER'S *INVISIBLE*

Copyright © 2009 by James Clark

Paul Auster's latest novel, *Invisible* (2009), makes headway, of sorts, with the author's dilemmatic sense of "fear" --- cultivated from out of his poetry of the 1970s. It does so, however, by way of a rendition of the "war" (another of the poetic focal points) between ascetics and sensualists, the specificity of which leaves much to be desired regarding that slipperiness of intent tending to make bathetic (hence ascetic) allies of the combatants. This deteriorative physics comes to be displayed by way of a figure. "Born," who, this being an Auster production, has been downloaded into a hosting centre the associative electricity of which can provide the narrative with its dramatic snap.

Born comes into view from the perspective of a protagonist, "Adam." Both, therefore, are engaged by the novel with respect to their initiating and inhabiting a world historical field of energy. Their first encounter at a party for college students like our guide, in 1967, is framed by accounts of the principal timbre of each sensibility: Adam "Walker" describes himself as markedly inert, discomfited by "the din... [and] presence of people I didn't know;"¹ and "Rudolf" Born seems to him to possess "physical strength," (ruddiness), and "steady brown eyes, the probing eyes of a man who seemed to be afraid of nothing."² Soon after introductions, Born contradicts Adam's apparently incontrovertible 60s and classical rational piety to the effect that "war" ("lovely [Vietnam] war" as he sneers, counting on dovetailing with the drift of the crowd that far at least) is self-evidentially vile.

"Never underestimate the importance of war. War is the purest, most vivid expression of the human soul."³

Auster's poetry evinces a quite remarkable comprehension of the initiatives (still-to-be-liberated from academic impertinence) of the long-gone but hardly dead, Heraclitus, a major insight of which was the indispensability of "warring" with one's own carnal relentment, and that of others.⁴ It is impossible to proceed well with that early collision between Walker and Born, in the absence of a steady bead upon Heraclitean efforts, and upon several other *invisible* cards in Auster's deck. One such clouded trope is the implication of "Born" with Max Born (1882-1970), a major exponent of quantum dynamics and its probabilistic concomitants which installed an obviation upon deterministic certitude, and drew from Albert Einstein the fruitless insistence, "God does not throw dice." Somewhat paradoxically, Born was a pacifist, a Jewish convert to Lutheranism and an academic mole. But, then, the Born in the novel is also a professor, on a one-year contract at the School for International Affairs at *Columbia* University, where Adam largely confines his discoveries to the minutiae of the sophomore program of English Lit. As such, he is quick to give what he would consider point to his riposte against Born's not fitting in, by citing Dante's consigning one Bertran de Born to the Inferno, for having an enthusiasm for battlefield atrocities. Referring to Columbia as "a dreary place,"⁵ Born describes his work there as teaching "Disaster" ---in the first sense, the disaster of French colonialism, but, closer to his real energies, disaster related to another of the tools up Auster's sleeve, namely, the Pandora's Box in the form of an atom bomb hidden in a leather and metal case which drives the action of the film noir, *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955).⁶ In the latter, a Dr. Soborin (So-Born), having stolen the material for the Russians, feels disaster up-close by way of being shot by his equally ambitious girl friend who precipitates the bomb's blowing away his Malibu beach house and all of the City of Angels. His misplaying the innovation implicit in his stolen loot speaks very directly to the Disaster concerns of the party-goer being demonized by the sophomore Adam, who fancies himself headed for a career as a "poet." There are other extremely elusive factors speaking to what he really is and will remain. An illuminative thread flashes out by means of Born's party companion, "Margot," like him a citizen of France, heavily made-up, dressed all in black and consumed with *ennui*. In view of her coming into Adam's range within the constellation just described, she functions here as

consort to a link with Soborin, namely, the private investigator, Mike Hammer (who also has a stake in successfully opening Pandora's Box of primal possibilities). A woman of her demeanor becomes ensnared in a dispiriting love affair with a volatile "Michel," roughly coinciding with Born's presence,⁷ in the films by Jacques Demy (1931-1990), *Lola* (1961), and its sequel, *The Model Shop* (1969). With this latter, virtually unseen, invisible presentation, there comes to light the test zone whereby the paragons spewing from Adam, as supposedly so closely allied to ultimate power as to slot acquaintances into Dantes' *Inferno* (as churning away in his *Divina Commedia*), would undergo unexpected diminishment. Following closely upon his surefire display of pacifist bona fides, Walker discloses, "I'd rather go to jail than fight in Vietnam,"⁸ and thereby he proceeds with invisible kinship to the draft-averse Berkeley-grad stalker ("George Matthews") of a world-weary Lola, and, as such, a letdown from qualities evinced by the unschooled Mike of the noir in his pursuit of a viable purchase upon the dangerous mysteries of Pandora's Box.

Whereas the locale where George would continuously miss the point with Lola was a dingy Los Angeles, the misadventure for Adam, onetime resident with his parents in Westfield, N.J., would begin in earnest at The West End Bar, "a dingy, cavernous hole."⁹ There he bumps into Born, and although he has been impressed to the effect that the latter "could possibly lead to trouble," because he "wasn't good,"¹⁰ in fact that "to contend that war is the purist expression of the human soul automatically excludes you from the realm of goodness,"¹¹ he jumps at the chance to edit an arts magazine that the bad man would finance. This startling windfall befalling an entity (now tinged with the fatuousness of Demy's "George") happy to acknowledge that he is not yet "out in the world,"¹² and yet never imagining such childishness could jeopardize his acuity apropos of "the realm of goodness," brings to mind the prototype "Michel" of *Kiss Me Deadly* who is presented with a lovely sports car by his adversary, Soberin, a handout he is acute enough to see through to its payload of two accelerator-linked bombs. A.I. Bezzerides, the screenwriter of *Kiss Me Deadly*, had in mind a protagonist adult to the point of understanding personal historical conflict as a deadly challenge, a mystery, a problematic state of affairs. Here it suits Auster to go with a little prig, a smug, clannish, smart-ass from Jersey (like Fanshawe in *The Locked Room*), to display a death-spiral elicited by a snare into volcanic resentment toward those having the temerity to eschew "the realm of goodness."

Along with the scrutiny toward Adam and where he's coming from, there is an equally unsparing illumination of Born's not being up to the level of difficulty implicit in Heraclitean war. In the run-up to the launch of what would be a bright little bombshell, Born recognizes the blood lust of his namesake as the action of a "revolting...madman"¹³ and then goes on to cruel goading of Adam into "fucking" Margot.¹⁴ After an interlude, due to Born's having to deal with an emergency in Paris (during which Walker does make some moves on Margot, leaving him feeling, "I had created a mess for myself, and coward that I probably was, I would have preferred to hide under my bed than to have to face either one of them"¹⁵), Born cuts a nice cheque for the boy and en route to a celebratory dinner—at a *Cuban* restaurant—they are confronted by a young, black and armed mugger and Born stabs him. Adam wants to get the poor victim to a hospital; Born does not.¹⁶ Adam "turns on his heels," does what he understands to be his duty, tears up the cheque (now convinced it had to do with a "filthy magazine"¹⁷) and learns from the newspaper that "the body of eighteen-year-old Cedric Williams had been discovered in Riverside Park with over a dozen knife wounds gouged into his chest and stomach."¹⁸

That first of two principal episodes of the narrative brings to an explosive point the crosscurrent as to ascetic and sensualist intent. Born, like Mike Hammer, singularly indifferent toward the well-being of those attempting to kill him, has erupted into a frenzy of resentful overkill as caught up in an ascetic, totalitarian, non-problematic moment of seeking to wipe out the whole apparatus of impudent dysfunctionality (including that cultist humanitarianism for which creatures like *Williams* constitute blue-chip agents of vengeance [booby-traps] toward those *willing* to laugh¹⁹). Born's spillover is presented as follows:

“Do you want to spend the next three years of your life in court?... Fine. Have it your own way. We’ll pretend to be good little Boy Scouts, and I’ll sit here with this piece of garbage and wait for you to come back. Is that what you want? How stupid do you think I am, Walker?”²⁰

Born threatens to use the knife on Adam if he informs on him to the police; Adam hesitates, allowing Born to flee the country; and the pacifist becomes edifyingly obsessed with redeeming himself by way of vigilante persecution of that avatar of Disaster. “*He had shown me something about myself that filled me with revulsion.*”²¹ George’s father had remarked, “That sounds like cowardice, George,” when the latter demurred about going to Vietnam. Demy was struck by cowardice in face of a bigger war than that.

Who do you suppose is the old college friend of Adam (a friend who is now a celebrated writer) enlisted by him (now terminally ill) to oversee his account of the clash with Born, forty years after the trauma? “Dear *Jim*”²² (Jacquot, Jacques) Freeman, pulling all the traces together like a super-magnet, is now on the spot to see that the ball goes across the goal-line. He’s faced with a dying activist-lawyer in Oakland (having been married to a black woman named *Sandra Williams*), who declares, “this sense of justice is what burns most brightly in me” and so, “It would be impossible to overstate how terribly this grieved me, has continued to grieve me. Justice betrayed.”²³ Although the saga to the point where we stand here has been implicated in researches by Demy that leave Adam at the fig-leaf stage (precisely where Auster, demonstrably—but invisibly—a connoisseur of the subtleties of the films, wants to take him—but *not simply leave him*), there will be scope in the sequel, produced as death closed in, to edit the lawyer’s sketchy text along regions even more thoroughly beyond the protagonist, as made apparent by this passage of Walker’s letter to Jim:

“...I think it [the lawyering] started that night in 1967 when I saw Born stab Cedric Williams in the belly—and then, after I had run off to call for an ambulance, carry him into the park and murder him. For no reason, no reason whatsoever, and then, even worse, for him to have gotten away with it, to have skipped the country and never to have been judged for his crime.”²⁴

Jim’s first move in the revamp of the sophomoric bad trip, snagged at a second chapter due to *fear* in face of “a wall of struggle and uncertainty,”²⁵ consisted of characteristic generosity and delicacy to a fault— “who can blame a twenty-year-old boy for losing his bearings in the blur of sophistication and depravity that surrounds a person like Born?”²⁶ And then there was characteristic ruthlessness (wrapped in conciliatory charm) --- “...fear is what drives us to take risks and extend ourselves beyond our normal limits, and any writer who feels he is standing on safe ground is unlikely to produce anything of value”²⁷— along with a writer’s workshop standby, sugar-coating professional innovative energies Adam would have had no hope digesting— “more often than not the condition of being stuck arises from a flaw in the writer’s thinking— i.e., he doesn’t fully understand what he is trying to say or, more subtly, he has taken a wrong approach to his subject... By writing in the first person I had smothered myself and made myself *invisible* [my italics]... I needed to separate myself from myself... and therefore I... began writing in the third person.”²⁸

Having tempered Walker’s miasma to a point of discharging the next stage of self-justification, Jacques (standing in for Auster, just as Fred Astaire served in the *Trilogy*) gives us a screening of the *Summer* moment, after the first chapter’s wintry *Spring*. Correspondence prior to the lights going out entails a proposed get-together in Oakland on the twenty-fifth. Now that a Jim is guiding us, that twosome on that date playfully touches upon his *Trois Places pour le Vingt-Six (Three for the Twenty-Sixth)*, a film about father-daughter incest arising from stultified carnality always in need of a jump-start. “Oakland” thereby hearkens to the bucolic setting of *Peau d’Ane (Donkey Skin)*, also driven by that incestuous possibility. The show proceeds in the spirit thus prepared. Days after the onset of “justice betrayed,” Adam the pacifist feels compelled to fight for Israel in what turned out to be a Six Day War. Noting that he was never fond of Zionism,²⁹ he fails, as always, to notice that his fondness for Jewish asceticism trumps every other possibility, especially coherence, especially that coherence of what Matthew Arnold called “Hebraism” and “Hellenism,” the possible attainment to which he covered with the phrase, “sweetness

and light.” Born has mocked his sterling suburban high-school baseball background, in combination with great grades and shunning drugs, with the rubric, *mens sana in corpore sano* (healthy mind, healthy body).³⁰ At his summer job as a “page” (placing him and his way with words far from the summit of the feudal fantasy [*Peau d’Ane*] forming the infrastructure here) at Columbia’s “Butler” Library (each of the terms of its architect’s name, “James Gamble Rogers,” mocking his timorousness--- “George” was an Architecture grad--- [the “Rogers” being an instalment of an ongoing chord in Auster’s novels regarding Ginger Rogers, a marvel of light-hearted grace when in the company of Fred Astaire but who in later years became very overweight--- hence the reference to the edifice’s “bulk and grandeur”³¹]), he would while away the slow afternoons by dreaming up erotic adventures (“You fuck Hedy Lamarr. You fuck Ingrid Bergman. You fuck Gene Tierney”³²) which would end without poetry (“...you leave your desk, dash down the corridor to the men’s room, and wank into the toilet”³³)

Adam’s sister, “Gwyn”--- in “Nell Gwynn” also eliciting missing the boat with royalty, and recalling “Geneviève” in *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*--- stayed with him at his place that summer in anticipation of beginning graduate studies at Columbia in the Fall while Adam did a Junior Year Abroad in Paris. Both siblings have been described, by Jim, as looking like matinee idols.³⁴ They have a matinee of sorts going, apropos of a brother who drowned as a young child (at “Echo Lake”), inasmuch as every year on the boy’s birthday, July *twenty-sixth*, they enact an elaborate ritual of remembrance (involving *three places* set) in hopes of offsetting his vanishing altogether. (During this summer, at work, when not contemplating starlets, Walker feels “an insistent surge of happiness” regarding the Puritan securements of Milton’s poetry;³⁵ and, one evening with Gwyn, he dips into the Lutheranism of filmmaker Carl Dreyer, in the form of his 1955 work, *The Word* [very unlike another film from that year, *Kiss Me Deadly*], whereby a scene of the resurrection of a dead farm woman who has died in childbirth causes him to cry and to opine, with Demy’s help, “You felt you were watching yourself rise from the dead. Over the next two weeks, your step gradually becomes less heavy.”³⁶) At the finish of the 1967 version of *Bring Back Andy* (that year Jacques brought Gene Kelly back to France to play the part of Andy Miller, a less than scintillating pianist, in *The Young Girls of Rochefort*)—during which Gwyn tells Adam he looks like, severally, a Mormon, an accountant, a math student or a “wannabe astronaut,” and he insists he must look like “a civil rights worker in the South”³⁷—Gwyn breaks down due to no longer being able to sustain the childish fantasy, and in subsequent conversation defines real love as endowed with measure, “when you get as much pleasure from giving pleasure as from receiving it.”³⁸ Thinking to himself, “love is not a moral issue,”³⁹ having, apparently nothing to do with meeting challenges of measure, equilibrium, composure, the deracinated do-gooder feels it’s time to revisit with Gwyn their secret romp (“grand experiment”) as adolescents.

“There are no rules anymore. The grand experiment was a one-time-only event, but now that you are both past twenty, the strictures of your adolescent frolic no longer hold, and you go on having sex with each other everyday, for the next thirty-four days, right up to the day you leave for Paris.”⁴⁰

The crude self-absorption of their love-making—including Adam’s smug relishing the trophy she, who made “men stop dead in their tracks to stare at her as she walks past them on the streets,”⁴¹ has become--- is not far removed from another pair of glamorous lovers, the prince and princess in *Peau d’Ane*, who chant, “What will we do with so much happiness? We’ll do what’s forbidden!” and gobble sweets like the grotesque escapists they are, benefitting *there* all the while from Jacques’s supernal—though perhaps not well-prepared—sanguinity.

It is for the presentation of the remainder of the saga, primed in equal measures by Demy and Auster, to determine how well “Freeman” can catalyze Demy’s bemused contentment. From the perspective of a free man, there would have to be a reckoning with a figure, however fortuitously positioned and self-promotionally adept, who could abide with, “Fuck me, Adam. For an entire month you are the captive of that word, the willing prisoner of that word, the embodiment of that word.”⁴² Graceful and inclusive embodiment being what his researches are about (and *Kiss Me Deadly* being its chosen mathematics),

Jim's heartfelt remark, on receipt of the deceased Walker's sketches for his last chapter, namely, "as long as the words of that letter were still before my eyes, it would be as if he had been resurrected, as if he had been momentarily brought back to life in the words he had written to me"⁴³ would be subject to quite drastic modification. So, too, there would be an invisible caveat to, "Despite my editorial involvement with the text, in the deepest, truest sense of what it means to tell a story, every word of *Fall* was written by Walker himself."⁴⁴

Fall completes Adam's self-incrimination. In doing so, it shifts the focus of the last *two* chapters upon Born. As screen written by Jacques, the final and most vicious clash between these enemies comes to light under the auspices of his most gentle and delicately detailed film, which happened to be his debut, namely, *Lola*. After more banal activities, now in Paris, with an easily found Margot, who, like him, feels, "Sex is the lord and the redeemer, the only salvation on earth," and moreover "that if she couldn't have sex she'd probably kill herself to escape the boredom and monotony of being trapped inside her own skin,"⁴⁵ and pondering the lethal status of incomprehensible facticity⁴⁶ he comes face to face with Born, who denies having stabbed Williams more than once.⁴⁷ Born invites him to meet his fiancée, Hélène, and her daughter, Cécile, and hands over his card displaying "All my coordinates."⁴⁸ Adam, caring little about inclusive coordination but finding vengeance as diverting as sex, daydreams about putting his adversary through "the expense and humiliation of a trial,"⁴⁹ and then goes on to calculate "a diabolical idea, an idea so cruel and underhanded that he is stunned by the mere fact that he is capable of imagining such a thing."⁵⁰ Despite having amply demonstrated an imagination very coordinated toward squalid and venomous outcomes, especially pertaining to those not ardently subscribing to conventional rationality (in particular conventional humanitarianism), he checks in (by way of Jacques's satiric service) with reflexive hypocrisy to the effect, "Walker is both thrilled and disgusted with himself. He has never been a vengeful person, has never actively sought to hurt anyone, but Born is in a different category, Born is a killer, Born deserves to be punished, and for the first time in his life Walker is out for blood."⁵¹ (The final chapter, *Winter*, entirely scripted by Jim, provides, retrospectively, a detailed delineation of the register of continuous vengeance crucial for an ascetic opportunist like Adam.) Although it has been Born's drunken ranting at the early contretemps which most obviously provides instances of resentment, a master of dark comedy of manners (intent) like Demy would draw upon Walker's self-righteous moralism and its wellspring of hysterically compensatory cowardice (prominently including righteous indignation) to render the latter in a remarkably harsh light, in no way mitigated by some marvellous humor.

"The plan calls for a practiced liar, a social acrobat skilled in the fine art of duplicity, and since Walker is neither one of those things, he knows he is the worst man for the job he has given himself."⁵²

Having tweaked Walker's tale of pedestrian indignation to yield a saga of crabbed resentment in its pertaining to the topspin of sensual buoyancy salient in many and implicit in all of his works, Jim increases the volume of the *Kiss Me Deadly* vein, in order to direct attention to the situation of major change at the heart of the war between Adam and Born as emergent from a Pandora's Box. The "plan" is right out of Mike and Velda's divorce service (leading Mike to admit to the Feds, "Alright, I'm a real stinker"). Walker, as Mike-manqué-George, plans to weasel his way into the ménage of Born, Cécile and Hélène "Juin" (that month of domestic bliss), and from there expose the assassin of the now nearly sainted Williams, thereby scuttling the wedding plans. "Born rejected. Born humiliated. Born crumpled up in misery."⁵³

La famille Juin recognizably touches upon *la famille Desnoyers* (*noyer* meaning, "drowning"), whose stresses and graces touch upon the painful comedy of Lola-Cécile, in the presence of Hélène, whom Adam perceives as carrying herself "with considerable poise and assurance—a question of style, perhaps, or else the product of some arcane Gallic wisdom concerning the nature of femininity."⁵⁴ A very telling contrast to that overtone comes by way of Cécile. In *Lola*, she is a fourteen-year-old, blithely countering her mother's bourgeois (considerate, overmatched and dignified) regime of refinement with sci-fi comics, a harmless fling with an American sailor (one of Lola's clients) by way of midway rides (bumper cars)

and a vague aspiration to be a “dancer.” (The older Cécile-Lola calls herself a dancer.) Cécile Juin is an eighteen-year-old classics scholar, plodding and unlovely, showing soupçons of impish humor and endeavor with musicality, but on a fast-track into academic erudition. Adam has no trouble duping them and in time pulls off the damnation of Born, which leaves the women incredulous, confused and angry (Cécile spits in his face). Born (like Mike’s well-connected adversaries in the LAPD) has him deported on a trumped-up Hash bust (the flics find “a large brick wrapped in aluminum foil”⁵⁵), and the skirmish is over.

But not the war. In the course of the final charge, Hélène’s “hard work” (Walker’s phrase) as a speech pathologist (regarding those suffering language deficiencies) comes to light in terms of language being “in some sense a physical property of human beings, which proves that the old mind-body duality is so much nonsense, doesn’t it? Adieu Descartes. The mind and the body are one;”⁵⁶ Walker writes a line he’s proud of--- “*never nothing but the dream of nothing/ never anything but the dream of all;*”⁵⁷ he considers a forgotten verse from Ecclesiastes, which “comes roaring into his consciousness. *And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly;*”⁵⁸ he pleads for his fix from Margot, which endows him the stature of George--- “‘I’m dying to see you... I’m going to miss you...’ ‘Get a grip on yourself, little man;’”⁵⁹ and Born, himself (like Nietzsche) never expert at self-control, particularly as pertaining to resentment, gives him a glimpse of why Pandora’s Box needs special care--- “I thought we had an understanding, and now you turn around and stab me in the back. Just like a Jew. Just like the stinking Jew you are, with your bogus Anglo-Saxon name and your filthy little mouth.”⁶⁰

There is about this more active Demy treatment of the enmity a special fluency the first wafts of which take up his quite bootless pep talk to the populist lawyer on the subject of eschewal of “safe ground,” of platitudes sure to win the approval of, be advantageous in the sphere of popular opinion. There is about the champion of justice’s campaign to demoralize Born the workings of another “sure man,” General William Tecumseh Sherman (1820-1891), author of the scorched earth campaign of the righteous feds in the American Civil War upon those rebelling against “the realm of goodness.”⁶¹ His most lurid mission taking place in *Georgia*, Sherman would, in the purview of this narrative, be about making sure that the realm of George not succumb to insufferable (as against decorative) contrarian motives. (Demy’s access to useful Americana surfaces in *Baie des Anges*, where the doomed Jackie imagines she sees “Sioux” in the stains of the hotel room ceiling.) Such a dusting of totalitarian war acts as an invisible compass directing us into Born’s taking up the mantle of Mike Hammer, in the fourth and final chapter, *Winter*.

Jim begins his run to a uniquely inflected finish by putting out some production info. Gwyn (married to an architect, of course) has denied there were any unorthodox moves between her and Adam⁶² but wants the book to go ahead--- since it “brought my brother back to me in ways I hadn’t expected, in ways that utterly surprised me.”⁶³ That is to say, as a self-aggrandizing stalwart of family values (she and Adam having, as high-school students, penned a *King Ubu the Second* in homage to Alfred Jarry’s assault upon excessive appetites), she would be pleased to see the saga of her brother’s mawkishness and her own “daring,” as long as Jim changed all the names--- “to protect the innocent” is her entitlement reflexive way of regarding it--- and claimed the book as his own invention. Then she could, like Blue-boy Orr in *Oracle Night*, run with a “nostalgic nihilism,” which she would have already resorted to, but without the invisible spice the celebrated story of the blowhard could furnish. Jacques, being an advanced and subtle and gentle investigator of such polished viciousness by the status quo (remark his Geneviève’s velvet calculations), has in fact spread out a set of contrived names tracing to his films and beyond, iridescent with the invisible firestorm of world history. And so he gets down to business about giving the clandestine effort a fitting sendoff. Of the Paris players, he is able to locate only Cécile, not surprisingly an academic (linked to something called the “National Center for Scientific Research” by reason of her being an expert regarding the bourgeoisie perfidy emanating from the novels of Balzac).

If eighteen-year-old Cécile was a comedown from the lightly observed Cécile Desnoyers of *Lola*, fifty-eight-year-old Cécile nearly manages to turn herself into a statistic, a statistic like that befalling all of General Sherman’s foot soldiers. “I am a silly old woman, and my emotions tend to run away with me.”⁶⁴ Her periods have stopped and she grieves, “It’s... about losing my place as a woman, of being expelled from the ranks of femininity. For forty years, I was proud to bleed. I bore up under *the curse* with the

happy knowledge that I was sharing an experience with every other woman on the planet.”⁶⁵ They meet at Jim’s hotel, on the “rue Dauphine,” a major artery on the Left Bank, linked to the “Pont Neuf,” to, that is, a portal from antiquity to innovation. More specifically damning (without the extortive apparatus of Dante’s *Inferno*) is the street name’s cohering with “Delphine,” the aspiring dancer in *The young Girls of Rochefort*, and the actress, Delphine Syrig, whose dash into a dark night concludes *Last Year at Marienbad* on a note of loving audacity, and whose fairy godmother role in *Peau d’Ane* includes, over and above its unsuccessful struggle with self-serving vanity, the line, “Life is not as easy as you think.” Cécile admits to being “devastated” by news of the death of Adam,⁶⁶ “perfect Adam,”⁶⁷ clearly a soulmate--- a comrade-in-arms--- in contrast to Born, whose bitter arguments (displays of frightening anger) with her during the 1968 uprising (where she, true to form, played the part of “a bright-eyed revolutionary”) led her mother to decide against marrying him.

Cécile provides Jacques with a diary describing her final skirmish with Born, in 2002; and that final glimpse of that Mike’s efforts comprises the “not easy” denouement of this Auster-Demy collaboration. She has described herself as “the most patient person in the world”⁶⁸ and as also liking to think of herself “as a person who doesn’t bear grudges.”⁶⁹ That the species of patience and resentment-eschewal she knows are rather limited constitutes one aspect of the subtly beautiful revelation Demy has in store for us here. In an exchange of letters, Born has invited her to visit him at his home on a remote island off the northern coast of South America, and she, admitting to feeling burned out most of the time, and therefore needing “to shake things up for myself, to breathe new air,”⁷⁰ accepts. Born has described his place of “seclusion” as “quite primitive”⁷¹ and the trek into his precincts nearly kills the sedentary ascetic who declares, “...my body is not cut out for exertions of this sort.”⁷² Another instance of unpropitious carnality jumps out at us in the description of the seventy-one-year-old Born’s startling girth. “...a truckload of excess poundage... It is a great medicine ball of a stomach now...”⁷³ In *A Slightly Pregnant Man* (1973), Marco, in the shadows of Mike’s doings with Pandora’s Box, is found by his family doctor to be pregnant, and the film savors the synchronized sensitivities of him and his Montparnasse friends as they readily subscribe to the lunacy. Though she may not reside in that long-standing quartier of cool, Cécile quickly demonstrates similarly global mannerisms. “I don’t like being waited on by servants. It offends me somehow...three black people working for two white people... unpleasant echoes of the colonial past. How to get rid of this feeling of shame?”⁷⁴

Born proposes to her, and her rebuff opens a course of contretemps making clear, despite his evasiveness, that he had been employed in counter-intelligence on behalf of the French government, thereby thwarting not only Adam but, as later disclosed, Cécile’s father (in a Soberin-like booby-trapping of his car). He comes to his most heartfelt hopes for her in proposing she help him write a book about his efforts. During the next dinner, he lapses into typically harsh cynicism about power politics, veering toward white supremacy and apocalyptic despair about the environment.⁷⁵ The next day he apologizes, claiming not to believe his own proclamations. Swerving all over the highway, he proposes a fictional account based on his exploits. “The true story can never be published. There are too many secrets, too many bits of dirty business to expose, too many deaths to account for.”⁷⁶ (Most directly he is referring to his work about specific political conflicts. Demy, and Auster, would want us to be struck by the putrefaction of all of world history and those billions with a vested interest (a violent interest) in its perdurance. As he warms to the glamor of novelistic excitements, our shaky Mike (even shakier than the “stinker” prototype) envisions a “Mr. X” as leading a *triple* life—academic; anti-Communist and pro-Communist (like Soberin). “Mr. X is a mole.”⁷⁷ But Mike isn’t. There is about the latter no program of ascetic compromise of sensualist priorities for financial advantage. (“...he’s earning more than twice as much as he would if he worked for just one side,”⁷⁸ that being Mike’s day-job of double incrimination in divorce proceedings; but the extracurricular work he really cares about is more about self-mastery than political one-upmanship.) A mole under carnal pressure would fly off the handle and blurt out to his literary “partner” a supposedly hot-ticket vignette of destroying a close friend who sees through his humanitarian scheming, a figure who happens to be her father. Cécile is revolted, and the nemesis of Walker’s fatuousness loses his grip as revoltingly as this—“Stop it Cécile. We’re just having a little fun.”⁷⁹

From out of the shambles of Born's bid for dynamic coherence (leaving him obsessed with the fireball tropical sunsets, and what went wrong on the island whose polyglot history establishes it as a "*laboratory of human possibilities*," exploding "rigid preconceived ideas about race"⁸⁰), he reached out to two enemies to his intent, Adam and Cécile, for the sake of generating some historical traction in the context of Heraclitean war. Though those engagements suffered shortfalls more punishing than that befalling the delinquency of the films,⁸¹ they did push the matter of departing a heritage-become-revolting to new levels of problematicness. Jim has invested instances of the joyous topspin to *Lola* and *The Young Girls of Rochefort* in an effort to lend to a dead end some of the lustre he knows to be within reach. His final touch on this behalf comes during Cécile's angry trek out of Born's Devil's Island. She hears a rhythmically haunting musical refrain (recalling that provided by Michel Legrand in the movies touched upon, and also recalling Adam's admitting to "no aptitude for music, in face of a vigorous effort by Cécile to play a "two-part invention by Bach"⁸²) produced by fifty or sixty black men and women breaking down stones with hammers and chisels, as in a chain gang, but here it was an industry, an industry producing a "stately harmony"⁸³ in the course of turning coagulative phenomena ("stone" being a trope of Auster's poems in the form of a source of "fear") to highway wherewithal. Though Born was a careless workman, he and others with daring and discernment would, Jacques wants to maintain, contribute to a strange and difficult headway. Even Cécile has to say, "That sound will always be with me."⁸⁴

The macabre intermittency of resolve so salient in the actions of Born and the paucity, though measurability, of resolve in Cécile suggest modes of interpersonal traction at the interstices of turbulent intent. Having so complete a fraud as Adam in the foreground for so much of the manoeuvring weights the novel's questioning in deference to those monolithic stone walls of distemper endowing the works of Demy and Auster with their characteristic despair (their predilection for clandestine, invisible efforts). But Jacques has chosen to put on display in the last few frames of this initiative the delicate suspense a less than totally sealed off sensibility can maintain, and hence the breath of "new air" Cécile had longed for.

This being a work deriving from the inclusive generosity of Demy as affixed to the adamant exclusivity of Auster's poetics of fear, that final image of liberated slaves toiling to remarkable effect in a paradisaical inferno—Cécile remarks that the flowers along her bitter escape route were "beautiful things whose *names* [my italics] were unknown to me. Burning red. Burning yellow. Burning blue"⁸⁵—posits the red, yellow and blue Walker as redeemed by his charitable activities. Walker, the bookish Cromwellian, whose wordsmithing hovers, to no reflective effect, around the preparations of Heraclitus, would, in the eyes of the Gallic sprite, Jim, little Jacques, come to register hopefulness about sterile prissiness giving new life to brutalized earthiness. In the absence of venture into rhythms of intent covering wildness *and* civilization, this project trades in the provocations of getting away with murder. But here the playful spirit of Demy introduces a quietly (invisible) discriminatory rejoinder (a "fractious, stately harmony"⁸⁶) of real weight to the litany of indispensable obsolescence.

ENDNOTES

¹ Paul Auster, *Invisible* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2009), p. 4. Adam's last name sets in relief the Heraclitean project as to dynamics, also salient in the penchant for walks by Quinn in *City of Glass* and Orr in *Oracle Night*.

² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴ For detailed exposition of Heraclitean thought and Auster's engagement of it, see James Clark, *Parallel Lives and the Art of Convergence* (Toronto: Springtime Publishers, 2009).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁶ Apropos of which, Adam indulges in this bit of fatalist (Old Testament) avoidance of the cost of dynamics--- "...that invisible cauldron of self-regard and ambition that simmers and burns in each one of us" (p.15) --- on admitting that Born's acquaintanceship "stoked the fires of my vanity" (*Ibid.*). See Clark, *op. cit.*, for the factor of *Kiss Me Deadly* in Auster's reckoning.

⁷ He is always seen in a white suit and with shaggy hair “cut shorter than the hair of most men at the time” (Auster, op. cit., p.5), namely, the time of the Beatles and their self-evident, populist cogency.

⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

¹¹ Ibid. Cf. Auster’s *The Locked Room* (New York, 1986), where an illiterate deckhand is overly sure that an abrasive character in some level of contact with Heraclitean synthesis is merely about “crazy shit” (p. 275).

¹² Auster, op. cit., p. 17.

¹³ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 37ff.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 65ff.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Demy’s epigraph to *Lola* reads, “Cry who can/Laugh who will.” Adam finds himself “sobbing” on returning home (Ibid., p. 66).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 79.

²² Ibid., p. 76.

²³ Ibid., p. 84.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ In his poetry Auster has defined a wall comprising those who are not prepared to supersede the paragons of world history.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 88f.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 89.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 94.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

³¹ Ibid., p. 98.

³² Ibid., p. 105.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 78.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 100.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 135.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 137.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 143.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 144.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 145f.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 147.

⁴² Ibid., p. 150.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 165.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 166. Jim heard from Adam’s stepdaughter that, “Dad had a lot of friends, a ton of friends,” (Ibid., p. 160) so fitting for an expert in quantitative calculus.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 181. This episode is distinctive in explicitly (though uncomprehendingly) linking Walker’s ascetic torpor to a drug-abuse function of love-making: “Even in the grip of a most crushing despair, he is mad for sex” (Ibid.).

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 182.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 184ff.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 187.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 188.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Adam would be Einstein to Born’s Born, as indicated by the choice of classical rational gamesmanship, in, “he is determined to go on playing *cards* [my italics] with the devil” (Ibid., p. 191).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., p. 188.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 191.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 192.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 240f.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 197.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 225.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 201

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 223-225.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 238f.

⁶¹ The little general is quartered at the soon-to-be-razed *Hotel du Sud*. Jim's divisions, for his realization of Walker's rough, *self-dramatizing* notes, read as follows. "As Walker leaves [Born, at their reacquaintance], the sun shoots across the sky and explodes into a hundred thousand splinters of molten light. Every building in Paris bursts into flame. End of Act I. Curtain" (Ibid., p. 187). "In every part of Paris, people are jumping out of windows. The metro is flooded with human excrement. The dead are crawling from their graves. End of Act II. Curtain" (Ibid., p. 122).

⁶² "I'm a married woman, Jim. I have two daughters and three grandchildren, dozens of relatives, hundreds of friends, a stepniece I'm very fond of, and it would be a crime to publish the book as it stands now. Agreed?" (Ibid., p. 257).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 262

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 281.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 262.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 267.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 232.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 276.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 281.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 277.

⁷² Ibid., p. 285.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 286f.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.288.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 300.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 301.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 302.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 303.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 305.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 280.

⁸¹ "Born's exile makes most ironic his long-ago remark to Adam that Margot believes you're too good for this world, and because of that, the world will eventually crush you" (Ibid., p. 17).

⁸² Ibid., pp. 220f.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 307.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 308.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 306.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 307.

For more commentary about the novels of Paul Auster, visit: www.springtimepublishers.com