Ben-Meir, Ilan

Hall of Mirrors:
The Book of Illusions and *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*

"Belike this show imports the argument of the play" – Hamlet III.ii

The Inner Life of Martin Frost made its first public appearance in Paul Auster's *The Book of Illusions*, published in 2002, as the innermost *mise-en-abyme* in that novel's intricate system of books within books and stories within stories. There, it took the form of a forty-one minute short film, described almost shot by shot over the course of twenty-one pages. Then, in 2007, it enjoyed an afterlife of sorts as *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, a feature-length film written and directed by Auster, whose first forty-one minutes closely (though not quite perfectly) bring into being the film -- until then only imaginary – described in Auster's novel. Auster's film struggles to stand on its own as a work of art, but provides a powerful extension of the rhetoric and themes of *The Book of Illusions*. If understood as an extension of *The Book of Illusions*' concerns with the processes of creativity, and the creative nature of perception, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* lends new depth and complexity to the novel from which it sprung.

Early in *The Book of Illusions*, Auster ventriloquizes David Zimmer, the novel's narrator and protagonist, in order to present the theoretical framework central to his novel's operation. Zimmer, by his own declaration, is a man of words. Early in *The Book of Illusions*, he announces: "I wasn't a film person. I had started teaching literature as a graduate student in my mid-twenties, and since then all my work had been connected to books, language, the written word … It wasn't that I had anything against the movies, but … [n]o matter how powerful the images sometimes were, they never satisfied me as powerfully as words did" (13-14). While he acknowledges the similarities between literature and film, noting that "cinema was a visual

language, a way of telling stories by projecting images onto a two-dimensional screen" (14), he indicts the use of sound and color, arguing that their "addition … had created the illusion of a third dimension." He prefers the alienating features of old films, arguing that "these were obstacles, and they made viewing difficult for us, but they also relieved the images of the burden of representation. They stood between us and the film, and therefore we no longer had to pretend that we were looking at the real world. The flat screen was the world, and it existed in two dimensions. The third dimension was in our head" (15). In films created after the silent era, he maintains, "too much was given … not enough was left to the viewer's imagination, and the paradox was that the closer movies came to simulating reality, the worse they failed at representing the world, which is in us as much as around us" (14).

These comments set the stage for *The Book of Illusions*. By way of Zimmer, Auster gives the reader an understanding of perception that renders it as a participatory, and meaningfully creative, act; "illusion" is the mistaken belief that our experience of reality is simply an act of passive perception, unaided by the creative interpolations of our individual subjectivities. He draws an analogy between the verbal language of literature and the visual language of silent film, two modes of representation that require the conscious engagement of the imagination to "fill in" the gaps between what they present and what they represent, and further draws a comparison between this engagement and the act of perception itself. Zimmer is resistant to post-silent film because it attempts to efface the participation of the individual subjectivity in constructing its world; by furnishing its images with sound and color, it offers the viewer a world that he or she is only responsible for passively perceiving, creating the "illusion" that we are not active participants in the construction of the realities we inhabit.

If these thoughts provide one axis along which *The Book of Illusions* is built, the other is furnished by two quotations from Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*. The first, the novel's epigraph, declares: "Man has not one and the same life. He has many lives, placed end to end, and that is the cause of his misery." The second reads "*Les moments de crise produisent un redoublement de vie chez les hommes*" (238), which Zimmer summarily translates twice: "Moments of crisis produce a redoubled vitality in men. Or, more succinctly perhaps: Men don't begin to live fully until their backs are against the wall." Neither of these renditions, however, provide the most literal translation of Chateaubriand's words: "Moments of crisis produce a redoubling of life in men." By running the two quotes against one another, one can arrive at an understanding of a process through which a crisis causes the self to fragment, resulting in the production of a "differentiated double"; this process is suggested, and performed in microcosm, by Zimmer's offering two contending translations of the original French in which the latter quotation is given.

Taken in tandem, Zimmer's musings on the nature of perception and the two quotations from Chateaubriand's provide the foundation for *The Book of Illusions*. Along the first axis, one finds questions about the nature of perception, which lead to a crisis of representation. While Zimmer's lament that "that the closer movies came to simulating reality, the worse they failed at representing the world, which is in us as much as around us," is ostensibly about film, the paradox it describes is true of any representative art – the more thoroughly and convincingly it creates a world, the greater the remove between that world and ours, and the less it forces us to engage in the creative process of translating the objective world into subjective perception that defines our experience of life. Along the other axis -- that drawn by the quotations from Chateaubriand – one finds questions of the nature of identity and the self, along with the

arguments that the self is fundamentally discontinuous, and that crises provoke a "redoubling" of life – a word that simultaneously suggests intensification and bifurcation.

The Book of Illusions is built around the intersection of these two axes. Although its plot is labyrinthine, it can be accessed rather quickly by examining four non-existent works, which circumscribe the entirety of its narrative, and which serve as differentiated doubles of each other.

The first of these is *The Silent World of Hector Mann*, a book written by Zimmer after his wife and two young sons are killed in an airplane crash. On the first page of Auster's novel, Zimmer sets the scene for the reader: "Everyone thought he was dead. When my book about his films was published in 1988, Hector Mann had not been heard from in almost sixty years … *Double or Nothing*, the last of the twelve two-reel comedies he made at the end of the silent era, was released on November 23, 1928. Two months later … he walked out of his rented house … and was never seen again" (1). In its discussion of *The Silent World of Hector Mann*, *The Book of Illusions* introduces the mystery of Mann's disappearance, which is central to the remainder of the novel's narrative; in his discussion of the process by which he wrote the book, Zimmer establishes it as a response to a moment of crisis, which is integral to the novel's operation.

Shortly thereafter, Zimmer declares that "it never would have occurred to me to suggest that Hector Mann was still alive. Dead men don't crawl out of their graves, and as far as I was concerned, only a dead man could have kept himself hidden for that long" (3). Yet it turns out that Hector has done just that. After *The Silent World of Hector Mann* is published, David receives a letter from a woman named Frieda Spelling, who claims that Mann is alive, that she is his wife, and that, having read Zimmer's book, Mann would like Zimmer to come visit the two of them at their home. Zimmer is deeply skeptical, and, after the exchange of a couple more cryptic letters, dismisses Frieda's communiqué as a hoax. Not long after he does so, however, he

receives a visit from Alma Grund, the daughter of Mann's regular cameraman, who arrives at Zimmer's house one night, threatens him with a gun, and brings him to the New Mexico ranch where she grew up, and where Mann has been living and making films almost since his disappearance.

On the flight to New Mexico, she informs David that she has spent the last seven years researching and writing *The Afterlife of Hector Mann*, Mann's authorized biography, which details his disappearance, subsequent wanderings, and the films he and Frieda made on their ranch, and which Hector has agreed to allow Alma to publish after he has died. The story she tells is shocking: Mann disappeared after his fiancée, Dolores St. John, accidentally murdered Brigid O'Fallon, a former lover who was carrying Mann's unborn child. Devastated and overwhelmed by guilt, Mann decides that there is no purpose in his ruining St. John's life as well, so he helps her bury the body, and then flees from Hollywood. Consumed by guilt, he adopts a series of identities, and forswears filmmaking forever – as it is the one thing he truly loves, he decides that denying himself its pleasure is the only appropriate form of penance for his crimes. Eventually, he meets Frieda, and moves with her to a ranch in New Mexico, where they have a young son. The child dies from a bee-sting, however, and to save Mann from being overwhelmed by grief, Frieda convinces him to again occupy himself by making films. Unwilling to abandon his penance, however, Hector decides that he can only do so under the condition that the films never be seen by anyone not involved with their production; they will be made solely for the purpose of being made.

Problematically for Alma, or any potential biographer, Mann's will stipulates that all of these films must be destroyed within twenty-four hours of his death. On the basis of *The Silent World of Hector Mann*, Alma has convinced Hector to allow her to bring Zimmer to the ranch, to

meet the man, view his later films, and thus serve as a witness to authenticate her unlikely story. Unlike *The Silent World of Hector Mann*, *The Afterlife of Hector Mann* is never actually published, or even read by anyone other than Alma -- by the end of the novel, Alma is dead, and the manuscript has been destroyed. However, over the course of the flight to New Mexico, Alma recounts its narrative to Zimmer at length, and although the reader only encounters it in this secondhand fashion, its contents nonetheless constitute the second essential node in *The Book of Illusions*.

As soon as Zimmer and Alma arrive at Mann's ranch, an incredible series of events begins to unfold. Zimmer meets Mann briefly, but Mann's wife Frieda insists that he be allowed to rest; overnight, Hector dies, and Frieda is so intent on destroying his films as quickly as possible that Alma and Zimmer have time to watch only one of them, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, before all of Mann's footage is burned. The film is an imaginative rendition of the creative process, set in Frost's mind. In it, Frost, a novelist exhausted after finishing his latest novel, accepts an invitation from his friends Hector and Frieda to relax at their ranch while they are out of the country. Immediately, however, he is inspired with the idea for a new story; the next morning, no less unexpectedly, he awakens to find Claire Martin, a beautiful philosophy student claiming to be Frieda's niece, naked and sharing his bed. After some initial confusion and misgivings, Martin and Claire become lovers, and his story takes off, but as it nears completion, Claire begins mysteriously ailing. She insists that Martin leave her bedside to finish the story, and when he returns with his completed manuscript, he finds her cold and lifeless. Realizing what has happened, he burns his manuscript, successfully resurrecting his muse. Alongside *The Silent World of Hector Mann* and *The Afterlife of Hector Mann*, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* is the third work around and out of which *The Book of Illusions* is built.

After leaving Mann's ranch subsequent to the destruction of the films, Zimmer returns to Vermont, having made plans with Alma for her to join him there as soon as she is able. Following a couple nights of regular telephone calls, however, she fails to call at the appointed hour, and Zimmer wakes up the next morning to find a long fax describing how she returned home to find that Frieda had destroyed her computer and was feeding her manuscript into the fire. In the struggle that ensued, Alma pushed Frieda, killing her; when she realized what she had done, she decided to swallow a bottle of pills rather than allow Zimmer to convince her to lie to herself such that she could live with her guilt. Having again lost the woman he loves, Zimmer this time manages to avoid falling into an abyss of despair, and carries on with his life -- until he suddenly suffers two heart attacks, several years later. Prompted by this abrupt confrontation with his own mortality, he decides to finally create a record of his story, which will also be the only record of Alma's destroyed manuscript, and thus also the only account of Mann's life and work after his disappearance. The final work on which *The Book of Illusions'* artifice rests, then, is *The Book of Illusions* itself, as it asserts its text to be a memoir by David Zimmer, rather than a novel by Paul Auster. Accordingly, *The Book of Illusions* has three title pages – the first simply reads "The Book of Illusions," while the second repeats the title along with information about the publisher and the words "A Novel" and "Paul Auster." On the reverse side of this page is the standard publication information, including the Library of Congress reference and ISBN number. This page is followed by the epigraph from Chateaubriand, which is followed by yet another page bearing only the title of the book; it is only after this third title page that the text proper of the novel begins.

Each of these narratives engages independently with Chateaubriand's claims about the discontinuity of self, and the "redoubling of life" produced by moments of crisis; in so

doing, they also structure the novel such that it is itself enacts a similar engagement by way of their interrelationship. *The Book of Illusions* provides an overture to its symphony of differentiated doubling within and across the four works that comprise it by way of an early passage. In the chapter that stands in for the text of *The Silent World Of Hector Mann*, Zimmer comments on Mann's final two silent films. The first, *Mr. Nobody*, tells the story of Mann's disappearance from the world of visible things after being tricked into drinking a dangerous potion, and ends with a shot of him examining himself in a mirror, slowly realizing that his body has again become perceptible. The second, suggestively entitled *Double or Nothing*, is itself a sort of differentiated double of Mann's career prior: "*Double or Nothing* cannot be counted as a new work … Instead, Hector pulled out bits of rejected material from previous films and cobbled them together into an anthology of gags, pratfalls, and slapstick improvisations" (53). Zimmer identifies its title, "words … not even remotely connected to anything presented in that eighteen-minute hodgepodge," as a reference back to the mirror scene at the end of *Mr. Nobody*, in which "we are looking at him as he looks at himself, and in this eerie doubling of perspectives, we watch him confront the fact of his own annihilation. Double or nothing … he is no longer the same person … we see him transformed into someone we no longer recognize." Here, faced with the crisis of the end of his studio contract, Mann makes two works – one whose plot hinges on a mirror, another made up entirely of pieces of his past selves.

A comparable process occurs within each of the four works that make up *The Book of Illusions*. A man, faced with a crisis, void, or *abyss* (for David, the deaths of his family, and later that of Alma; for Mann, the accidental murder O'Fallon; for Martin Frost, the completion of his novel), must re-create, or redouble, himself (David abandons his post

teaching literature and becomes a scholar of film, by way of his obsession with Hector Mann; Mann adopts the persona of Herman Loesser and works a variety of menial jobs before marrying Frieda, taking her surname, and becoming Hector Spelling; Martin Frost externalizes his creative consciousness in the form of Claire Martin, and when forced to choose between his life as a writer and his relationship with Claire, destroys his work in order to remain her lover). This redoubling constitutes a creative act which both informs and forms an analogy with his subsequent acts of more traditional creativity, producing imaginative realities that express and embody the continuous discontinuity that is the artist's identity (Zimmer's books, *The Silent World of Hector Mann* and *The Book of Illusions*; Mann's return to filmmaking, as described in *The Afterlife of Hector Mann*; *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, which, as it is set in Frost's head, can be understood as being a product of the character's imagination). Insofar as this process is common across the four works, they can each also be understood as a differentiated double of the others.[1]

Moreover, each of these works can be understood as a differentiated double of Chateaubriand's *Mémoires*, yet another way in which they can be understood as integrally interrelated. In a telephone conversation with his friend Alex, who has asked him to translate the work, Zimmer announces that he has "already figured out how to translate the title" (62); having rejected "*Memoirs from Beyond the Grave*" as "too literal, somehow, and

[1] Countless instances of differentiated doubling, less easily schematized than those already discussed, occur within the text of *The Book of Illusions*. Examples include the fact that Mann's dead son is named Tad, and Zimmer's Todd, a coincidence that leads Zimmer to remark: "Tad and Todd. It can't get any closer than that, can it?" (206), as well as the birthmark on Alma's face, which leads Zimmer to refer to her as "the woman with the strange double face" (108), and Alma to identify herself with Georgiana in Hawthorne's *The Birthmark* (120). Elsewhere, Alma insists to Zimmer that "we're the same" (123), while Zimmer later calls her "a girl after my own heart" (283); this doubling comes to a head when David and Alma are talking, and she insists that he "could be someone else, someone who's only pretending to be David. An impostor" (291) because he has just said "the *exact* words that were in … [her] mind."

yet at the same time difficult to understand," he settles instead on "*Memoirs of a Dead Man*." He notes that "[i]t took Chateaubriand thirty-five years to write his book, and he didn't want it to be published until fifty years after his death. It's literally written in the voice of a dead man." This description can be applied, with varying levels of literalism, to each of the other works in *The Book of Illusions*.

In the time between losing his wife and sons and beginning to work on *The Silent World of Hector Mann*, Zimmer himself comes as close to the grave as one can, without actually dying. Even after finishing his book, and moving on to the translation of Chateaubriand, he refers to himself as "[not] really anyone … [not] really alive … a dead man who spent his days translating a dead man's book" (102); following a chapter devoted to a description of Mann and his career, which one can only assume represents an extremely quick and superficial gloss of Zimmer's book, Zimmer remarks that "I had no telephone, no radio or TV, no social life of any kind … I was in the book, and the book was in my head, and as long as I stayed inside my head, I could go on writing the book. It was like living in a padded cell, but of all the lives I could have lived at that moment, it was the only one that made sense to me. I wasn't capable of being in the world, and I knew that if I tried to go back into it before I was ready, I would be crushed. So I holed up in that small apartment and spent my days writing about Hector Mann" (55). During his disappearance, meanwhile, Mann is so wracked with guilt and a desire for self-negation that he claims that he has decided "to crawl into his tomb … [and] live off the smell of his own corruption" (181); after shaving his trademark mustache and discarding his trademark cap, Mann looked "like no one, like the spitting image of Mr. Nobody himself" (144). Even Martin Frost is so exhausted from finishing his novel that he wants "*to do nothing, and live the life of a*

stone" (245). Finally, Mann only agrees to allow Alma to write his biography after she promises "not to show it to anyone until after he's dead" (217), and in its final pages, *The Book of Illusions* itself is "revealed" to be a posthumous testament, as Zimmer writes that "following Chateaubriand's model, I will make no attempt to publish what I have written now … If and when this book is published, dear reader, you can be certain that the man who wrote it is long dead" (318).

The Silent World of Hector Mann, *The Afterlife of Hector Mann, The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, and *The Book of Illusions* (the text "written by" Zimmer, not Auster), insofar as each reflects the novel's central themes and concerns, can thus each be understood as a *mise-en-abyme* within the text, which is fitting for a novel preoccupied with the ways that moments of crisis are voids, across which artists redouble themselves both through the process of creating works, and through fundamental renegotiations of their identities.

At the absolute center of the multiplex of mirrors created by the novel's various *mises-en-abyme* rests *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*. Even before the film starts, Auster double-underlines the role it is to play within his novel; Zimmer travels "through a set of double doors into the little theater" (241) where he is to watch the film, and upon looking into the projection booth, notices that "there were two projectors, each loaded with a reel of film. By Zimmer's account, the editing of the film reinforces the decision to read it primarily as a compendium of instances of differentiated doubling. Zimmer remarks that one shot is "similar to the one that ended the scene in the bedroom at the beginning of the film, but whereas Claire's face was motionless as she watched Martin make his exit, now it is animated, brimming with delight" (261). The most common edit that Zimmer observes is a sudden reverse-shot, seen most powerfully in the sequence where Claire begins to ail:

"the angle reverses to record his point of view … another reverse, then another shot of Claire" (262). The key sequence of the film, in which first the audience, and then Martin, realize that Claire is not real but a doppelgänger of Martin's inner muse, is also built around this pattern of doubling and redoubling; it unfolds as "a sequence of cross-cuts between the two characters. We go from Martin back to Claire, from Claire back to Martin, and in the space of ten shots, we finally get it, we finally understand what's been happening. Then Martin returns to the bedroom, and in ten more shots he finally understands as well" (266). Here, critically, both the medium of the film and the medium of the text describing that film at once describe and perform the differentiated doubling; the former through the paired sequences of ten shots, and the latter through rhetorical chiasmus ("from Martin back to Claire, from Claire back to Martin").[2]

The plot of the film is also built around instances of doubling; when Claire shows Martin her key to the house, he responds by showing her "an identical key" (249); when Martin asks Claire the name of her professor, she tells him it is "Norbert Steinhaus" – the name of the actor playing Martin. When Martin jokes with Claire about the fact that she is wearing a Berkeley sweatshirt while reading Berkeley, she tells him that "it's the same spelling … but it's two different words" (251); this doubling is compounded by the fact that Hector Mann, the director, has recently reinvented himself as Hector Spelling – an inversion of the situation confronting Claire and Martin; this time, the same man (or Mann), is signified by "two different words." After Martin discovers that Claire's claim that she is Frieda's niece is a lie, she reinvents herself, in a scene that doubles both the mirror scene in *Mr. Nobody* and a famous sequence in *Vertigo*: "Claire goes on working in front of the mirror,

[2] This effect also construes the rhetoric of the film and the rhetoric of Zimmer's description of it (and therefore, the rhetoric of *The Book of Illusions*) as differentiated doubles of each other.

transforming herself from one kind of woman into another. The impulsive tomboy disappears, and in her place emerges a glamorous, sophisticated movie-star temptress … we scarcely recognize her any more" (258). And, of course, the eventual revelation that Claire is not a woman so much as an outward manifestation of Martin's inner life is the instance of differentiated doubling which dominates the entire film.

The Inner Life of Martin Frost thus literalizes an understanding of literary creation as a redoubling of the self, through an act of externalization and manifestation that results in a product that is predicated on -- but not perfectly identical with -- the identity of the artist, which is itself altered through the creative act. In its depicting this process, it also performs it; Zimmer makes this relationship explicit, observing that "Martin burned his story in order to rescue Claire from the dead, but it was also Hector rescuing Brigid O'Fallon, also Hector burning his own movies, and the more things doubled back on themselves like that, the more deeply I had entered the film. Too bad we couldn't watch it again … I wasn't sure … if I had paid enough attention to the trees" (272). These lines make clear the relationship between *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* and Hector's story, as told in Alma's summary to Zimmer of *The Afterlife of Hector Mann*; additionally, they call to mind Zimmer's earlier comment, prompted by his learning that Mann obsessively cultivated trees upon first moving to the ranch, that "*Memoirs of a Dead Man* opens with a passage about trees" (221). Given the extensive echoes between Zimmer's story of loss and renewal and Mann's, the film thus effectively enacts a differentiated doubling of a number of the narratives found in Auster's text.

On top of this, a parallel relationship exists between the film and *The Book of Illusions*, as becomes clear when Zimmer describes Frieda's destruction of Alma's

manuscript: “Crouched in front of the hearth in the living room, Frieda was crumpling up sheets of paper and throwing them into the fire. Gesture for gesture, it was a precise reenactment of the final scene of *Martin Frost*” (304).). *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* is thus a *mise-en-abyme* within the novel as a whole, but also bears relationships to each of the other *mises-en-abyme* within the novel, which in turn are concerned with an operation that can itself be described as the essence of the *mise-en-abyme* – the creation of art-works to fill “the abyss.”

It is fitting, then, that it is also the point where the two axes undergirding the structure of the novel identified at the beginning of this paper intersect. At this point, one must pull back and consider the dependence of *The Book of Illusions* on other works, real and imaginary, in light of Zimmer’s comments on literature, film, and the nature of perception at the beginning of the novel. Zimmer has insisted that most film superannuates to its presentation of images on a two-dimensional screen the “illusion” of a third dimension, a sense of reality, which actually resides “in our head.” Perception, then, is defined as a creative act, in which the two-dimensional world of objects is translated into our subjective consciousness; this translation is the primal instance of the “doubling with a difference” toward which Auster’s paired invocations of Chateaubriand point. But Chateaubriand’s presence in the text pushes further, drawing an analogy between the acts of literary and artistic creation performed by artists in moments of crisis, as they re-create themselves (both within themselves and in their work) in defiance of moments of emptiness and despair, and the perceiving subject’s assertion of itself into the void between the world of objects and the world as experienced.

The Inner Life of Martin Frost is explicitly in dialogue with Zimmer's thinking about the subjective nature of perception found at the start of the book. Over the course of the film, Claire encounters two quotations from Berkeley ("*And it seems no less evident that the various sensations or ideas imprinted on the sense, however blended or combined together, cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them*. And again: *Secondly, it will be objected that there is a great difference betwixt real fire and the idea of fire, between dreaming or imagining oneself burnt, and actually being so*" [250-51] – as well as one from Kant ("*Things which we see are not by themselves what we see … so that, if we drop our subject or the subjective form of our senses, all qualities, all relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, would vanish*" [264]). It is appropriate, then, that Zimmer insists that "the setting of the film … [is] the inside of a man's head," and that Claire is "a figure born of the man's imagination" (243). By making no attempt to represent reality, and seeking instead to represent only the creative process which *The Book of Illusions* has insistently invoked as an analogy for the process of translating reality into subjective perception, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* entirely circumvents the crucial "paradox" of film identified by Zimmer at the beginning of the novel: "[T]he closer movies came to simulating reality, the worse they failed at representing the world, which is in us as much as around us."

By virtue of its dependence on other works, *The Book of Illusions* itself can be understood as likewise escaping from this paradox. One recalls Zimmer's claim that, while writing *The Silent World of Hector Mann*, "I was in the book, and the book was in my head"; upon meeting Hector, he similarly remarks: "Until I saw him lying there in that bed, I'm not sure that I ever fully believed in him … that he was tangible, that he wasn't an imaginary being. He had been inside my head for so long, it seemed doubtful that he could exist

anywhere else" (222) – an observation which, of course, is belied by its being uttered by a fictional character in a work powerfully aware of its ontological status as fiction. In a procession of *mises-en-abyme* centered around *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, Auster's novel, self-consciously influenced by Chateaubriand, poses as Zimmer's memoir, which contains Alma's account of Mann's life after Hollywood, including the production of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* (which Zimmer is allowed to see because of the book he wrote about Mann). In so doing, it mounts a final performance of a consciousness creatively constructing an imaginative reality – namely, that of Auster, translating his experience into the world of the novel.

A full consideration of Auster's expanded film version of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* is outside the scope of this paper, but it is possible to quickly see several points of coincidence between it and *The Book of Illusions*, along the twin axes previously discussed, which strongly suggest that the film is best understood as an extension of the themes and thought contained in the novel; if one insists on viewing it as an adaptation of anything, it is better understood as an extremely loose adaptation of *The Book of Illusions* than as a relatively faithful, but significantly extended, adaptation of the account of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* found therein.

Although the film does not precisely follow the visual description given in *The Book of Illusions*, its first forty-one minutes are otherwise a near-exact translation of the account of the forty-one minutes of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* given by David Zimmer onto an actual screen. Small bits of dialogue are changed, and details of Zimmer's account that did little but heighten the significance of the film within the broader narrative of *The Book of Illusions* (such as its frank eroticism, which serves little purpose outside of its relevance to

the story of Hector Mann) are abandoned, but otherwise the film tracks its description in the novel with close precision. It's remaining sixty-six minutes are an answer to the final question posed by Claire in the novel: "Tell me, Martin, what on earth are we going to do?" This question makes interrogative a rather literal description of the relationship between a figment of someone's imagination and the mind that produced that figment, but in the film, Claire and Martin's relationship does not develop as straightforwardly as its origins might suggest.

After leaving Claire in the car while he goes to purchase a replacement for a flat tire en route to the airport, Martin returns to find that she has vanished – a note explains that she has been "called back" by the mysterious group that coordinates the distribution of muses, leaving Martin alone. This scene resumes the novel's motif of differentiated doubling; the rush to the airport recalls Zimmer's rush to Logan with Alma (which in turn recalls his earlier rush to get his family to their fateful flight on time), while the causal link between a flat tire and the disappearance from his life of a woman he loves recalls Alma's account of the flat tire which prevented Mann from reaching O'Shannon's house in time to save her life.

As the film progresses, the instances of differentiated doubling of moments in the novel accelerate. The film appropriates the shock from Zimmer's description of the "bizarre interruption" (251) of a telephone call during his first conversation with Frieda, in the novel used as a rumination on the power of words and coincidence, for the telephone call that interrupting Claire and Martin's lunch and leads to Martin discovering that Claire is not who she claims to be. Jim Fortunato, in the novel a heater repairman who is named but does not appear, appears in the film as differentiated double of Martin; he is a writer of ludicrous (and ludicrously bad) fiction,

but Martin realizes that he has a muse of his own when he is introduced to his niece, Anna James.[3]

After Claire's disappearance, Martin is devastated and confronted with a crisis, to which he responds by writing down the story of their time together; an act in keeping with the broader understanding of crisis, redoubling, and creation found throughout *The Book of Illusions*. By the end of the film, Claire has returned, brought back through Martin's interactions with Anna, who herself functions as a differentiated double of Claire. Although we learn that Anna has been released into the world prematurely, leading Jim to think that she is mentally deficient, she is a muse; by agreeing to take her in and care for her, Martin is somehow able to finally bring back Claire. Although he is told that he cannot look at her for a year, he soon learns that this rule does not apply to mirrors, and there is no prohibition against his gazing on her retrospectively. The film ends with Martin, Claire, and Anna driving away in the family sedan, with Anna singing "Polly Wolly Doodle," and Martin looking at Claire in the rear-view mirror.

If this all sounds incoherent, it is likely because it is; as an autonomous text, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* does not make much sense. The film's operation can best be understood by examining a conversation and a single shot; the former performs a quintessential act of differentiated doubling of a scene in the novel, while the latter places the film thoroughly within the bounds of the novel's concerns with representation and reality. In their first conversation, Claire reveals to Martin that she is reading Berkeley, prompting him to ask: "If a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, does it make a sound

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[3] Anna is played by Auster's daughter Sophie, in an inversion of Alma's mother's presence in the film-as-described-by-Zimmer. Alma's mother is further conjured when Sophie sings song lyrics including her name, Faye, moments before the film ends. Moreover, Anna's name doubles that of a character in the story Martin burns to save Claire (in both the novel and the film).

or not?" Claire replies: "More like, is the tree really there?" This exchange is a more-or-less direct appropriation of a passage in the novel, in which Zimmer poses the question asked by Martin to himself, and then follows it with a question referencing Mann's late *oeuvre,* including (*The Inner Life of Martin Frost*) that is closely echoed in Claire's reply to Martin: "If someone makes a movie, and no one sees it, does the movie exist or not?" (207). Through this powerful early instance of differentiated doubling of *The Book of Illusions*, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* involves itself with the novel's conception of creativity, and also joins the procession of works telescoping within and around it.

On top of this, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* adopts *The Book of Illusions*' preoccupation with problems of representation, as well as its conclusion that these can be avoided by seeking to represent the operations of a mind engaging with reality, rather than reality itself. Just as *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* (as described in *The Book of Illusions*) is actually set in Martin's mind, so too is Auster's extended film similarly circumscribed; moreover, just as *The Book of Illusions* is itself a *mise-en-abyme* whose borders are co-extensive with the outer bounds of the work in which it is contained, so too is *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* a story within a story whose contents are limited to it. This is accomplished by repeated shots of trees, explainable only as visual references to Claire's early suggestion that an unheard falling tree might not exist[4], and, more definitively, by a crucial shot at the end of the opening voice-over (delivered by Auster, whose family photographs also adorn the dressers in the house). The narrative voice, having just finished describing the first scenes of the film, says of Martin's type-writer: "It might not have been the newest equipment in the world. But it worked"; this is immediately followed by a shot

[4] This also recalls Zimmer's wish that he had given more attention to the trees in *The Invisible Life of Martin Frost*.

of a sheet of paper within the type-writer that has just been described, bearing the words: "It might not be the newest equipment in the world. But it works." In addition to being yet another instance of differentiated doubling, this moment frames the entire narrative of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* as a product of Martin's typewriter, which both explains the repeated shots of a rotating typewriter on a black background that punctuate the film, and invert the original identity of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* -- what was originally a non-existent film described within a novel is reconfigured as a non-existent verbal text pictured by a film.

This shot and this sequence, taken together, finally and fully establish the essential relationship between *The Book of Illusions*, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, and the forty-one minutes they share. The two larger works trace a lemniscate through the portion of the film described in the novel, or the portion of the novel taken up by the film; at the center of everything rests the forty-one minutes of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*. But what are these forty-one minutes? They are the absolute interior of the hall of mirrors that is formed within and between *The Book of Illusions* and *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, echoing and reflecting the general theories of creativity and representation espoused and embodied by the works surrounding them, but they also tell a story that is anterior to the creation of the other stories echoing through both works. From Martin's account of his time with Claire, to Mann's films, to Zimmer's criticism and memoir, the abyss into which every one of the major creative acts within either work is projected is opened in response to the loss of a loved one; Zimmer loses first his family and then Alma, Mann loses the mother of his unborn child and then his son, and in the film, Martin loses Claire. It is the strength of these loves that precipitates the crises through which the artists acts of creativity emerge, and the

Auster's works leave little doubt that, if given the chance, Mann and Zimmer would make the choice Martin does without a second thought, happily destroying their work to restore the beloved on whose loss it depends. In the novel, then, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* tells the a fairy tale predicated of the deepest longings of Zimmer and Mann; in the film, the impossibility of this choice is revealed, and Martin must do what Zimmer and Mann before him have done: learn to love again, and keep close the memory of the beloved by working it into film, criticism, fiction, and other forms of art.