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UDC: 821.111(73).09-31 Auster P.
DOI: 10.19090/gff.v48i3.2390
Original research paper

NAVIGATING NOSTALGIA AND EXILE IN PAUL AUSTER'S *IN THE COUNTRY OF LAST THINGS*

Anna Blume, the protagonist of Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* finds herself in exile, although she has not physically left her country. Nonetheless, she has been thrust into an unknown, harsh, unwelcoming environment that exacerbates feelings of loss, loneliness, and despair. The concept of exile in the context of post-apocalyptic literature is questioned in the paper, and Anna is established as a representative of this type of exile - an exile from stability, moral values, and previously established reality. Anna's journey is analyzed from a theoretical perspective of nostalgia which is typically interpreted as longing for one's homeland in a spatial sense. In this context, however, it is interpreted as longing for the carefree times of the past and mourning of the lost future. Anna's nostalgia is not regressive but rather progressive. It motivates her and gives her hope that she will rediscover the life she once had. Although nostalgia is often referred to as a disease of the modern age, the paper investigates whether it can serve as a remedy as well.

Key words: nostalgia, memory, exile, Anna Blume, Paul Auster, *In the Country of Last Things*.

INTRODUCTION

In an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory (1989: 18), Paul Auster once expressed the idea that all his books were actually "the same book", because they "seem to revolve around the same set of questions, the same human dilemmas." Indeed, dominant topics and tropes can be identified in Auster's oeuvre, such as questions of human nature and the connection between language and reality. Restrictions, both physical and linguistic, play an important role in the development of Auster's narratives. Whether unable to leave the confines of an imposed space (Mr. Blank's room in *Travels in the Scriptorium*, Anna Blume's unnamed dystopian city in *In the Country of Last Things*), under mental constraints of their own making (August Brill's dream-constructed dystopia in *The Man in the Dark*) or deprived of language and/or memories (Peter Stillman in *The New York Trilogy*), Auster's protagonists are faced with a crisis that opens the ever-present questions of language,

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space, and memory. Auster's representation of a dehumanizing urban environment spreads throughout his entire literary opus, beginning with *The New York Trilogy* and *In the Country of Last Things*, both published in 1987. Although both novels express Auster's spatial concerns and their influence on the protagonists' language identity and perception of reality, the greatest difference is to be found precisely in the representation of the city. Auster's New York, despite its overwhelming presence and strong influence on the protagonists' lives, is still a functional city, whereas the unnamed, post-apocalyptic cityscape of *In the Country Last Things* is in complete disarray and ruin. Displacement, confusion, and loss of roots take physical form in Anna Blume's environment. The setting of *In the Country of Last Things* causes estrangement and highlights the emotional turmoil of his young protagonist. As such, it is the best-suited of Auster's works for an exploration of nostalgia and exile in a non-traditional sense. Through Anna, a nostalgic exile, he expresses the inability to go back to previous social, cultural, economic status and traditionally nostalgic perception of the past, making it exceedingly difficult for people to remember their roots, for the very sense of belonging has been extinguished by overwhelming urbanity.

In the Country of Last Things is not overtly political, nor does it include references to historical periods or events. Auster began writing the book in 1970, when he first heard the voice of Anna Blume. Initially reluctant to write it, not wishing to seem presumptuous by writing from a woman's perspective, it took him fifteen years to complete the novel (Mccaffery & Gregory, 1989: 35). The novel is said to be influenced by the literary movement attempting to express the unspeakable following World War II and the feeling of disorientation caused by rapid technological, political, social changes. Auster's works such as *The Music of Chance, The New York Trilogy,* and *In the Country of Last Things* share themes found in some of Auster's literary influences – Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, Knut Hamsun. A parallel may be drawn between Anna Blume and Knut Hamsun's unnamed protagonist in the novel *Hunger* (1890). In *The Art of Hunger* (1992: 11), Auster comments on the destiny of Hamsun's protagonist, emphasizing that he did not need to starve because "solutions exist, if not in the city, then at least in departure." Much like Hamsun's protagonist, despite her efforts, Anna "is truly shorn of [her] self" (Auster, 1992: 15), having been left without a clear image of her past or present. The working title of *In the Country of Last Things* was *Anna Blume Walks Through the Twentieth Century* (McCaffery & Gregory, 1989: 36). This significantly reflects Hamsun's protagonist who "systematically unburdens himself of every belief in every system, and in the end, by means of the huger he has inflicted upon himself, he

arrives at nothing. There is nothing to keep him going – and yet he keeps on going. He walks straight into the twentieth century" (Auster, 1992: 20). Anna Blume may thus be seen as a continuation of the figure of the exiled wanderer, showing that the steps she takes in the twentieth century are not different from those before her or those to come.

THE INTERSECTION OF EXILE, NOSTALGIA AND POST-APOCALYPTIC LANDSCAPES

In the Country of Last Things takes the form of a single letter written by the protagonist, Anna Blume. Anna's brother William, a journalist, left home to gather reports from an unknown city which Anna describes in the initial stages of her letter as a "a city consuming itself, even as it remains" (Auster, 2005: 21-22). Her search for William is futile, as Anna too becomes consumed by the city in which life bears no resemblance to her previous experiences. The city is in ruins and crumbling down before Anna's eyes, only further declining as the novel progresses. Much like a labyrinth in which people walk around in circles, hopelessly searching for a way out, the city traps people and overpowers them with the grand, yet decaying, structures. Violence, theft and even cannibalism have become commonplace. The novel "explores the capacity of the individual to maintain a unified mental self when the physical self is subject to the most extreme urban conditions" (Brown, 2007: 140-1). The addressee of the letter is a former childhood friend, who interrupts the narrative flow of Anna's confessional. "This narrative strategy simultaneously draws the reader's attention to the layering and mediation of the narrative, and to the many lapses and losses of memory and language" (Brown, 2007: 141). The losses of memory are closely related to the confusion of past and present brough about by the frequent overlapping of memories from Anna's childhood with current situations.

The paper centers on Anna's perception of nostalgia, the extent to which the novel is infused with a nostalgic mood, and the overall positive and negative consequences of nostalgic sentiment in post-apocalyptic literature. It is worth noting that Anna's nostalgia is distinct from that experienced by immigrants relocating to a new country, as she is faced with an unrecognizable social system, devoid of order, morality, and progress. This paper will examine how nostalgia as a concept must be re-evaluated and negotiated in the post-apocalyptic landscape, and whether it functions as a motivational force for survival or a hindrance to the protagonists' ability to adapt and thrive in their new reality.

In post-apocalyptic settings, spatial, temporal, and social changes are exacerbated, serving as a poignant reminder of what has been lost. Nostalgia in post-

apocalyptic literature can manifest itself in numerous ways, such as idealizing the past, romanticizing lost objects and traditions, or yearning for a sense of security and stability. Consequently, the post-apocalyptic landscape serves as a unique backdrop for exploring the complexities of nostalgia, as it highlights the human propensity to cling to the past even in the face of insurmountable change.

In the Country of Last Things, while including elements of a futuristic dystopia, is not a tale about the future. Instead, Auster is depicting the present in a book that has "nothing to do with science fiction. It's quite fantastical at times, of course, but that doesn't mean it's not firmly anchored in historical realities. It's a novel about the present and the immediate past, not about the future" (Mccaffery & Gregory, 1989: 36). Auster defines his novel as "a book about a collapsing society" (Morris, 2005: 165) that, much like his other works, serves as a "political parable about power" (Morris, 2005: 166). Auster's words on the novel's rootedness in contemporary social, moral, and environmental issues are as follows:

> I feel that it's very much a book about our own moment, our own era, and many of the incidents are things that have actually happened […] And in many cases, reality is far more terrible than anything we can imagine. Even the garbage system that I describe at such length was inspired by an article I once read about the present-day garbage system in Cairo. Admittedly, the book takes on these things from a somewhat oblique angle, and the country Anna goes to might not be immediately recognizable, but I feel that this is where we live. It could be that we've become so accustomed to it that we no longer see it. (Auster, 1992: 285)

The novel is thus read as reflection of Auster's contemporary society, but also as an exaggeration that serves as a fearful reminder, warning and meditation on the potential pitfalls of urban living and solitude – a way of life that dehumanizes individuals to the same extent a hostile and unknown environment would. While the preservation of memory and reconstruction of one's life is the focus of many of Auster's protagonists (Daniel Quinn, Mr. Blank, Sidney Orr), Anna Blume is an instance of memories being erased over time, becoming foggier as her life slips away from her the more she embraces her new reality. As Auster's writers-protagonists typically look toward the past to make sense of their lives, Anna Blume and her husband Samuel Farr write nothing of the past. They are focused on documenting the dystopian present as a means of coming to terms with the unfamiliar situation they have found themselves in.

EXILE BEYOND BORDERS

An individual need not necessarily be in a foreign land for them to be in exile. Anna Blume remains in the same country, surrounded by people speaking her native language, yet she finds herself in a "fundamentally discontinuous state of being" (Said, 2000: 177). Anna's new environment does not resemble her home in the least. There is a pronounced loss of familiar objects, loved ones, and a safe space. "To be exiled is not to be flung out of any door, but out of your own door; it is to lose your home where home suggests close emotional belonging and the gnarled roots of one's identity" (Gass, 1990: 97). Anna must rebuild her life, attempt to find new roots and navigate her identity amongst intense feelings of nostalgia.

Grinberg and Grinberg (2004: 166) state that "those who are exiled have not come in search of something but have fled or been expelled." Thus, Anna's voluntary journey to the post-apocalyptic cityscape leads to the consideration whether she is, in fact, an exile or an immigrant. The distinction between an immigrant and exile is important to make because the inability to return home heightens the sense of loss and nostalgia for one's previous life. An immigrant typically leaves an unstable, traumatic environment, in search for a better life, while an exile is thrust into an often unstable and isolated setting. All migrations are traumatic experiences in and of themselves, but we distinguish a different type and level of trauma associated with each event, along with differences in the subsequent yearning for home. While Anna's departure was willing and motivated by her search for her lost brother, her inability to return was not voluntary, but rather set by external factors outside of her control. Unlike immigrants, Anna was not prepared for her journey, because upon departure, she was not aware that it would last forever.

"Exile involves rejection by a loved one, as if the face in your mirror grimaced when it looked out and saw you looking in. It is a narcissistic wound" (Gass, 1990: 97). Anna is indeed rejected, but not by her family as the previous definition of exile may suggest. She is rejected by herself, finding her image unrecognizable in the mirror and the pain of her loss intolerable. Anna describes looking at herself in the mirror for the first time after coming to the city: "The first few moments were frightening. I looked so ugly that I didn't recognize myself anymore. It was as though I had been turned into someone else. What's happened to me?" (Auster, 2005: 59-60). As "an exile is always out of place" (Said, 2000: 180), Anna combats the inherent urge to fit in, since fitting in meant succumbing to the violence and coldness of the city. To become integrated into the unfamiliar environment, Anna must renounce part of her individuality. "Such renunciations or losses inevitably produce internal conflicts, since they clash with each individual's striving to assure his own

distinctness from others, that is, to preserve his identity" (Grinberg & Grinberg, 2004: 162). Anna does not have a desire to fit in, but to survive. However, as time passes, she inevitably becomes influenced by the new environment, riddled with death and violence. This becomes evident when she takes pleasure in choking and nearly killing Ferdinand, becoming, for a moment, like all others wandering the city, killing to survive, unremorsefully stripping corpses of their belongings:

> My grip around Ferdinand's throat was like iron, and no amount of trashing and kicking would ever have loosened it. What happened was that I suddenly became aware of the pleasure I was feeling. I don't know how else to describe it, but right there at the end, as I lay on my back in the sweltering darkness, slowly squeezing the life out of Ferdinand, I understood that I was not killing him in self-defense – I was killing him for the pure pleasure of it. (Auster 2005: 65)

Anna's status as an exile is solidified by the impossibility of her returning home. The losses Anna faces range from loss of familiar food and comforting objects, to much graver losses such as the loss of stability and previously established reality. Exile is viewed as a notion transcending spatial and national categories. By viewing exile as beyond the notion of crossing borders, Anna becomes a figure of the unknowing exile in post-apocalyptic literature, an individual imprisoned by a sense of loss and mourning, "condemned to the imaginary and to nostalgia for the future" (Baudrillard, 1988: 95).

Describing Kafka, Auster writes: "He wanders. On a road that is not a road, on an earth that is not his earth, an exile in his own body" (Auster 1992, 24-25). Anna Blume, Auster's wandering female protagonist, is an exile in her own country, having been displaced from her previous identity rather than her place of birth. Anna as an exile echoes Auster's understanding of Paul Celan's poetry. As a poet of exile and "an outsider even to the language of his own poems" (Auster, 1992: 82), Celan had to change himself to become a part of his new environment, which was "an impossible struggle, doomed from the start to disaster" (Auster, 1992: 94). Celan's inability to curb his desolation, trauma and nostalgia proved fatal, until nothing remained of him, not even his words. Anna Blume, unlike Celan, accepted the necessity of change for survival and thus her exile was not fatal.

NOSTALGIA – POISON OR CURE?

In *The Invention of Solitude,* published five years before *In the Country of Last Things,* Auster expresses his musings on nostalgia as "the rift created between one's past and present and subsequent sensation of nostalgia for the present" (Auster, 2005a: 79). Temporal displacement and confusion ensue as one attempts to navigate memories and

the emotions they bring about. Auster "attempt[s] to share the nostalgia for the unattainable, a nostalgia that at once evokes the pain of withdrawing from the world and the solitude made palpable by such a withdrawal" (Dow, 2004: 57). The significance of nostalgia in *In the Country of Last Things* lies in its emergence as the culmination of Anna's anxieties about linguistic, social, and geographical change.

Even though the word nostalgia has been associated with mental disorders for centuries, any exclusively medical connotations it may have had are disappearing due to its frequent use in everyday language. "So easily and 'naturally' does the word come to our tongues nowadays that it is much more likely to be classed with such familiar emotions as love, jealousy, and fear" (Davis, 1977: 5). Despite the commonplace use of the term, there remains a lack of consensus regarding its connotation as either a positive or negative emotion. Upon thorough examination, three plausible perspectives on the nature of nostalgia arise: it can be perceived as either a positive or negative emotion, or alternatively as an amalgam of both, constituting an ambiguous, bittersweet feeling. The latter option offers a nuanced conception of nostalgia, as it acknowledges the complexity and multivalence inherent in this elusive state, which defies simplistic reduction to a binary opposition. In Davis's definition of nostalgia as "a positively toned evocation of a lived past in the context of some negative feeling toward present or impending circumstance" (Davis, 1979: 18), it is worth highlighting that even when nostalgia is viewed as a purely positive state, it is remains inevitably tied to the negative experiences that caused one to retrieve into the past for comfort.

The meaning of nostalgia has broadened over time and now includes not only the apparent longing for a place, but "a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams" (Boym, 2001: 452). Since it is not possible to turn back time, nostalgia has become "an incurable state of mind, a signifier of 'absence' and 'loss' that could never be made 'presence' and 'gain' except through memory and the creativity of reconstruction" (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2002: 258). In *In the Country of Last Things*, Auster's protagonist displays nostalgia for her peaceful and carefree childhood, and for the future she will not experience in such conditions. While reminiscing about her past, Anna describes her home in a positive light, a lost paradise filled with fantasies and the hope of one day returning. Her letter, devoid of lamentation, is instead a reflection on everything she will be deprived of due to her new circumstances, as she attempts to reconcile with her new reality. Despite frequently writing about her childhood memories, Anna does not dwell on the past. She embraces the present, although nostalgia remains at the center of her life, evoking a combination of pain and joy in remembrance of her happy childhood.

Turner (1987: 150) states that nostalgia is to be viewed as a paradigm with four possible dimensions. Firstly, there is the sense of historical decline and loss, involving a departure from some golden age of 'homefulness,' followed by "a sense of the absence or loss of personal wholeness and moral certainty." The third aspect is the sense of loss of individual freedom and autonomy with the disappearance of genuine social relationships" (Turner, 1987: 151). The fourth dimension of nostalgia brings "loss of simplicity, personal authenticity and emotional spontaneity" (Turner, 1987: 151). The dimensions of nostalgia as delineated by Turner are applicable to Anna Blume, as each aspect in her new city life is discerned. Firstly, the historical dimension of loss is manifested in the city's decline, which entails the erosion of all historical, cultural, and societal values, leaving Anna homeless, both literally and metaphorically, as she struggles to survive on the streets. Secondly, the moral dimension of nostalgia is discernible in Anna's compromised values, as she is forced to resort to questionable means to ensure her survival. Thirdly, Anna is unable to forge genuine relationships, as intimacy and emotional bonding become fraught with danger and potentially fatal consequences. Fourthly, consumed by fear, regret, and mourning, while suppressing her innate human urges for touch, love, and intimacy, there is a lack of personal authenticity and emotional spontaneity, rendering Anna's initial existence in the city a desolate and emotionally barren one.

The loss Anna feels is further emphasized by the lack of objects from her previous life, which used to give her a sense of security. According to Chase and Shaw, a crucial prerequisite for experiencing nostalgia is the presence of "objects, buildings, and images from the past" (Chase & Shaw, 1989: 4). In contrast to the hypothesis given by Chase and Shaw, the situation depicted in *In the Country of Lasts Things* is not one of abundance. The buildings are dilapidated, the objects broken and reduced to garbage, devoid of any recognizable visual representation for Anna. Nevertheless, this does not prevent the association of these objects with the past and the rise of nostalgic sentiments. Anna maintains a connection with the artifacts from her previous life through their current remains. Albeit in an altered form, the objects accentuate the rift between her past and present, intensifying her nostalgia for the times passed and unattainable future times in which these objects could be whole once more. The progression of nostalgia in the novel contradicts the notion that "the objects of nostalgia are often carefully preserved" (Chase & Shaw, 1989: 4). While the past has not been built over, it has been eradicated, and the objects associated with it discarded. Thus, Anna's dialogue with objects from the past becomes "one-sided" as "the deep sense of connection with the past one might feel can be simply a unilateral projection of our present anxieties and fantasies" (Chase & Shaw, 1989: 4).

In 1987, the year *In the Country of Last Things* was published, the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to Joseph Brodsky. Svetlana Boym (2001: 288) discusses Brodsky's exile and reflection on nostalgia and notes that Brodsky rarely used the world nostalgia, and in the rare situation he did, it had a negative connotation.

> Brodsky doesn't tempt fate with a literary reconstruction of homecoming […] Brodsky's figure for exile is not a cryptically disguised spy or a double with a great propensity for mimicry, but rather someone who is 'less than one,' a part of speech, a fragment, a ruin, a crying monster […] Instead of obsessive homecoming, Brodsky reenacts a ritual of fleeing home, of repeated leave-taking, of retaining the past in one's memory in order to never come face to face with it. (Boym, 2001: 288)

His vision of exile and nostalgia differ from Anna Blume's in that she does not initially come to terms with her exile and continues romanticizing her past and wishing for a miraculous homecoming. While Anna feared her new estranged environment, Brodsky accepted his, on the premise of Russian formalist critics that estrangement is the necessity of all poetic creation (Boym, 2001: 290). However, Brodsky and Anna both share a "nostalgia for the familiar, for the vanishing routines" (Boym, 2001: 295) rather than nostalgia for their home country, or even the people they left behind.

Anna did not indulge in nostalgic daydreams as most city dwellers did. Her outlook on remembrance upon her arrival was grim as she deemed it an escapist waste of time: "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, 2005: 2). Even though Anna was immune to the allure of recreating past spaces and habits, this cannot be said for many of the city's other inhabitants. Examples of such tendencies are found in the photographs used to rent out apartments and in the functioning of the Euthanasia Clinics. People were desperate to find a place to live, and they fell prey to the scams of real estate agents, resulting in the loss of all their possessions. The photographs presented to them depicted fully equipped apartments, reminiscent of an era long gone, which evoked the smells of fresh coffee and sensations of warmth and coziness. Despite knowing that these photographs do not reflect the current state of the apartments, they were too overcome by their nostalgia to take caution (Auster, 2005: 8-9). The second example is the "Pleasure Cruise," a costly suicide package offered by the Euthanasia Clinics in which "the customers are treated to an opulent life, catered to in a manner that rivals the splendor of the old luxury hotels. […] This runs into quite a bit of money, but for some people the chance to live the good life, even for a short while, is an irresistible temptation" (Auster, 2005: 14). The overwhelming power of nostalgia can be seen in the fact that people are willing to give up their lives for the mere glimpse of their former lives, which they had been ceaselessly mourning. The nostalgic desire for the past can be

equated with the representation of hunger in Auster's novel – "hunger is a curse that comes every day, and the stomach is a bottomless pit, a hole as big as the world" (Auster, 2005: 5).

In the atmosphere of poverty and scarcity, Auster's city dwellers continually discuss food, through a description so detailed that they can almost feel the sensations of eating the food. These conversations about food have become a primary preoccupation and serve as a means of easing one's ailments.

> Often you will overhear a group of people describing a meal in meticulous detail, beginning with the soups and appetizers and slowly working their way to desert, dwelling on each savor and spice, on all the various aromas and flavors, concentrating now on the method of preparation, now on the effect of the food itself, from the first twinge of taste on the tongue to the gradually expanding sense of peace as the food travels down the throat and arrives in the belly. (Auster, 2005: 9)

Food is found to be one of major factors of inducing nostalgia in Auster's novel. However, Anna is not susceptible to this type of nostalgia, because hers is a nostalgia for the lost future, meaning and self. "Familiar foods serve as an anchor in an altered world […] whereas unfamiliar food may become one of the clearest measures of how far we have journeyed from the present" (Retzinger, 2008: 370). Anna views these conversations as using the "language of ghosts" and she refuses to take part in this ritual. She refrains from indulging in olfactory remembrance, which emphasizes the drastic change in her personality.

> I refuse to speak the language of ghosts, and whenever I hear others speaking it, I walk away or put my hands over my ears. Yes, things have changed for me. You remember what a playful little girl I was. You could never get enough of my stories, of the worlds I used to make up for us to play inside of. (Auster, 2005: 10)

When feeling anxious, an exile may resort to eating familiar foods in the company of others from the same country as a means of alleviating feelings of displacement and attempting to overcome the sense of loss for one's home (Grinberg & Grinberg 2004: 160). In Auster's novel, this sentiment is present in a changed capacity. Since there is no food in the city, its inhabitants exchange the ritual of sharing a meal with the ritual of summoning one's deepest sensual memories and imaging the meal. Comfort is no longer found in the food itself, but in the shared memories and company of equally nostalgic individuals. "In a bleak setting, familiar foods take on the role of 'comfort foods' quite literally and offer a means of clinging to a former world" (Retzinger, 2008: 372). Serving as a reminder of past times, the prolonged imagining of food carries a bitter-sweet reminder of times gone, that cannot be evoked in any way other than in memory. Mindless reminiscence without purpose, according to Anna, exacerbates longing to the

point that one loses touch with their reality and becomes consumed by nostalgia. Anna warns that:

> Thinking about food too much can only lead to trouble. These are the ones who are obsessed, who refuse to give in to the facts. They prowl the streets at all hours, scavenging for morsels, taking enormous risks for even the smallest crumb. No matter how much they are able to find, it will never be enough […] It is a slow death, as if food were a madness, burning them up from within. They think they are eating to stay alive, but in the end they are the ones who are eaten. (Auster, 2005: 3-4)

At the onset of exile, one seeks out a person or group to "help him become integrated, to assume the function of 'mothering' and 'containing', which will permit him to survive and get reorganized (Grinberg & Grinberg, 2004: 159). For Anna, the maternal, protective figure is first found in Isabel, followed by her future husband Samuel Farr, and Victoria Woburn after her tragic pregnancy loss. They represent "good internal objects, along the line of 'godparents' or substitute parents" (Grinberg & Grinberg, 2004: 159) who allowed Anna to revert to a childlike security and find solace in the present, as opposed to only relying on her own memories for comfort. The most consoling and empathetic presence in Anna's life was Samuel Farr, whose shared background and shared experiences enabled him to comprehend her predicament more intimately than the urban strangers. "All you have to do is listen to me talk. My accent is the same as yours. We come from the same country, the same city. We probably grew up in the same neighborhood" (Auster, 2005: 100). Samuel's ability to contextualize Anna's present struggles within the framework of her past life, and their shared memories, reinforced their relationship. "Nostalgia serves an indirect belongingness function. Nostalgia generates feelings of connectedness, reinforces attachment security, bolsters perceived interpersonal competence, and elevates feelings of social support" (Routledge, 2016: 7). The overlapping of their nostalgic reminiscences united them in a way that would not have been possible had they not had a shared origin: "We were not people of this city. We had grown up in another place, and perhaps that was enough to make us feel that we already knew something about each other" (Auster, 2005: 106). The pair recognize their joint past and use it as a foundation on which they can build their future in exile.

Prior to meeting Samuel Farr, Anna did not exhibit signs of nostalgia for her past, as she did not even indulge in such recollections nor held aspirations of returning home. However, upon gaining a confidante her latent nostalgia was revived and became the driving force of Anna's and Sam's survival.

> We often talked about home then, summoning up as many memories as we could, bringing back the smallest, most specific images in a kind of languorous incantation […] we were able to share the flavor of these things, to relieve the myriad incidentals of a

> world we had both known since childhood, and it helped to keep our spirits up, I think, helped to make us believe that some day we would be able to return to all that. (Auster, 2005: 110)

Anna exhibits a tendency to evoke childhood memories as a coping mechanism in response to trauma, becoming engulfed by a nostalgic mood that she associates with a sense of security rooted in situations that remind her of her past. This is evident in her first encounter with the Rabbi in the daunting library:

> It was strange what had come over me in the presence of this man, but the more I talked to him, the more I sounded like a child. Perhaps he reminded me of how things had been when I was very young […] I felt on solid ground with him, and I knew that he was someone I could trust. (Auster, 2005: 96)

Even though Anna's home is so out of reach that it seems like it has completely disappeared, it remains an active and living entity in her mind, based on which she measures her current environment and conditions. "Yet nostalgia is not a longing to return to this 'safe home,' but to home as a scene of incubation: a singular knot of unmade decisions, of excitement at the flowering of alternatives, of reversible mistakes, of preparations for departure" (Chrostowska, 2010: 55). A return to a time of safety, stability, and certainty, which Anna found herself lacking. The city around Anna is in a "constant flux" (Auster, 2005: 1), due to which the stability of existence is shattered along with Anna's very notion of identity and humanity. "In order to live, you must make yourself die" (Auster, 2005: 20). In other words, you must destroy your memories and stop comparing the brutal present with the illusive and unattainable past. In Auster's urban landscape, "a house is there one day, and the next day it is gone. A street you walked down yesterday is no longer there today" (Auster, 2005: 1). The primary source of Anna's anxiety can be attributed to the rapid changes to her surroundings, causing desire for a time of her life marked by steadiness.

"What is nostalgia if not a kind of desire steeped in memory?" (Sayers, 2020: 44). The act of reminiscing about the past, with the intention of reliving it in one's imagination, arises from a yearning to retrieve a sense of past prosperity. Anna's "nostalgic desire for forms to revert to immobility, concealed beneath the very intensification of their mobility" (Baudrillard, 1988: 7) is emphasized. Her nostalgic inclination is manifested as a desire to reclaim her life and reconstruct it, not bound by the confines of her harrowing present, but rather guided by the memory of the security of her childhood. Thus, the desire is recognized as an indicator of "the importance of the unrealized past, of still *latent* unfinished dreams, of the slow and careful transformation of deeply felt losses, and of the creative collision of memory and possibility." (Sayers, 2020: 82).

AFTER THE APOCALYPSE: REBUILDING HOPE?

In Auster's novel, exile is portrayed as a permanent state of being with no possibility of returning to one's previous life. Anna's nostalgia, however, is not a paralyzing emotion, but rather a productive force that motivates her to rebuild her life. Despite the many challenges she faces in her post-apocalyptic landscape, Anna remains hopeful. The novel's conclusion offers a glimpse of that hope, suggesting that migration after migration is the new reality for Anna, and that her life, much like the city that had trapped her, is in a constant state of flux. The letter Anna writes serves not only as a sign of hope but also as an empty space that can be filled with new experiences, people, and ideas. By embracing the unknown and remaining optimistic, Anna is able to move forward, building upon the foundation of her past experiences, and embracing the new paths that lie ahead. The novel ultimately suggests that even in a post-apocalyptic landscape, there is hope, and that "nostalgia can be a poetic creation, an individual mechanism of survival, a countercultural practice, a poison, or a cure" (Boym, 2001: 456), depending on one's perspective. "Thus, not only does nostalgia promote meaning, but it also generates the states of well-being that are associated with perceptions of meaning. Nostalgia is a critical meaning-making resource." (Routledge, 2016: 99).

Auster's exploration of nostalgia in a post-apocalyptic world raises questions of "the future of nostalgia", so aptly answered by Boym in her eponymous study. Emphasizing the change in the nostalgia paradigm, Boym argues:

> Once opium, leeches and a return home was a panacea for nostalgia. Now it is technology that has become the opiate of the people, that promises speed, ease and oblivion of everything except the technological products themselves. (Boym, 2001: 346)

Nostalgia is no longer considered an illness as it was in its original form, nor is it considered a cure. It is neither hopeful, nor hopeless. It is an ambiguous and fleeting entity in an increasingly urban and technology-oriented society.

Aleksandra Stojanović

TUMAČENJE NOSTALGIJE I EGZILA U ROMANU *U ZEMLJI POSLEDNJIH STVARI* POLA OSTERA

Rezime

Ana Blum, protagonista *U zemlji poslednjih stvari* Pola Ostera, nalazi se u egzilu, premda nije napustila svoju zemlju. Osećaj gubitka, usamljenosti i očaja jednako je prisutan kao i tipičnim primerima egzilantske književnosti. Pojam egzila u kontekstu postapokaliptične književnosti se preispituje i Ana se uspostavlja kao predstavnik ove vrste egzila - egzila od stabilnosti,

moralnih vrednosti i čitave prethodno uspostavljene stvarnosti. Razmatranje nostalgije jeste neizbežno u kontekstu egzila. Nostalgija se obično tumači kao žaljenje za domovinom u prostornom smislu, no u ovom kontekstu, ona se tumači kao patnja za prošlim bezbrižnim vremenima. Anina nostalgija najviše se odražava u činjenici da ona pati za izgubljenom budućnošću. Ana se tokom čitavog romana priseća prošlosti koju prikazuje u najboljem svetlu. Međutim, njena nostalgija nije regresivna već progresivna. Ona pokreće Anu i daje joj nadu da će ponovno pronaći život kakav je nekada imala. Iako se radi o postapokaliptičnoj sredini, roman se završava idejom nade. Iako je nostalgija često nazvana bolešću modernog doba, ona nije otrov nego može poslužiti i kao lek u zavisnosti od toga kako joj se pristupi. Nostalgija se može savladati i poslužiti kao poticaj za postizanje napretka u budućnosti, kako primećujemo u slučaju Ane Blum.

Ključne reči: nostalgija, sećanje, egzil, Ana Blum, Pol Oster, *U zemlji poslednjih stvari*

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