

## An Aspect of Contemporary Dystopia: An Analysis of Paul Auster's *The Brooklyn Follies*

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*The Brooklyn Follies* is the latest novel of Paul Auster, his eleventh, and it contains almost all elements of his work. It can be read as the detective story, the road novel, the picaresque, or hard-boiled mystery with humor, chance element, adventure, violence, surprise, tears, or heart-warmer. Like the characters in most of his novels, figures in this book are confronted with absence and gaps, in which they are searching for the true self. Like *Oracle Night*, his previous book, *The Brooklyn Follies* is set in Brooklyn as its title shows, and the narrator is an ardent reader of books. Though he is not a professional writer unlike the protagonist of *Oracle Night*, he begins to write something from memories of the past just as a pastime, and finally he finds himself working on writing to the extent that Tom says, "You're a writer, Nathan. You're becoming a real writer," and that the woman he loves treats his stories as literature of the first rank.

Despite these similarities there seems to be some distinction in the whole vision of the narrative. *The Brooklyn Follies* is narrated in more social and political tone. The story is set in Brooklyn during the US election of 2000, which the characters are taking up as a topic of conversation. Doubtlessly they sound against Bush and the tendency of the right wing takeover of America.

Auster has taken up some historical incidents in parallel to quite personal episodes for his books. However, the historical factors have not played a very important role, just helping emphasize the figures' psychological condition, or suggest their inner existence. On the whole, they are not principal, but incidental. On the other hand, here in *The Brooklyn Follies*, the problems of politics of America are

significantly related to the story, elaborately converging on the final main theme.

Finally Auster concludes this novel on September 11, 2001, the day of terrorist attack on America at the World Trade Center in New York City—the terrible disaster which changed the world. In *The Brooklyn Follies* Auster ingeniously tells the narrative of his characters, focusing on some aspects of the contemporary American society they are confronted with. In the end, the narrative involves innumerable ordinary people's existence. This is a textual analysis, exploring how and what Auster narrates in his newest work, and consequently what truth or absence of truth he penetrates.

## I

Auster's storytelling is surpassingly excellent. Stories of Nathan and people around him are developed in parallel with Nathan's writing of "The Book of Human Folly." So *The Brooklyn Follies* is structured as multi-layered, complex narrative with stories within stories. For Nathan's book, a lot of interesting stories in relation to the problems of life and death, money, love and involvement of chance are told through his experiences as a life insurance salesman, and for the narrative of Nathan, more arresting episodes throughout thirty chapters with interesting titles respectively.

The first four chapters introduce the circumstances of characters and describe their solitude and desperate search for identity in their own way. Harry's stories in Chicago can be defined as picaresque, comprising some typical elements of picaresque: marriage with a daughter of multi-millionaire, bullying interference from her father, success in art gallery business, an affair with a villain, his daughter Flora's developing schizophrenia, forgery of a dead painter's work, imprisonment, divorce, and moving to Brooklyn and starting a used book store under a pseudonym.

The middle part, where the stories of Tom's missing sister, Aurora and her daughter, Lucy are intertwined, is the road novel. It also has every component the road novel needs, and is the brightest and the most peaceful part. Here the central theme is surprising happiness we might find unexpectedly. Chance here could be called happy chance.

While they are driving to North in order to put Lucy under the care of her aunt-in-law, Nathan and Tom (= Auster) enjoy a pleasant chat over literature and anecdotes of several writers including Poe, Hawthorne, Kafka, Milton, or Christopher

Marlowe. A series of incidents following after the unexpected car trouble caused deliberately by Lucy, are representation of human dream into which we cannot help but lose ourselves. The atmosphere is filled with the sound of a horsefly buzzing, the smell of the honeysuckle, lilac bushes, a small breeze through sixty acres of woods, or the pleasures of food and alcohol. In such an atmosphere would we revel in the possibilities of Utopia with harmony and repose. But in the end or from the first, we know this is just a dream, self-deception, or hopeless fantasy. Thus, they have to return to reality, though the unexpectedly happy moments at the Chowder Inn bring them rest and relaxation, a new encounter, illusion of rebirth, or a presentiment of a new family.

Hardly has he made us immersed in a Utopian fantasy when Auster leads us to the sentimental and thrilling world of B-Movie and hard-boiled mystery. It begins with Harry's sudden death that was caused by the betrayal of his ex-lover about the fraud of Hawthorne Manuscript. The leading actor of the B-Movie is Rufus, whose transformation into Tina, and performance at the funeral is "magnificent and absurd," and "funny and heartbreaking." On the other hand, it is Nathan himself who plays a private detective in the hard-boiled mystery. Auster farcically describes Nathan as the detective, showing his reasoning with the cause of his death and the offenders' motives, close observation at the scene, and counterattacking.

If you show up at Brightman's Attic tomorrow, I'll break your neck. And then I'll turn you over to the cops....But that's only if you act like a good boy. You do what I tell you to do, or else I switch to Plan B and go after you with everything I've got. Do you hear me? I'll have you busted and thrown into jail. I'll fuck you up so bad, you won't want to live anymore.<sup>1</sup>

Another device Auster takes in this multi-layered novel is a twisted allusion to well-known classics. Besides having solved the case concerning Harry and the Hawthorne hoax, Nathan assumes the role of recovering his missing niece, Aurora. In the proceeding he is becoming another Narrator visiting another House of Usher. The modern House of Usher is located on Hawthorne Street, Winston-Salem.

Eighty-seven Hawthorne Street was shabby two-story house on a half-rural, half-suburban road about three miles from the center of town. I lost my way

several times before I found it, and when I parked my rented Ford Escort in the dirt driveway, I noticed that all the blinds on the front windows had been drawn. It was a gloomy, overcast Sunday in mid-December. Logical assumption was that no one was at home—or else that Rory and her husband lived in that house as if it were a cave, guarding themselves against the glare of natural light, fending off the impingement of the outside world. (BF 248)

Here Roderick is David, Aurora's husband, who is a member of a fanatic religious cult called the Temple of the Holy World, and on the other hand, for Madeline is Aurora. These two houses as well as its inhabitants are paralleled, and yet the difference between them is poignant. The House of the nineteenth century was of infinite sensitivity, mystery, terror, and thrilling beauty more than anything else. Now the house on Hawthorne Street is exposing its ignorance, stupidity and violence completely alienated from the original House. The terrifying smile of Madeline in the state of catalepsy in the coffin is replaced by not smiling but totally frightened appearance of Aurora who used to be called laughing girl. In addition, on Hawthorne Street, Winston-Salem are there just an eccentric swindler in disguise as religious leader, and his reckless follower, and cruel violence brought by their self-centered desire. The situation full of deceit and meanness, even though it pretends to be related to the question of belief, evil or original sin, might be too vulgar for any witchcraft trial.

Thus Auster's ingenious and cynical treatment of text takes effect to convey more superficial, and vulgar, but agonizing and terrible nature of the contemporary world as well.

## II

The three central figures, Nathan, his nephew Tom, and Tom's boss, Harry make a kind of family. At the point of time they met, all of them are alone, divorced, or estranged from daughters, or alienated from a sister. The start was Nathan's unexpected reencounter with Tom almost seven years after his sister's funeral. Tom had changed radically in his physical appearance. He looked dumpy and fat. The spark had been extinguished from his eyes, and everything about him suggested defeat. Everything was unexpected to Nathan, because he was certain Tom had landed a position at some prestigious university as a young literature scholar.

As a matter of fact Tom got stuck with the dissertations after finishing all his course, and abandoned his career, and as a result he became a taxi driver “as a way of mourning the collapse of his most cherished ambitions.” On the other hand, Nathan had suffered “the long bouts of nausea and dizziness, the loss of hair, the loss of will, the loss of job, the loss of wife.” He could not imagine how to go on. The place he arrived is just a silent end to his “sad and ridiculous life.”

Now their circumstances are identical. Both of them are within monotony of solitude, wrestling with the mysteries of the universe. After the encounter with tears they gain the awareness that they are entering a new era in relation to each other. There is not “Old Dr. Thumb and Uncle Nat” any more, just “Nathan and Tom.”

The third member is Harry, the owner of Brightman’s Attic, a used-book store. He is far from his appearance as a flamboyant homosexual. Harry is the most complex, the most influential and the most ambiguous of the characters of this novel, full of contradictions and surprises. First, Brightman is not his real name, as his schizophrenic daughter reveals later, saying “he is not a bright man, but a dark man and he lives in a dark wood.” He’s trying to start a new life in Brooklyn burdened with the shameful past of squalor and failure back in Chicago. In a sense, it can be said that BF revolves around him, because his bookstore is where Nathan and Tom unexpectedly met, eating and drinking with Harry one evening unite them into a dream plan, and his sudden death owing to a cruel betrayal, and the money and building he bequeathed to Tom and Rufus enabled them to launch a new life respectively.

One thing common to them is a sense of humor especially in terms of wordplay. Humor is a way Auster uses in his writing, even though a story may be overwhelmed with gloom and disaster. When Michael Wood interviewed Auster, he answered; The joke is the purest, most essential form of storytelling. Every word has to count.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly in this story, Nathan says, “Tone would be light and farcical throughout.” when he starts writing “The Book of Human Folly.”

Throughout the story the three men frequently enjoy playing on words: “Oh no, Oh Poe, Oh Thoreau, an unfortunate rhyme.” (BF 14), and Darkness, Disintegration, and Death for the D’s of 3-D Company (BF 31) Also when Nathan introduces himself to Harry, he says, “How interesting. Tom Wood and Nathan Glass. If I

changed my name to Steel, we could open an architecture firm and call ourselves Wood, Glass and Steel. You want it, we'll build it." (BF 57-8)

The conversation full of silly remarks and ludicrous witticism can redeem their self-reliance, and as a result, help making a kind of family. Harry says, "Tom's like family to me, and since you're related to Tom, you're in my family as well. (BF 58-9)

Searching for Utopia is part of theme of BF. In the first part of this novel Poe and Thoreau are mentioned in relation to quest for Utopia. According to Tom, Poe and Thoreau can be discussed in the same category, even though seemingly they stand at opposite ends of American thought. It might be possible through focus on their concerns about an ideal place to live. Auster's references to the past American writers range from the well-known such as *Walden*, to the rather neglected, such as "The Philosophy of Furniture," "Landor's Cottage," and "The Domain of Arnheim." Through Tom's words, Auster points out that these works give the description of the ideal room, the ideal house, and ideal landscape. Both of them, Poe and Thoreau, were in pursuit of a noiseless sanctuary, or a dream of perfection. It is significant to point out that it was a sensible alternative to the condition of the time when American society was being crushed to death by growing power of machines and money.

The idea of "Hotel Existence" tells us more humanitarian side with Harry. He used to have two of them, both of which he had in mind during World War II. One was as a kind of fortress to protect us from squalor and uncertainty of everyday life, and the other for a refuge for lost children, starving boys and girls in the post-war Europe. We can see another Holden Caulfield of *The Catcher in the Rye* in the fantasy of Harry looking for and guiding these children through the hotel.

As Harry says, every man has his or her own Hotel Existence. It is different from all the others, and Tom's one is more personal and more realistic. Primarily it is the reflection of agony of alienation from family. He misses everyone he's lost and has a longing for a life to share with people he loves and respects. His sanctuary, or the inner refuge, or imaginary Eden needs a lot of land and buildings.

As suggested in the beginning of this analysis, Auster makes his characters of this novel discuss politics and social issues. Tom, the youngest of the three, is filled with anger and disgust toward evil of the world: politics, economics, intolerance, and greed.

And the horrible place this country has turned into. The maniacs on the Christian Right. The twenty-year-dot-com millionaires. The Golf Channel. The Fuck Channel. The Vomit Channel. Capitalism triumphant with nothing to oppose it anymore. And all of us so smug, so pleased with ourselves, while half the world is starving to death and we don't lift a finger to help. (BF 100)

At the Chowder Inn Tom talks against the tendency of the right-wing takeover of America, saying, "We are marching backwards. Everyday we lose another piece of our country. If Bush is elected, there won't be anything left." Or, "He (Bush) was an ideologue of the extreme right, and the instant he was sworn into office, the government would be controlled by lunatics." (BF 175) And Honey is in total agreement with him. Nathan's words "the 2000 election disaster" and "four days after Bush was illegally handed the election," also, suggest Auster's anger against political and social evil. As I said previously, there are moments they imagine they've found a new Hotel Existence as Utopia, later while staying the Chowder Inn. But it doesn't exist. It's an idea as fake as Harry's Hawthorne manuscript. Ultimately, any Hotel Existence, however little or humble it may be, would not be achieved without involvement of politics, and contrarily, it could be destroyed with that.

### III

Nathan Glass is not only the narrator of BF, but the author of "The Book of Human Folly." One thing he and his nephew have in common is literature. Though he failed to follow a path to studying literature, reading books had been his escape and consolation. While longing for restoring a meaningful life even in uncertainties, he takes up writing down what had happened to people he knew including himself. It would be "an account of every blunder, every pratfall, every embarrassment, every idiocy, every foible, and every inane act." As it is for the protagonist of *Oracle Night*, the process of recollection of the past and recording the follies of human beings works help Nathan introspect himself from more objective perspective. Consequently, what started only to keep himself entertained leads to a kind of recreation, or something of meaning and reinforcement. This is how Auster uses the activity of writing based on his belief in infinite power of writing and words. "The Book of Human Folly" starts with writing the fragmented and the extremely trifle, such as

inattentive slip of the tongue while asking for a bagel at a deli. But in the proceeding one story generates another story, almost immensely. Thus, just like the narrator of *Oracle Night*, Nathan who started from private writing, has composed BF, and ultimately he has provided searchers questioning in the inexplicable world with some solution or insolubility.

What is the true nature of facts Nathan has grasped? About one year after the thrilling journey, which started with looking for a place to die, Nathan is contemplating himself.

The bitter, solitary man who had crept home to Brooklyn less than a year earlier, the burnout who had convinced himself there was nothing to live for—knuckle-headed me, Nathan Unwise, who could think of nothing better to do than quietly wait to drop dead, now transformed into a confidant and counselor, a lover of randy widows, and a knight-errant who rescued damsels in distress. (BF 284)

Auster's treatment of chance as fundamental element of reality is overwhelmingly poignant toward the final part of the novel. When every character of the novel reached a new happy life in their way, chance element malignantly interferes in their life. Nathan had sudden heart attack and was taken to the hospital, and this is only the beginning. Nathan is confronted with the questions of life and death, not so much for just an idea as for reality. He is awed by discontinuous nature of life, when a man in the same room is dead, and on the other hand, he is alive.

Rodney Grant had been escorted to his uncertain future, the bare bed seemed to be haunted by some mysterious force of erasure, blotting out the men who had lain on it and ushering them into a realm of darkness and oblivion. The empty bed signified death, whether that death was real or imagined, and as I pondered the implications of this idea, another idea gradually took hold of me, which overwhelmed all thoughts about everything else.... I understood that I had come up with the single most important idea I had ever had, an idea big enough to keep me occupied every hour of every day for the rest of my life. (BF 300)



The big idea that occurred to him focuses on a lot of ordinary people including himself, and their existence.

I was no one. Rodney Grant was no one.... Our deaths wouldn't be announced on radio or television. There wouldn't be any obituaries in the *New York Times*. No books would be written about us. Most lives vanish. A person dies, and little by little all traces of that life disappear. An inventor survives in his inventions, an architect survives in his buildings, but most people leave behind no monuments or lasting achievements: ...My idea was this. To form a company that would publish books about the forgotten ones, to rescue the stories and facts and documents before they disappeared—and shape them into a continuous narrative, the narrative of a life. (BF 300)

His idea in relation to a biography of an ordinary person is explored with such imagination that he comes up with biography insurance.

Was I crazy to dream that I could make something of this farfetched project? I don't think so. What young woman wouldn't want to read the definitive biography of her father—even if that father had been no more than a factory worker or the assistant manager of a rural bank? ...In every case, it would have to be a question of love. ...I would resurrect that person in words and once the pages had been printed and the story had been bound between covers, they would have something to hold on to for the rest of their lives. Not only that, but something that would outlive them, that would outlive us all. One should never underestimate the power of books. (BF 302)

Auster makes Nathan say that the first book in the collection should be about Harry. Why Harry? What is the inner truth of Harry's life under the disguise of an aging city drag queen? Tom maintains that the external facts are less important than the inner truth of each man's life while he refers to his study theme. This is true with Harry's life. His attributes full of extravagant contradictions are varied from generosity, loyalty, and courage, to provocative curiosity, vulnerability to love, and indiscretion, the latter of which brought him to prison. He admits his inconsistency:

There's an imp inside me, and if I don't let him out to make some mischief now and then, the world just gets too damned dull. ...I like tricking people.... I don't know why, but the urge came over me. That's who I am, Nathan. I'm generous, I'm kind, I'm loyal, but I'm also a born prankster. (BF 125)

It is these contradictions that makes Nathan think of Harry as the first subject of his biography. Because Harry is representative of ordinary people, whose lives comprise happiness, love and laughing, and at the same time, sorrow, loneliness, hate, errors, and even unexpected death.

Auster wrote a critical essay entitled "The Bartlebooth Follies" in 1987. It is about a life of Georges Perec, a French writer who died in 1982, and his book.

Like many of the other stories in *Life*, Bartlebooth's weird saga can be read as parable (of sorts) about the efforts of the human mind to impose an arbitrary order on the world.... Even a self-annihilating project such as Bartlebooth's cannot be completed, and when we learn in the Epilogue that Valene's enormous painting has come no farther than a preliminary sketch, we realize that Perec does not exempt himself from the follies of his characters. It is this sense of self-mockery that turns a potentially daunting novel into a hospitable work, a book that for all its high-jinx and japery finally wins us over with the warmth of its human understanding.<sup>3</sup>

Here is Auster's point of view toward follies of people who struggle with difficulties and inconsistency of the world. Human folly is nothing but evidence of human existence, as Nathan says, "People slip up. They do dumb things," to Rachel, when she complains about her husband's unfaithful behavior. Auster tries to accept any ordinary person and his or her follies. He is sympathetic even toward David and Gordon, referring to the fact that David lost his father when he was seven years old, or interpreting Gordon's revenging act as the question of love, not money. In this way Auster's view of characters is of no discrimination in essence.

Similarly, the terrain of Brooklyn is described from the same perspective. In the first part, Nathan Glass comes to Brooklyn 'looking for a place to die.'

I instinctively found myself returning to the neighborhood where we had lived, crawling home like some wounded dog to the place of my birth. (BF 1)

But while exploring the neighborhood, he finds some interesting places such as the Cosmic Diner where an adorable waitress named Marina is working, or Brightman's Attic which plays a key role in the narrative. The most remarkable discovery is that "Brooklynites" are less reluctant to talk to strangers. This is what Auster says in an interview about why he has stayed in Brooklyn. He says, "I like it here. It is a comfortable part of town to live. The neighborhood is very mixed and tolerant."<sup>4</sup>

It is this characteristic that fascinates Lucy when she moved to Brooklyn from Carolina, where they speak only English. Hearing different tongues, a variety of human sound in Brooklyn is exciting rather than intimidating or perplexing to her.

In the later part, Nathan confesses his love of Brooklyn in relation to the environment for Utopia.

I have only recently begun a new life of my own, and I'm perfectly content with the decision I made to settle in Brooklyn. I find that the city agrees with me, and I've already grown attached to my neighborhood, with its shifting jumble of white and brown and black, its multi-layered chorus of foreign accents, its children and its trees, its striving middle-class families, its lesbian couples, its Korean grocery stores, its bearded Indian holy man in his white robes bowing to me whenever we cross paths on the street, its dwarfs and cripples, its aged pensioners inching along the sidewalk, its church bells and ten thousand dogs, its underground population of solitary, homeless scavengers, pushing their shopping carts down the avenues and digging for bottles in the trash. (BF 180)

This paragraph emphasizes that these various inhabitants ranging from middle-class people to homeless scavenger, and myriad details seen on or behind the streets compose potential coexistence of a different variety. It might be possible to remove agony and regain lost self only within the miscellaneous human existence full of despair, pain, delight, or happiness. It is a community of tolerance that fi-

nally heals a hurt soul and recreates it to life.

In addition, what Tom mysteriously conceived, while driving along the streets in Brooklyn as a taxi driver, impressively conveys other fascination of the city.

Or travelling across the Brooklyn Bridge at the very moment a full moon rises into the arch, and that's all you can see, the bright yellow roundness of the moon, so big that it frightens you and you forget that you live down here on earth and imagine you're flying, that the cab has wings and you're actually flying through space. (BF 30)

In it can we see a symbolical scene where the painful, solitary soul is mysteriously inspired.

In the Introduction of *The Neighborhoods of Brooklyn*, Kenneth T. Jackson, Jacques Barzun Professor of History and the Social Sciences, Columbia University, writes as follows, trying to convey the complex and mysterious fascination of Brooklyn.

Brooklyn is an enigma. On the other hand, it is New York City's most populous and arguably its most colorful borough. It is one of the best-known place names in the United States and has long been one of America's greatest literary landscapes. ...Brooklyn has been featured in dozens of songs, movies, books, photographs, and television programs. It has miles of beach front, scores of vibrant neighborhoods, spectacular cultural institutions, and numerous architectural treasures.... Yet Brooklyn remains a mystery.<sup>5</sup>

Also, in this novel Brooklyn is described, metaphorically as well as literally, as the place of tolerance and coexistence where any people could be accepted, and at the same time, the place of enigmatic fascination where any solitary soul might feel a sudden consolation.

You, the ex-Uncle Nat, now known as Nathan, pure and simple. I've paid my debt to society and my conscience is clear. X marks the spot, my friend. Now and forever, X marks the spot. (BF 59)

Harry says this in the early part of the story, whose context shows the circumstance common to the three of them: they are going to cut off the past with the expectation of regeneration. The feeling of confidence and reliance is pervasive there. But it is so paradoxical, because this is Auster's careful allusion as a preliminary. After all, "X marks the spot" is used as the title of the final chapter, where the context gets absolutely opposite.

That morning Nathan who was literally brought back to life from death steps out into the cool morning air. He feels so glad to be alive. He is walking, thinking of his loved ones, Joyce and the kids. Overhead, the sky was the bluest of pure deep blues. The scene is the most serene and the most peaceful of the novel, but at the same time it might be said to be the cruelest, the most terrible beyond our imagination.

It was eight o'clock when I stepped out onto the street, eight o'clock on the morning of September 11, 2001—just forty-six minutes before the first plane crashed into the North Tower of the world Trade Center. Just two hours after that, the smoke of three thousand incinerated bodies would drift over toward Brooklyn and come pouring down on us in a white cloud of ashes and death.

But for now it was still eight o'clock, and as I walked along the avenue under that brilliant blue sky, I was happy, my friends, as happy as any man who had ever lived. (BF 303-4)

Innumerable narratives of human follies belonging to ordinary people, whether comical or pathetic, could be totally erased out to nothing in a moment. The brilliant blue sky sets the most poignant contrast with the white cloud of ashes and death after a moment. The most terrible folly, the worst of the existing rampaged destructively far beyond any imagination.

Auster wrote an essay on the evening of September 11, entitled "Random Notes—September 11, 2001—4:00 PM," and he expressed his shock.

We have been talking about the possibility for years, but now that the tragedy has struck, it's far worse than anyone ever imagined. We have no precedent for what has happened today, and the consequences of this assault will no doubt be terrible. More violence, more death, more pain for everyone.<sup>6</sup>

This was prophetic, and BF is written from this perspective. There are two categories for human follies: personal, private one and political, social one.

The former involves anyone in his or her own way. No one can escape it. There is no sanctuary free from it. However, it is accompanied with laughs and tears, despair and bliss, and comedy and tragedy. Anyway it is to be accepted, for it is nothing but human existence. On the other hand, the latter works just with arbitrary intention disregard most of ordinary people, and consequently could grow to devastating violence, and destroy everything. There is no tolerance.

As mentioned before, Brooklyn symbolizes coexistence and tolerance, and the characters of BF are, of course, ordinary people, whose comprising image is Harry.

Auster has repeatedly used chance element for his writing, and chance has influenced on characters in various ways, for better or worse. Certainly it can be said that BF sees one in the worst, the most unbelievable way. It is out of scale, out of imagination, and out of human. After the final scene, undoubtedly Nathan's idea of writing biography of ordinary people should add other significance. Here we can see Auster's assertion of the power of words in most straightforward way. Auster is thinking of a lot of ordinary people who are trying to make sense of them in the contemporary American society. Now that their existence might be blotted out through terrible human folly, what he can do is just write in order to resurrect their lives in words.

The meaning of the two titles, "The Book of Human Folly" for the book within the novel, and *The Brooklyn Follies* for the novel becomes clear. In other words, "The Book of Human Folly" which Nathan started with the intention of writing down the details of trivial mistakes has assumed the role as a witness of contemporary Dystopia caused by the most terrible human folly. Thus "The Book of Human Folly" is transformed from the book of the most personal to that of human folly in history. And it is presented through the narrative of BF, for, after all, the inner truth of facts lies in details of ordinary existence. Then *The Brooklyn Follies* takes on a new meaning as requiem for a lot of people whose lives were suddenly discontinued by the worst human folly.

## Notes

1 Auster, *The Brooklyn Follies*, 215-6. Subsequently quoted as BF.

- 2 <http://www.parisreview.com>
- 3 Auster, *Collected Prose*, 392.
- 4 <http://www.3ammagazine.com>
- 5 Citizens Committee for New York City, xvii.
- 6 Auster, *Collected Prose*, 506.

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