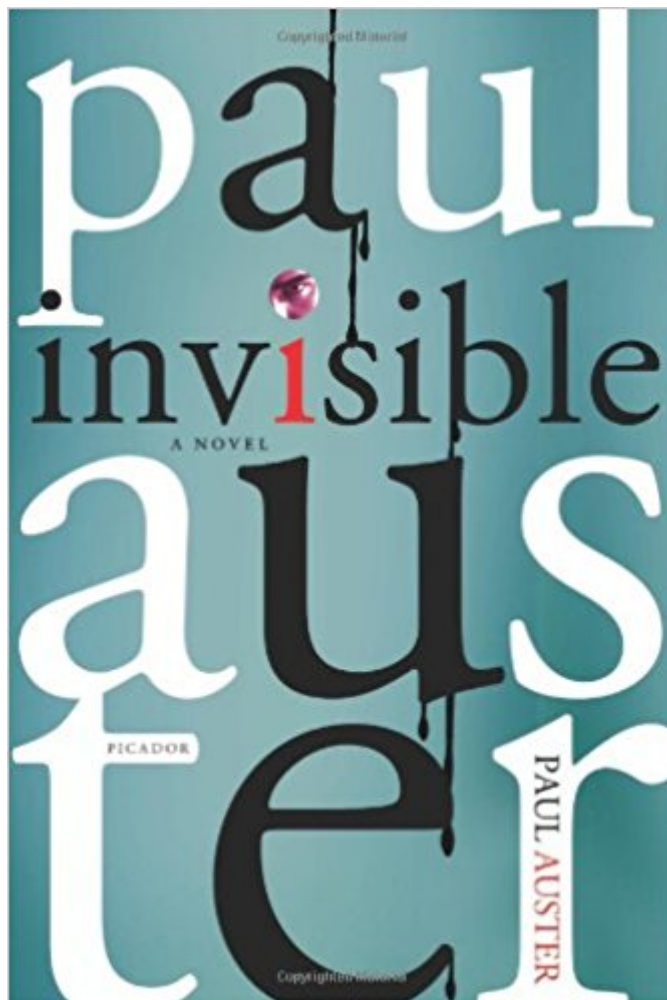


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Invisible (Rough Cut)



Synopsis

One of America's greatest novelists • dazzlingly reinvents the coming-of-age story in his most passionate and surprising book to date Sinuously constructed in four interlocking parts, Paul Auster's fifteenth novel opens in New York City in the spring of 1967, when twenty-year-old Adam Walker, an aspiring poet and student at Columbia University, meets the enigmatic Frenchman Rudolf Born and his silent and seductive girlfriend, Margot. Before long, Walker finds himself caught in a perverse triangle that leads to a sudden, shocking act of violence that will alter the course of his life. Three different narrators tell the story of *Invisible*, a novel that travels in time from 1967 to 2007 and moves from Morningside Heights, to the Left Bank of Paris, to a remote island in the Caribbean. It is a book of youthful rage, unbridled sexual hunger, and a relentless quest for justice. With uncompromising insight, Auster takes us into the shadowy borderland between truth and memory, between authorship and identity, to produce a work of unforgettable power that confirms his reputation as one of America's most spectacularly inventive writers. •

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Customer Reviews

In his latest, Auster is in classic form, perhaps too perfectly satisfying the contention of his wearied protagonist: there is far more poetry in the world than justice. Adam Walker, a poetry student at Columbia in the spring of 1967, is Auster's latest everyman, revealed in four parts through the diary entries of a onetime admirer, the confessions of his once-close friend, the denials of his sister and Walker's own self-made frame. With crisp, taut prose, Auster pushes the tension and his characters' peculiar self-awareness to their limits, giving Walker a fractured, knowing quality that doesn't always

hold. The best moments from Walker's disparate, disturbing coming-of-age come in lush passages detailing Walker's conflicted, incestuous love life (paramount to his education as a human being, but a violation of his self-made promise to live as an ethical human being). As the plot moves toward a Heart of Darkness-style journey into madness, the limits of Auster's formalism become more apparent, but this study of a young poet doomed to life as a manifestation of poetry carries startling weight. (Nov.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Invisible contains many of the hallmarks of Auster's trade: formal literary devices and stylistic high jinks, psychological depth, elegant prose, and the manipulation of information, voices, and stories. Told against the background of 40 years of history, with shame and colonial guilt ever present, Invisible feels "warmer and more human than the stuff he's famous for" (San Francisco Chronicle) as well as less contrived and more hopeful. Indeed, notes the New York Times Book Review, it's "a love story, or a series of intertwined love stories," with Walker at the core. A few critics thought that Auster's technique overwhelms the story, and one thought the characters uninteresting. But most agreed that Invisible is Auster's finest "and perhaps most accessible" novel to date.

One of the best new auster novels. I read it already a few years ago. And last months again with the audible narration by paul auster himself. And that gives the book even more extra power. He is such a good narrator ! Now reading the book for the second time i discover new layers i didn't read earlier. What a story ! The characters became more clear this time. Not only Adam Walker . Still a little shaky agter put the ebook away. Like i had with the book of illusions

Paul Auster has long been fascinated by popular fiction; THE BOOK OF ILLUSIONS for instance, my personal favorite among his works, is about an old-time film-maker. Like Michael Chabon (author of THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAVALIER AND CLAY), Auster has a hankering for the good old yarns they don't tell any more: adventure stories more startling, romances more compelling, or mysteries more sinister than are now the fashion in this more nuanced age. Not that either author is devoid of nuance; Chabon burrows beneath his stories to reveal human depth; Auster erects a scaffolding around them to study the nature of story-telling itself, and what it reveals of our secret natures. Auster is the more abstract author, but that doesn't stop him from being hugely enjoyable. This latest novel gripped me from the very beginning and didn't let go until almost the end. The book is in four parts; the first three of these take place in 1967;

the fourth is an addendum from forty years later. Each of the 1967 sections is told in a different voice, using the first, second, and third person respectively. So the opening is the first-person narrative of Adam Walker, a junior English major at Columbia and would-be poet. He meets a visiting professor from France, Rudolf Born, who offers to invest some family money in a literary magazine that Adam would edit. It seems a young writer's dream come true, but it doesn't feel entirely real and there are disturbing undertones. Gradually Adam gives in to a seduction that is simultaneously intellectual and erotic, until the situation blows up in an encounter which makes him see Born in a different light. The second part continues Adam's story with Born temporarily out of the picture. Auster is brilliant at capturing both the hot, lazy atmosphere of New York in summer and the loose-end feeling of a university student during the long vacation. The erotic element now takes center stage, and might well shock some readers by its explicitness and subject matter, yet Auster also seduces the reader with a romantic yearning that goes beyond the physical. The third part follows Adam to Paris in the fall, the Rive Gauche of the sixties being captured as beautifully as Morningside Heights had been. There Adam meets a brilliant young woman whose mother is about to marry Born; it is a touching and almost innocent relationship, but the elements of eroticism and menace from earlier in the book intervene here too. The final part ties up several of the loose ends, but also questions the veracity of others. In the end, one is left wondering whether any of this supposedly factual narrative is true. Hang on -- isn't it absurd to question levels of truth in a work of fiction? Only if you forget that even fiction reflects someone's truth, that of the author. The invisible presence of the title here is the author himself, hidden behind pseudonyms and layers of narrative. Walker sends part 1 of his story to an old college friend, now a famous novelist, who assembles Adam's notes for publication much as in the third novella in *THE NEW YORK TRILOGY*. Advising Walker to shift to the second person, he cites his own experience: "By writing about myself in the first person, I had smothered myself and made myself invisible... I needed to separate myself from myself, to step back and carve out some space...." Auster takes his own advice. Adam Walker is another example of Auster's continuing attempt throughout his novels to write about himself in other persons, other voices. Of course some of his story is "untrue," because any writer makes things up, just as any writer calls upon true experience. The whole book reads as a demonstration of how fiction is written, by starting with the known and imagining into the unknown. There is, admittedly, a strongly narcissistic quality to the book, which reaches its height in Adam's obsession with his sister. Why should we care about a self-absorbed author if he merely rearranges the lily pads on his reflecting pool? And yes, there are Auster novels where the self-reflexive technique grows tedious. But not this one. Here, Auster lays aside his adult concerns and focuses with astonishing perception

on those few years of young manhood where narcissism is everything. What we see of the adult relationships in the book (with the single exception of Born's) seem contented and stable; the young Adam, by contrast, lives in a world of wish-fulfillment, whether granted or frustrated, as though he were creating his own life in order to live in it. In Adam's first conversation with Born, for instance, it can be hard to tell between the professor and the pupil; quotation marks and speech prefixes are meaningless if both voices are projections of the same mind. The three different women with whom Adam gets involved -- the virgin, the whore, and the virtual twin -- seem like the fantasy objects of late teen libido. Almost fifty years ago now, but I recognize the futility still -- and the thrill of that brave new world. Adam's student Paris in the sixties is my own student Paris. While my life has been much less colorful, I have seldom read a book that so perfectly captured the self-dramatizing quality I cringe to recall from that age, or the combination of brashness and insecurity that gave rise to it. Painful but magnificent!

I absolutely love some of Auster's early books and love his style, which is mostly preserved in this book. Part I was for me an excellent start to a novel. I'm good with gimmicks and everything but all of the subsequent material fell apart for me. With unreliable narrators, you need something to hold the novel together and to me, all of the characters were thin and entirely unreliable, unbelievable, and in the end making me feel as though I don't care. For me, this is not his best, and not very good, mostly because of the placard-like characters.

Is handsome but not brash Gets the girl, with a twist Capable and highly intelligent And blah blah blah.... plot suffers because of all this. Very samey stuff. Not much beneath that veneer. Interesting meta-narrative techniques but not enough to carry the novel.

I have read all of Auster's novels, and every time he takes a turn and makes a decision that takes me from loving the novel to decidedly not loving the novel. Here the turn is a revelation about the 'experiment' that is relayed in such detail, it is difficult to not let its subject overwhelm your taste for the entire novel. As always, his writing is rock-solid, but I wouldn't have the stomach to go recommending this one at a dinner party.

I have to admit that one reason I enjoyed *Invisible* so much was that I found in it echoes of John Fowles's *The Magus*. If Auster has room for references to obscure twelfth-century provençal poets, it seems inconceivable he wasn't aware of Fowles's bestseller when he penned his latest

novel. But perhaps this is mere fantasy on my part - Invisible's ending suggests so, taking a tangent from the book's earlier drift, and to me a little disappointing - perhaps this is simply a case of an unsurprising consonance in themes. Indeed, while in Fowles it is only the protagonist who gets lost in a labyrinth of carefully crafted illusions, Auster's book is multi-layered. The novel moves back and forth between first and second narrator, between third-party voice and subject, forcing the reader to confront the ambivalent roles of narrative as substitute for experience, of memory for self-perception, and of fiction for an elusive reality. In this sense, indeed, it is closest to Auster's own New York Trilogy. It is more or less constructed along three parts, told in the first, then second, and third person, and its vision of writing as a contradictory exercise is a metaphor (I suppose) for the clashes inherent in our own self-constructed identities. Invisible has Adam Walker, a young literature student and poet, drawn into the warped orbit of Rudolf Born, ostensibly just a Columbia university visiting professor, and his licentious girlfriend Margot, also French. At some stage, the story veers into Walker's own complex family inheritance, with explicit scenes I won't betray here to avoid spoilers. But it resumes with revelations of Born's long-foreshadowed violent nature, and a confrontation in which everyone seems to fit increasingly less into what he or she at first appeared to be. Adam Walker is Nicholas Urfe and Born is Conchis (Fowles again, sorry). But then a meta-narrator arises, Auster himself under another, assumed identity. And 'invisible', it is explained, is for the unseen first person, the voice forever barred from turning upon itself, forever incapable of true perspective. Yes, this is all true-to-form Paul Auster, but it is one of his most engaging novels in a long while.

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