



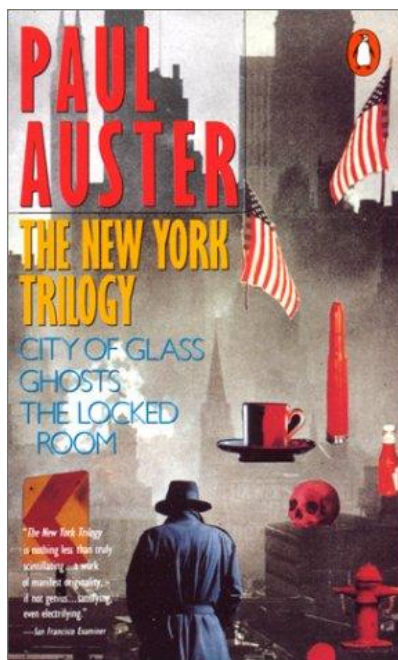
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The Reader Strikes Back:

A Narratological Approach to Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*

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Abstract: The detective novel genre has long been a genre of conventions. Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* is a detective story with a twist that challenges the established conventions of the genre. In this essay, I will use narratology, with a focus on Roland Barthes' *S/Z*, to study Auster's text. I will show that it is by using the five codes that Barthes presents in *S/Z*, that I am able to display how Auster challenges the conventions. In this reading I will also relate *The New York Trilogy* to other detective fiction and to Barthes' notion of 'the death of the author'. Ultimately, I will show that Auster does confirm 'the death of the author'. In the narratives the author is disseminated step by step, and eventually ceases to play an important role.

Key words: Paul Auster *The New York Trilogy* 'The Death of the Author' Roland Barthes Postmodernism Narratology

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“I don't write a book so that it will be the final word; I write a book so that other books are possible, not necessarily written by me” – Michel Foucault¹

Introduction

In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes proposes a distinction between what he calls the ‘readerly’ and ‘writerly’ text. He suggests that “the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text and its user, between its owner and customer, between its author and its reader” (Barthes 4). The vast majority of literature that can be purchased at book stores consists of ‘readerly’ texts, where the reader is simply consuming the text with little or no reflection. The ‘writerly’ text, however, allows a multitude of interpretations and it is the reader, along with the writer, who creates and interprets the narrative. This is also related to Barthes’ famous idea of ‘the death of the author’ since, as Barthes himself puts it, “the birth of the Reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (148). With this quote, Barthes intended to encourage a new era of literature where the reader, once it is written, has more power over a work than the author himself. With structuralism came the idea that works of literature could not be attributed to the genius of a single author. Instead, it was the overall system of writing that had created the work (Dale Parker 57). No text was truly original, since it had to rely on previously established genre conventions and writings. Barthes, being the major figure of the literary theory of structuralism, popularized this concept in his foundational essay “The Death of the Author”. One example of a ‘writerly’ text could arguably be the postmodern novel. Postmodernism, which Frederic Jameson referred to as “the cultural logic of late capitalism” (Dale Parker 299), has been a philosophical, artistic and cultural intellectual development that succeeded modernism. Postmodern literature brought, according to Glenn Ward in his book *Postmodernism*, an end to strict divisions between high and low culture, popularized metafiction, and intertextuality, and blurred the boundaries between fact and fiction (33). One example of a postmodern work of fiction that possesses all of the above mentioned characteristics would be Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*.

In this essay, I intend to use Barthes’ methods from *S/Z*. This Barthesian reading will also be related to some genre theory on detective fiction. I will also show that it is by means of what Barthes refers to as ‘the hermeneutic code’ that Auster plays around with the detective novel genre and it is through breaking with the hermeneutic code, and to a less extent the other codes as well, that he is able to create the text. Auster uses the conventions of the genre

¹ Foucault, Michel. *Dits et Ecrits vol I*. Paris: Gallimard, 1994.

and subverts them as in a postmodern parody, as Linda Hutcheon defines it in *A Theory of Parody*. Finally, I will show that Auster finally confirms the notion of ‘the death of the author’. This will be accomplished through a close reading of the texts.

Theory and Background

The New York Trilogy is a completely new variation of the detective story with neither any real detective, crime nor investigation. It is a metafictional, *film noir* inspired work that has received widespread attention, both in and outside of academic circles. The trilogy consists of the novels *City of Glass*, *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*. They are three different stories and initially published at different times, yet they share so many common characteristics that each story is a reincarnation of the other, or as the narrator himself puts it; “these three stories are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about” (294). In fact, characters are often confused with each other and no identity except New York City itself is ever stable. In each story, we are presented with a mystery, however, in each one of them we are denied closure.

The trilogy has already been examined critically. Anne Holzapfel analyzes the structure of the novels in her *The New York Trilogy: Whodunit?- Tracking the Structure of Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Novels*. Alison Russell argues in her article “Deconstructing *The New York Trilogy*: Paul Auster’s Anti-Detective Fiction” that the *New York Trilogy* is an example of anti-detective fiction, a term coined by Stefano Tani, which means that it is playing around with the genre’s conventions in a postmodern style. There is no doubt that Auster wildly plays around with the conventions. However, does the trilogy really live up to Tani’s ‘anti-detective fiction’ category? Scott A. Dimovitz argues against this point in his “Public Personae and the Private I: De-Compositional Ontology in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*” where he suggests that even if Auster has postmodern influences in his writing, *the trilogy* actually departs from that and never confirms postmodernist ideas. Other critics, such as Madelene Sorapure and Steven Alford, have also examined the narrator, the structure, and the trilogy’s relationship to other detective fiction.

Barthes introduces five codes in *S/Z* that he argues are interwoven in every narrative. He writes that “the five codes create a kind of network, a topos, through which the entire text passes” (Barthes 20). These five different codes are the hermeneutic code, the proairetic code, the semantic code, the symbolic code, and the cultural code. According to Barthes, under the hermeneutic code “we list the various (formal) terms by which an enigma can be

distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense and finally disclosed” (Barthes 19). Of the proairetic code, Barthes writes:

Actions (terms of the proairetic code) can fall into various sequences which should be indicated merely by listing them, since the proairetic sequence is never more than the result of an artifice of reading: whoever reads the text amasses certain data under some generic titles for actions (stroll, murder, rendezvous), and this title embodies the sequence; the sequence exists when and because it can be given a name, it unfolds as this process of naming takes place, as a title is sought or confirmed; its basis is therefore more empirical than rational, and it is useless to attempt to force it into a statutory order; its only logic is that of the “already-done” or “already read” – whence the variety sequences (some trivial, some melodramatic) and the variety of terms (numerous or few) (Barthes 19).

The proairetic acts build suspense and lead the plot on. A character might hear gunshots and the reader will wonder who fired the shots. One act thus triggers another in the narrative. The semantic code finds additional meaning through connotation. Barthes’ first example of this is the connotation of Balzac’s *Sarasine*, which would be connoted with femininity for any French speaker. However, the author of *Sarasine*, Honoré de Balzac, has played a trick on the reader and later on in the narrative it is revealed that Sarasine is a castrato. The symbolic code is somewhat closely related to the semantic one but the symbolic code goes deeper into the structure to uncover meaning, mostly by looking into antitheses. Barthes lastly explains the cultural code by saying that “the cultural codes are references to a science or a body of knowledge; in drawing attention to them, we merely indicate the type of knowledge (physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary, historical, etc.) referred to, without going so far as to construct (reconstruct) the culture they express” (Barthes 20).

Many scholars have shown a theoretical interest in the mystery novel genre. W.H. Auden was one of them, and he had a ‘guilty pleasure’, detective novels. In his essay “The Guilty Vicarage” he offers a theoretical framework at the same time as he elaborates on his addiction. He writes that “for... [him] as for many others, the reading of detective stories is an addiction like tobacco or alcohol” (406). His own personal taste of detective fiction is rather narrow. He writes that “he find[s] it very difficult, for example, to read one that is not set in rural England” but he also says that, in general, “the story must conform to certain formulas” (406). In order for a work of literature to be considered detective fiction it has to fulfill certain criteria. Auden writes that the “basic formula is this: a murder occurs; many are suspected; all but one suspect, who is the murderer, are eliminated; the murderer is arrested or dies.” He also suggests that “many detective stories begin with a death that appears to be suicide and is later discovered to have been murder.” He goes on further by saying that “the

detective story has five elements – the milieu, the victim, the murderer, the suspects and the detectives” (407). The detective is the *sine qua non* of detective fiction, but the detective could be either professional or amateur. Auden also places the milieu among the important elements of detective fiction. He argues that “in the detective story, as in its mirror image, the Quest for the Grail, maps (the ritual of space) and timetables (the ritual of time) are desirable.” Auden also writes that “the detective story requires: [...] A closed society so that the possibility of an outside murderer (and hence of the society being totally innocent) is excluded; and a closely related society so that all its members are potentially suspect (cf. the thriller, which requires an open society in which any stranger may be a friend or enemy in disguise)” (407).

Another valuable theoretical approach to the topic would be Charles Rzepka’s *Detective Fiction*. He writes that “[a] mystery detective story usually contains a detective of some kind, an unsolved mystery (not always technically a crime), and an investigation by which the mystery eventually is solved (10). He further elaborates on the topic by suggesting, “it is essential to [grant] the reader access to information essential to solving the mystery is thought by many readers and critics, at least nowadays, to be crucial to stories of detection” (11). The reader thus plays a crucial role in detective fiction. The classic detective story could then be considered partially a ‘writerly’ text since the reader has to exercise their intellect to produce meaning; yet, by the end of the story one single solution is presented as the key to the mystery, rather than a multitude of solutions. Willard Huntington Wright famously stated in the opening of his “Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories” that “the detective story is a kind of intellectual game. It is more – it is a sporting event” (qtd. in Rzepka 189). Rzepka also writes that “the narrative structure of testimonies within which the clues appear in fictional detection has become a prominent part of contemporary narratology” (18). Due to the detective novel’s unique suspense narrative structure, it provides interesting material to study detective fiction from a narratological point of view. An approach such as Barthes’ could thus be appropriate for an analysis of *The New York Trilogy* to unravel how clues are revealed and not revealed. Additionally, I would like to add one more remark about narratology and detective fiction. According to Tzvetan Todorov, each detective story has two parts, the story of the crime and that of the investigation. He writes that “the story of the crime – tells ‘what really happened’, whereas the second – the story of the investigation – explains how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it” (qtd. in Rzepka 45). In true narratological spirit, Todorov refers to the first story as ‘story’, and the second ‘plot’. Due to the multitude of terms within narratology, I would like to clarify that I will use Todorov’s terms. These

terms would correspond to the same terms different narratologists have referred to as tale and telling, fabula and sjuzet, and story and discourse (Parker 66). The story is the sequence of events in that exact order they take place, and the plot is the order in which they are narrated. In addition, some concepts from Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* will be used, since it is such a foundational work within narratology.

For many postmodern writers and thinkers strict conventions of how things usually were done no longer made sense to them. The postmodern detective novel in the form of anti-detective fiction was therefore not a surprise. Holzapfel has in her "The New York Trilogy: Whodunit?" attempted to define this new subgenre. She writes that "the anti-detective novel is, as the term implies, not a detective novel in the true sense of the meaning. It is rather a parody of the genre, toying with the readers' expectations and conventions of detective novels" (23). *The New York Trilogy* is very frequently, when discussed, referred to as a postmodern novel. The postmodernist critic Linda Hutcheon has in *A Theory of Parody* developed a theory on parody in a postmodern context. Holzapfel writes that the anti-detective novel is a parody on detective fiction, but Hutcheon presents a more general definition of parody when she describes it as "repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity" (6). She develops her explanation and suggests that a work of parody imitates another one, however, this imitation is not normally any form of mockery of the original text. In fact, it could even be considered flattery (6). Hutcheon then adds that a parody does not necessarily need to be a parody on one single work, it could also be an entire genre (22), which the term 'anti-detective fiction' would refer to.

The critical theory used in this reading will be narratology, with a focus on Roland Barthes' *S/Z*. In *S/Z* Barthes does a thorough reading of Honoré de Balzac's *Sarasine*. He goes through every single sentence of the short story and analyzes it by applying his five codes. In this essay, I will use Barthes' codes, i.e. his theory and method, but I will not look at every single sentence of *The New York Trilogy's* three novels. Instead, I will look at key passages chronologically from each story applying the codes. The first chapter will consist of an analysis of *City of Glass* and the second chapter will deal with *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*. The in-depth analysis will be found by the end of the second chapter, since it eventually is *The Locked Room* that represents the final stage in the awareness of the narrator/author, according to himself. The terminology used in this essay will correspond to the same terminology Barthes uses in *S/Z* in addition to Todorov's terminology above.

Hermeneutic code

In this essay, a primary focus will lie on the hermeneutic code and should thus be explained more explicitly. The hermeneutic code could show us how clues are revealed in the narrative. Barthes observes that “the hermeneutic code has a function, the one we (with Jakobson) attribute to the poetic code: just as rhyme (notably) structures the poem according to the expectation and desire for recurrence, so the hermeneutic terms structure the enigma according to the expectation and desire for its solution” (75). In *S/Z*, Barthes finds the different enigmas in *Sarasine*, i.e. the different unanswered questions that lead the plot on. Then he numbers them according to their occurrence in the narrative. He then shows how the answers to those enigmas are delayed and finally disclosed.

Chapter one – *City of Glass*

City of Glass is a story full of mysteries. The narrative circulates around the protagonist Daniel Quinn, who writes mystery novels under the pseudonym William Wilson. After an unexpected series of events, he is soon drawn into a real life mystery novel, in which he finds himself taking on the role of the detective. Comments on the genre are sprinkled throughout the novel. The narrator observes that “the detective is the one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them. In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable” (8). The narrator also lets us know that “even before he became William Wilson, Quinn had been a devoted reader of mystery novels. He knew that most of them were poorly written, that most could not stand up to even the vaguest sort of examination, but still, it was the form that appealed to him, and it was the rare, unspeakably bad mystery that he would refuse to read” (8). A classic detective novel does at least to some extent claim monopoly on the solution. When Sherlock Holmes has solved a crime, the solution is posed as the truth and it is not further questioned. However, for many postmodern writers and thinkers the concept of ‘truth’ comes uneasy. As mentioned above, they often dislike to think that there is one universal truth that is true for all groups of peoples. Thus, the detective novel, with its single solution, has to be altered in its form, in order to be written under a postmodern influence.

In this chapter, I will extract a few key sequences out of *City of Glass* and apply Barthes’ five codes in order to reveal the structure of this anti-detective novel. I will do this so that I can see how Auster presents and discloses enigmas in the narrative, and what that implies. The hermeneutic code depends on the introduction and solution of any number of enigmas in the narrative. An enigma is first introduced and then it could immediately be disclosed or delayed. If the solution to the enigma is delayed, the author could use some of the narrative devices Barthes refers to as “snares”, “jammings” and “equivocations” (Barthes 75). These terms will later be introduced and explained. The key sequences will be introduced chronologically. The novel starts *in medias res* with a phone call; “it was the wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of the night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not” (Auster 3). Here, we are introduced to the first four enigmas of the story. Enigma number one is introduced: who was supposed to get that phone call? Enigma two would be: who is calling? Enigma three would be: who is answering? The whole story thus starts with a mystery and we are introduced to the plot immediately. We want to know what happens next. The proairetic act would be to answer the phone, which

requires further action. “It was the wrong number that started it” makes us wonder what ‘it’ is and we are thus exposed to enigma four: what is about to happen? There is not yet a crime, detective, or victim but the reader fears what is about to happen. This first sentence is also full of connotations. It is related to secrecy. Since the caller calls in the middle of the night there is a hint that his business is not something that should be talked about during the daytime. The wording of the expression “dead of the night” also suggests that it was during the most uneventful part of the night that Quinn received the phone call.

The narrator then introduces Quinn, the person answering the phone:

As for Quinn, there is little that need detain us. Who he was, where he came from, and what he did are of no great importance. We know, for example, that he was thirty-five years old. We know that he had once been married, had once been a father, and that both his wife and son were now dead. We also know that he wrote books. To be precise, we know that he wrote mystery novels. (Auster 3)

Here, we are given the answer to enigma number three; who is answering? The person receiving the phone call seems to be a man named Quinn. We are given this answer at the same time as our curiosity is not satisfied. The narrator simply tells us that it is not necessary to know all the details. They are not relevant. We find out that he was married and had a child but that something has now happened. This is what Barthes would call a ‘partial answer’, since we just partially find out the truth (75). The partial answer, however, raises more questions and enigma number five arises; what happened to his wife and child? We are also given the curious information that Quinn writes mystery novels and, as far as the reader understands it, he seems to have become involved in a mystery plot himself. At this point, we are starting to see the paradoxes of the story. This is no regular mystery novel; it is experimental because a character in classic detective fiction would never be the writer of detective fiction himself. We are also given some chronological information and we find out that Quinn at this time is thirty-five-years old. According to Rzepka, this would correspond to the archetypal mystery novel writer and the archetypal detective, i.e. a Western middle class, middle aged male (235). Rzepka also adds “white” (235) to this description; however, nothing has been mentioned of Quinn’s skin color yet. Yet, if we skip ahead to the third and final part of the trilogy, *The Locked Room*, the narrator claims authorship of all three novels at the same time that he confirms that he is white as well. At that point in the narrative, the narrator goes back to a point before the beginning of the story and tells us that he for one summer worked to track people down who had not responded to questionnaires, and that he in one apartment “talked with a half-blind woman whose parents had been slaves. Twenty minutes into the

interview, it finally dawned on her that I wasn't black, and she started crackling with laughter. She had suspected it all along, she said, because my voice was funny, but she had trouble believing it. I was the first white person who had ever been inside her house" (292-293). This however, reveals our bias as readers. Most of us pictured the narrator as a detective-like character, fitting directly into the archetype. The narrator's embedded story just tells us what we knew all along, due to our genre expectations. This is notable, considering how much Auster has experimented with other aspects. At the same time, the black woman finds it difficult not to assume that the person interviewing her is not black since her previous experience has taught her that only black people come into her house.

The story goes on and our desire for clues arises:

"Is this Paul Auster?" asked the voice. "I would like to speak to Mr. Paul Auster."

"There's no one here by that name."

"Paul Auster. Of the Auster Detective Agency."

"I'm sorry," said Quinn.

"You must have the wrong number."

"This is a matter of utmost urgency," said the voice.

"There's nothing I can do for you," said Quinn. "There is no Paul Auster here."

"You don't understand," said the voice. "Time is running out."

"Then I suggest you dial again. This is not a detective agency." (Auster 7)

Here, we are given the answer to enigma number one; who was supposed to get that phone call? The man who was supposed to receive that phone call seems to be somebody named Paul Auster who seems to be working for a detective agency. It also seems likely to assume that Auster is a detective himself. Enigma number one is thus disclosed. Any reader who has opened the book, will immediately associate this Auster character with the author, whose name is Paul Auster as well. The motif of confused identities appears. We also ask ourselves what is it the voice needs so desperately? This could be seen as enigma number five. The mystery deepens as the voice shows so much urgency even if Quinn tries to make it clear that he cannot help. One cannot help but to relate this conversation with oddity. The 'voice' seems in this passage as if he is a little deranged. The 'voice' does not show a normal reaction when Quinn lets him know that he has dialed the wrong number. The most normal thing to do would be to finish up the conversation and to admit that he dialed the wrong number.

The conversation then is led into more serious matters:

I need help, 'said the voice. 'There is great danger. They say you are the best one to do these things.' 'It depends on what things you mean.' 'I mean death. I mean death and murder.' 'That's not exactly my line,' said Quinn. 'I don't go around killing people.' 'No,' said the voice petulantly. 'I mean the reverse.' (Auster 11)

In this sequence, we receive some more information about ‘the voice’. Supposedly, somebody is going to kill him and we are introduced to enigma number six; who is going to kill ‘the voice’? We are also given a snare to enigma number five: what is it the voice needs so desperately? Here we have what Barthes calls a snare. According to him, a snare is an early revelation of the enigma, yet at the same time the whole truth will not be disclosed (75). The begging instigates further action since we have certain expectations about the detective narrative. We want to know why he is in danger. Here, we are also given the first hint of one of the essential elements of detective fiction, the crime. No crime has yet occurred as far as we know but we know that there is great danger. What we see here is seemingly the victim contacting somebody he assumes to be a detective. Yet this is not what one would normally expect in the detective narrative. According to what Auden tells us, it is more common that the crime has already occurred when the narrative begins, which is likely to be a murder. The detective is then hired to find out who committed the crime. In *City of Glass*, Auster plays around with these conventions and the established story – plot relationship is challenged. We know that Quinn is not a detective, yet he takes on the role of an amateur one from this scene onwards. The wording of “‘I mean death. I mean death and murder’” implies grave seriousness.

The next sequence is even more enigmatic and full of paradoxes:

My name is Peter Stillman. Perhaps you have heard of me, but more than likely not. No matter. That is not my real name. My real name I cannot remember. Excuse me - Not that it makes a difference. That is to say, anymore.” (16)

Here we get an equivocation of enigma number two: who is calling? Equivocation is according to Barthes “a mixture of truth and snare which frequently, while focusing on the enigma, helps to thicken it” (75). Quinn now meets the man who was ‘the voice on the phone’. He tells us that his name is Peter Stillman even if that is not his real name. He even says that he cannot remember his real name. The mystery with the caller now seems to be partially solved; at least he is now sitting in front of Quinn. The detective novel requires a setting of an enclosed number of people. However, here identities almost seem to float free and the question ‘who’s who?’ seems more and more abstract. Who could be the culprit when we cannot confidently ask the question ‘whodunit?’, and expect an answer? The mysterious Peter Stillman has now introduced himself but we want to know more. We are now led further to believe that Peter Stillmann is either very odd or mentally ill. His words depart from any kind of logical thought when he presents himself with what he says is not his real name. It is even more illogical that he suggests that he does not remember his real name.

Peter Stillman continues his deranged speech and tells Quinn “that is why I will tell you. No questions, please. You are wondering about all the rest. That is to say, the father” (Auster 18). We are now given the answer to enigma number six; who is going to kill ‘the voice’? Now we are given what Barthes calls ‘disclosure’, which means that the answer to an enigma is fully revealed (75). It seems to be Peter Stillman’s father who is the danger and the possible future murderer. Quinn is hereafter given the role to follow Peter’s father around to make sure he does not pose a threat to Peter Stillman the younger.

The story goes on, yet it never seems to lead into the plot. By the last pages of the novel many enigmas are introduced, yet very few are disclosed. The narrator comments on this and introduces him/herself:

At this point the story grows obscure. The information has run out, and the events that follow this last sentence will never be known. It would be foolish even to hazard a guess. I returned home from my trip to Africa in February, just hours before a snowstorm began to fall on New York. (Auster 132)

We have now arrived at the last page. A hundred pages have passed and no crime has yet occurred. The first sentence of this extract, “at this point the story grows obscure”, could not be more fitting. Barthes writes that “truth is brushed past, avoided, lost” (75), which would correspond well to this entire story, even if Barthes with those words just commented on delays in the plot. Equivocations and snares delayed the disclosure of the enigmas, yet the end does not disclose those enigmas at all. The narrative thus breaks with the hermeneutic code. The detective novel especially is very dependent on the hermeneutic code since it always includes a mystery that requires a solution. Now there is a completely foreign narrator of whom we have no prior knowledge introducing himself in the narrative. Here we are introduced to enigma number seven; who is the narrator? We are never given the answer to this mystery in *City of Glass*, and much more is not known about him by the end of the trilogy either. If we also reflect on what the narrator has told us previously we also question his reliability. The narrator claims that he “followed the red notebook as closely as [he] could” and that he has “refrained from any interpretations” (133). When Gérard Genette completed his study of narratives, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, he also studied different types of narrators. He categorized them according to their involvement in the narratives. The two most involved categories of narrators, according to Genette, who hold the testimonial and ideological functions, i.e. that the narrators confirm the source of the story and its accuracy, at the same time as they interrupt the narrative with some general comments on the narrative (Genette 162). There is a new character introduced here on this final page, the narrator. The

act of presenting himself could be seen as a proairetic act and it would thus lead the plot on. However, this happens on the final page and the next thing we expect to come after the proairetic act, does not occur. Auster does thus also break with the proairetic code.

At this point we are approaching the very end of the novel, with just a few sentences left. Due to our genre expectations, we desperately crave closure. The narrator, however, does not give us what we crave:

As for Auster I am convinced that he behaved badly throughout. If our friendship has ended, he has only himself to blame. As for me my thoughts remain with Quinn. He will be with me always. And wherever he may have disappeared to, I wish him luck. (Auster 133)

We are thus finishing the book not knowing what happened to Quinn. Even if this enigma is never disclosed, it could be seen as enigma number eight and what Barthes refers to as 'jamming', i.e. an acknowledgement of insolubility (47) and that is what we have here, the story is jammed and cannot be solved. We will never know what happened to Quinn and most of the other enigmas are not disclosed either. The narrator thus denies us the closure that we want. In "Deconstructing The New York Trilogy: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction" Russell writes that "as a genre, the detective story is end-dominated, and its popularity attests to Western culture's obsession with closure. By denying closure, and by sprinkling his trilogy with references to other end-dominated texts, Auster continually disseminates the meaning of this detective story" (Russel 73). Barthes also mentions the Western obsession with closure and what he refers to as "the closure system" (7).

The conventions of the detective novel are constantly played around with and since we now have a knowledge of its poetics we can see the experimentation more clearly and it is clear that *The New York Trilogy* parodies the genre. The narrator tells Quinn that "Stillman jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge" (Auster 123). It appears as if he, Stillman Sr., could not handle his guilt anymore. However, since we know that many detective stories begin with murder that looks like suicide, it would be fair to assume that Auster is playing with this convention as well. This might well be another mystery and we will never know if it was maybe the other Peter Stillman, the one who Quinn decided not to follow at the train station, who jumped off the bridge (123). Peter Stillman Jr. would surely have a motive to kill his father. The milieu is in some ways enclosed and structured, as in the typical detective novel. The whole plot takes place in New York City, or Manhattan and Brooklyn to be precise. The city remains a stable character in the story and there are constant street references throughout. There are also maps included throughout the text to describe Quinn's and Peter Stillman Sr.'s movements. However, there are never any unknown suspects and an investigation trying to

figure out who did it. The reader is unable to try to solve the crime on the same conditions as the detective.

Through using Barthes' codes and applying the genre conventions of detective fiction we can realize to what extent Auster plays around with the genre. We can see how the connotations related to the text send it even further into absurdity. Towards the end of *City of Glass*, signifiers are left floating away, far from the signifieds. Meaning is disseminated and appears to be forever inaccessible. Scott A. Dimovitz says it well when he writes that "this [...] perfectly reflects Auster's Barthesian view that the reader ultimately generates textual meaning" (620). This is thus a writerly text where the reader has to produce the meaning of the narrative.

In the next chapter, I will look at *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room* with a Barthesian approach and compare the stories with detective fiction.

Chapter two: *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*

In Auster's two succeeding novels *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*, the parody of the detective novel is taken even further. In *Ghosts*, Blue is hired to spy on Black by White. He is given an apartment across Black's and starts watching him. There is an uneventful time that follows when Blue suddenly realizes that Black might be spying on Blue. Already in the first few sentences of *Ghosts*, Auster plays around with the story and plot convention common to detective fiction. The narrator tells us that "first of all there is Blue. Later there is White, and then there is Black, and before the beginning there is Brown [...] that is how it begins" (137). Before the beginning is referring to a time before the plot began, which would be in the story. According to Rzepka, we will first have a crime and then an investigation following to solve the crime. Here, however, Auster constructed it the other way around and already on the first page the investigation is introduced: "the case seems simple enough. White wants Blue to follow a man named Black and to keep an eye on him for as long as necessary. While working for Brown, Blue did many tail jobs, and this one seems no different, perhaps easier than most" (137). We are now given the information that Blue seems to be a private detective. Blue automatically "assumes that it is a marriage case". This is rather surprising. Even if we know that Blue works as a detective and that detectives would do marriage assignments, such cases are very rarely found in detective fiction, or at the very least, they have a lot more to them than just a marital conflict. Here, we are introduced to the first enigma of the novel: why is Blue watching Black?

According to Todorov, as previously mentioned, each detective story contains two stories, the crime and the investigation. He observes that "the first story, that of the crime, ends before the second begins. But what happens in the second? Not much. The characters of this second story, do not act, they learn" (44). I mentioned previously that *Ghosts* starts directly with the plot and not the story, according to Todorov's terminology. Todorov suggests that not much happens in the plot (qtd. in Rzepka 19), which is something that Auster takes a step further. The unnamed narrator lets us in on nested narratives, i.e. stories within stories (Dale Parker 69), with stories about murdered children and the future Mrs. Blue that are in Blue's head. But that is almost everything that happens throughout most of the story. For the majority of the time Blue just sits in his window, watching Black. After just a minor event where Black meets a woman in a restaurant, the narrator observes that "the days go by, and once again things settle down to the barest of routines [...] Blue begins to think that any day he will get a letter telling him that the case is closed" (157). As the novel progresses he starts to imitate Black and when Black reads *Walden*, so does Blue. In *City of Glass* the narrator observes that a

detective watches, listens and searches for that one idea that will connect the dots to solve the mystery. Thus, he also suggests that the writer and detective are interchangeable (8). Since these three works are so closely connected, this comment could be applied to *Ghosts*. Blue looks at Black, he listens to him during their encounters and he searches for the idea that will pull all things together. However, as everywhere else in the trilogy, meaning is always deferred and that one idea that will pull everything together and hit the nail on the head does not exist. The lack of definite meaning is prevalent in postmodern fiction, but in detective fiction one solution is presented as the one universal truth. The choice of using detective fiction genre conventions for a postmodern work therefore shows to be an interesting combination.

The plot nears its climax where it is not expected. Blue grows restless and one day, when he goes to the bank to leave his report, he waits for White to appear. White does after a while show up at the bank. However, he is wearing a mask and when Blue approaches, he hurries away. A few days after the event, he receives a note saying “no more funny business” (169). At this point in the narrative, the second enigma is reintroduced in the plot. However, we still do not receive any more clues about who White really is, even if he appears to be a more threatening figure. This would thus be a ‘jamming’. According to the hermeneutic code, enigmas will eventually be solved as the plot progresses. In *Ghosts*, however, we are never given the answer to this enigma.

Blue and Black finally have a violent encounter where Blue nearly, or actually, kills Black. This is now the final scene and Blue comments on the story’s frame by saying that “you’re supposed to tell me the story. Isn’t that how it’s supposed to end? You tell me the story and then we say goodbye” (196). The narrator remains unnamed, yet comments on the proceeding plot in the very end, “but the story is not yet over. There is still the final moment and that will not come until Blue leaves the room. Such is the way of the world: not one moment more, not one moment less. When Blue stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door, that will be the end of it” (198). The clear boundary of the end shows Auster’s notion of time. In the beginning, the narrator tells us that “the time is present” (137), just to tell us on the next page that “it is 3 February 1947”. In the final passage the narrator has changed his mind again, “for we must remember that all this took place more than thirty years ago, back in the days of our earliest childhood” (198). A reader would normally be able to follow a somewhat chronological timeline of events, but here Auster chooses a contradictory account of events.

The final words of the novel are: “and from this moment on, we know nothing” (198). We still have not received the answer to the first enigma, about why Blue was hired to watch Black. We will never get the answer to enigma number three either. Once again, Auster denies the reader what he wants because he knows just how badly the reader desires closure. Yet it is the reader himself who has to create some meaning, and, just as Blue was speculating why he was hired, the reader has to speculate about what happened.

Auster’s third novel of the trilogy was published in the same year as *Ghosts*, 1986 and it is named *The Locked Room*. It is the final wrap-up of this series of novels and since the narrator mentions that each story represents a different stage in his awareness of what it is about, the final story should be the most developed story. If *The Locked Room* is being looked at in that way, any analysis of the final novel in the trilogy should be considered more valuable than an analysis of the two other novels, since the author in this novel came a little closer to his own understanding of what the trilogy is about. *The Locked Room* thus offers the most complete account of meaning and the most accurate themes. Therefore, I will do a more in-depth reading of the final work of the trilogy. All in all, *The Locked Room* gains its meaning through its relationship to the other two novels, and, according to some critics even through its relationship with Auster’s other writings. By this way of reasoning, it could even be said that all literature that came before it helped this work gain its meaning. This is perhaps more true with Auster’s trilogy than most other recent texts, since it relies so heavily on previously established genre conventions and all its references to previous works such as *Walden* and hard-boiled detective fiction. The same characters, intertextuality and plot reoccur in *The Locked Room*. The unnamed narrator now suddenly presents himself as the author of all three works: “these three stories are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about” (294).

In contrast to the other two novels, *The Locked Room* more clearly corresponds to the genre conventions of detective novels when it comes to plot and story. In the story, the narrator and Fanshawe have a long, mostly very happy, childhood together. They grow up together and then they drift apart in their late teenage years. In the story, the narrator becomes a published writer and Fanshawe goes to sea, possibly traveling all over the world. Fanshawe then meets and marries Sophie. All of a sudden, in the midst of Sophie’s pregnancy, Fanshawe disappears and he is nowhere to be found. It is also in the story that Sophie hires the private detective Quinn to look for Fanshawe. The plot begins with the narrator being contacted by Sophie:

It seems to me now that Fanshawe was always there. He is the place where everything begins for me, and without him, I would hardly know who I am [...] Seven years ago this November, I received a letter from a woman named Sophie Fanshawe. 'You don't know me', the letter began, 'and I apologize for writing to you like this out of the blue. But things have happened, and under the circumstances, I don't have much choice.' It turned out that she was Fanshawe's wife. (201)

Sophie then tells the narrator about what has passed and he is given the role of evaluating Fanshawe's literary works and to see if publishing them is worthwhile. The narrator suggests that he gains his own identity through his relationship with Fanshawe. This is related to Saussure's idea that concepts ultimately gain their meaning through their relationship with other concepts (Dale Parker 45). But since other identities always change, not even the self would be stable. Ultimately, the narrator almost becomes Fanshawe. They marry the same woman, they are the father of the same child, and the narrator even considers publishing Fanshawe's work under his own name. Two characters blur into one, which further emphasizes that identity is a social construct. This has been previously addressed in Auster's trilogy; we have seen three Peter Stillman, Quinn floats freely between himself, Max Work, William Wilson and Paul Auster, and in *Ghosts* Blue and Black almost melt into the same character since they both observe each other.

On the very first page, the first, and most major, enigma of the novel is introduced: what happened to Fanshawe? If the story from this point would follow the pattern of the detective novel then a detective would be hired to try to track down Fanshawe in the plot, which would be the investigation. However, the reader is soon to find out that the detective Quinn has already been hired to try to solve the problem of the disappearance. Quinn has already given up on the case and left it behind him, or that is at least the information that is initially disclosed. In *City of Glass*, Quinn took on the identity of a detective, in *Ghosts* both Black and Blue are detectives, but in *The Locked Room* nobody explicitly takes on the role of the detective. However, the narrator still does shoulder the role, even if it is never clearly stated. The narrator searches for Fanshawe but does it for personal reasons; he wants to know what happened to Fanshawe to be able to proceed with his life. He left a pregnant wife behind him and a soon to be elderly mother. The narrator puts himself in the situation of searching for the idea that will pull all things together, why did Fanshawe leave? Even if the writer presumes that he is dead he cannot conclude that to all certainty, and thus Fanshawe lives on.

In the two initial novels, endings and answers are desperately craved, and in *The Locked Room* the half-hearted investigation finally leads to the narrator's finding Fanshawe. Fanshawe requests him to come to an address in Boston. When he arrives, Fanshawe is in a

locked room, just like the common detective novel trope (Rzepka 69). In this final scene the narrator is given a chance to question Fanshawe about what happened: “at a certain point, I realized that I owed you an explanation for what I did. At least an attempt” (311). Fanshawe then tells the narrator that he has written his whole story down in a notebook that he gives to the narrator. Even if the notebook does not seem to make much sense, “each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible (370), there is at least an attempt at an explanation and the enigma is almost given closure.

The Locked Room ends when the narrator has finished reading the read notebook, thus giving a clear actual boundary to the end of the plot. This is similar to the situation in *City of Glass* when the plot ends as Quinn has no more pages left to write on in his red notebook. In the end, the narrator comments on the content: “if I say nothing about what I found, it is because I understood very little. All the words were familiar to me, and yet they seemed to have been put together strangely, as though their final purpose was to cancel each other out” (313). This could also easily be seen as a comment on the trilogy as a whole where many elements cancel each other out. In *City of Glass* one Peter Stillman at Union Station cancels out the other, in *Ghosts* the time references cancel out each other, and, in *The Locked Room*, it is Fanshawe’s notebook that cancels itself out. Eventually, it is also the hermeneutic code that cancels itself out because one clue makes the previous one impossible. Even if Barthes seems to have been in favor of literary works where the reader is a producer of meaning, he still wrote *S/Z* with its narratological approach.

It is first in the third part of the trilogy that it is revealed that there is one single narrator in all three works. The identity of the narrator has already been extensively discussed by critics. Both Madeleine Sorapure in her essay “The Detective and the Author” and Steven E. Alford in his critical essay “Mirrors of Madness: Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*” make the claim that the narrator of the three works is actually the writer Paul Auster himself. Both critics have gained their reading through the fictitious Auster’s reading of *Don Quixote*. In *City of Glass* Auster tells the narrator that Sancho Panza was the only eye witness to Don Quixote’s adventures and that there never was such a person as Cid Hamete Benengeli. Instead, he thinks that Panza, illiterate but possessing a great gift for language, dictated the story to somebody else. The story was subsequently translated to Arabic, and this was the translation found by Cervantes. Auster, however, argues that “Don Quixote [...] was not really mad. He only pretended to be. In fact, he orchestrated the whole thing himself” (99). Quinn then asks why Don Quixote would go through all that and Auster subsequently answers:

Don Quixote was conducting an experiment. He wanted to test the gullibility of his fellow men. Would it be possible, he wondered, to stand up before the world and with the utmost conviction spew out lies and nonsense? To say that windmills were knights, that a barber's basin was a helmet, that puppets were real people? Would it be possible to persuade others to agree with what he said, even though they did not believe him? In other words, to what extent would people tolerate blasphemies if they gave them amusement? The answer is obvious, isn't it? To any extent. (100)

Alford writes that “to follow the lines of the Quixote argument, we could argue as well that (Auster) has engineered the entire enterprise and chosen Quinn and Stillman as his saviours so that he could spew out lies and nonsense for people's amusement. Hence, Paul Auster, the writer in *City of Glass*, is a character invented by (Paul Auster), narrator, the same way that the character “Don Quixote” was engineered by Don Quiote” (21). He subsequently concludes that we thus have three Austers in the story: those being narrator, character and author.

Sorapure draws similar conclusions to Alford. She suggests that “in this interpretation, the author (“Auster”) seems to be situated in a position of even greater mastery and authority than in the traditional detective story, a kind of metamastery, standing behind not only the events and characters in the novel but the writing of the novel itself” (85). I think their claim holds a lot of textual evidence. There are many parallels that could be drawn between *Don Quixote* and *The New York Trilogy*, especially in regards to the narrator.. Also, what neither Alford or Sorapure mention as support to their theory is that the narrator holds information that he could not possibly know from the red notebook, such as the fact that the narrator tells us that Quinn does not remember any of his dreams anymore (5). Additionally, if we look at the extracts of the red notebook, they are mainly philosophical reflections about his surroundings, and not a detailed dairy. Thus, it seems unlikely that he would have included details such as bathroom breaks, which can be found in *City of Glass*.

The identity of the narrator has been a frequent discussion topic when *The New York Trilogy* has been examined. The identity of the narrator is also related to the role of the author. In the following paragraphs, I will try to show how Auster's use of intertextuality is related to the notion of ‘the death of the author’. Barthes believes that meaning can be unraveled by means of the codes. The semiotic code will create meaning through connotations and the cultural code through different references. Throughout the three works there are many references and connotations to the latter half of the 19th century in America. This was a period of importance when it came to creating an American identity, often referred to as the American Renaissance. During this time many of America's most foremost early writers

published their work. These were writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, Edgar Allen Poe and Walt Whitman. Hawthorne published a novel called *Fanshawe*, the narrator introduces himself as Melville in Paris, Blue and Black read Thoreau, and converse about Whitman. Quinn's mystery novel pseudonym, William Wilson, shares its name with a short story by Poe about confused identities. Henry Ward Beecher, a famous abolitionist and brother to Harriet Beecher Stowe, is also mentioned in *Ghosts* when Blue walks by his statue in Brooklyn. The intertextuality is almost always present and it permeates the texts. These authors were more or less part of the transcendentalist movement, which was an intellectual and spiritual movement in the latter half of the 19th century, with its center in Massachusetts. The transcendentalists' writings would easily fall into the category of high culture (Britannica Online Encyclopedia). The blending of high and low culture has, as mentioned in the introduction, been a popular practice among postmodernists. Detective fiction, on the other hand, is more easily consumed entertainment, that is purchased by the vast masses of people. The blending of transcendentalist high culture and detective low fiction further confirms Barthes notion of 'the death of the author', mentioned in the beginning since Paul Auster was only able to write *The New York Trilogy* because of the relationships to other works. The already established genre conventions of detective fiction gave him something to build from, and, by using intertextuality, he shaped the novel. Paul Auster also used his own life to write the trilogy. The name printed on the front cover is Paul Auster, yet the Paul Auster we encounter in the *City of Glass*, does not claim authorship, he is simply a bystander. Still, however, the Paul Auster appearing in *City of Glass* shares many characteristics with the non-fictitious Paul Auster who wrote the novels in the eighties. They seem to be roughly the same age, they both have a son named Daniel and a wife named Siri of Norwegian heritage. The identity of Paul Auster is further disseminated when there is also another Auster who has a detective agency.

That Auster seems to look back to the American Renaissance in his works is significant in many ways. Since so many of today's famous and most read works of American literature were written during that time, it was finally possible to answer the question; what is American literature? A national literary identity once established, can also be expanded to include more, previously marginalized writers, and it could also finally be disseminated. Auster does rely heavily on the American Renaissance writers' works. Interestingly enough, it is the one writer who could, according to Rzepka, be credited with the invention of literary detective stories with his 1841 short story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (13), i.e. Edgar Allen Poe, who is most often referred to in the trilogy. Throughout the novels, plenty of references to Poe can

be found. Quinn asks himself in *City of Glass* “what is it Dupin says in Poe? “An identification of the reasoner’s intellect with that of his opponent.” (48). Later on, he also reflects upon that “on this same spot, in the summers of 1843 and 1844, Edgar Allen Poe had spent many long hours gazing out at the Hudson” (100). The delirious state that Quinn is found in by the end of the novel could perhaps be compared to the state of Poe himself, who also was found delirious right before his passing. His exact cause of death remains, as is well known, a mystery. In *The Locked Room* the narrator reflects once again upon the works of Poe; “it is surely a frightening thing, to imagine breathing yourself into a coffin of ice, and to my mind considerably more compelling than, say *The Pit and the Pendulum* by Poe” (300). Just after the death of Fanshawe’s father, the two boys walk around in a cemetery when Fanshawe decided to climb down into a freshly dug grave. “His feet touched the ground and he looked back up at me with a half-smile, and then lay down on his back, as though pretending to be dead” (222). This event could easily be related to Poe’s common theme of the fear of being buried alive, found in short stories such as “The Premature Burial” and “The Cask of Amontillado”.

So Auster relies heavily on the American Renaissance writers, with a focus on Edgar Allan Poe. However, he also relies on earlier writings as well. Quinn reads Marco Polo’s *Travels*, reflects upon Montaigne’s essay “Apology for Raymond Sebond”, and the narrator’s identity is, according to my previous analysis, established through Auster’s interpretation of *Don Quixote*. To take it even further, the narrator makes references to Haydn’s opera *The Man in the Moon* and the painting *Soldier and Young Girl Smiling* by Vermeer. To produce meaning Auster makes use of referring to other works of culture. *The New York Trilogy* is thus not a very original work, even though it is often being considered so. This realization echoes the words of Barthes in his essay “The Death of the Author”, where he writes that each text is a:

Multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture. Similar to Bouvard and Pécuchet, those eternal copyists, at once sublime and comic and whose profound ridiculousness indicates precisely the truth of writing, the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any of them. (146)

Michel Foucault expressed views similar to Barthes’ in his essay “What is an author?” He reflects on the disappearance of the author within criticism and concludes that we will no longer have to hear such repetitions as “who is the real author?” ‘Have we proof of his originality?’ ‘What has he revealed of his most profound self in his language?’” (138). Instead we will within criticism ask ourselves questions such as “what are the modes of existence of

this discourse?’ Where does it come from; how is it circulated; who controls it?’ ‘What placements are determined for possible subjects?’” (138). The early criticism, with its many parallels drawn between the author and his work would, and should, according to these French intellectuals be a thing of the past.

This thought has in many ways permeated the last decades’ criticism. According to Barthes’, the author is a product, created by capitalism’s individualism and desire to sell everything sellable. In *The New York Trilogy*, the author is eventually so disseminated that he ceases to be important. Quinn notes that “no matter how many facts are told, no matter how many details are given, the essential thing resists telling. To say that so and so was born here and went there, that he did this and did that, that he married this woman and had these children, that he lived, that he died, that he left behind these books or this battle or that bridge – none of that tells us very much” (242). By the end of *City of Glass*, Quinn disappears more and more in his writer role. When he returns to his apartment, the girl currently living there says that “they said it was a writer. But he disappeared, hadn’t paid his rent in months” (149). Quinn is shocked, and answers “that’s me! [...] I’m the writer!” (149). This scene could also be interpreted symbolically and indicate that the writer always disappears. Eventually, as Quinn runs out of pages in the red notebook, he fades away in vitality and in importance. His works will continue to exist by themselves, and will maintain their minor importance, even if nobody has any idea of who William Wilson is. In *Ghosts*, Black obsesses about knowing the details of some American writers’ lives. Yet, he states that:

Writing is a solitary business. It takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he’s there, he’s not really there. Another ghost. (209)

It is perhaps difficult to pinpoint why Black is so obsessed with writers, yet they seem to be something separate from the stories they wrote. He never connects his anecdotes with their actual works. In *The Locked Room*, we have another writer fading away. Fanshawe wrote novels, but when he was pressured by his wife to finally publish them, he decided to take himself out of the picture. His work is successful, even if most readers have very little knowledge of Fanshawe as a person. At the same time, when the narrator tries to write a biography, it takes over his life and how would he ever be able to accurately represent somebody he has not truly known for many years? Finally, the recurring motif of pseudonyms and confused identities further denies the importance of the author. Just as much as nobody could draw a parallel between William Wilson and his work, nobody can ever know a work’s true author. Even Shakespeare, who has perhaps been celebrated for his literary genius more

than anybody else in history, has been questioned as the true author of all his works. The true author of *Don Quixote* has also been frequently debated.

In *The New York Trilogy*, the author is always there. Auster even made himself a character in his initial novel, a character doing research on the true authorship of *Don Quixote*. Still, even if the author is more present than in most other works of fiction, Auster forces us to examine the novel separately. Because one does not need to know biographical details of Auster's life to perform a reading of his works. Auster's Jewish identity, and the fact that he has a wife named Siri of Norwegian origin, matters very little. By the end of each story, the author becomes more and more disseminated, eventually disappearing into textuality. Russel does not put a major focus on the author in her analysis, yet she states that "just as language is divorced from the things it signifies, texts themselves become divorced from their creators" (Russel 78). To sum up, Auster's trilogy does confirm Barthes' notion of 'the death of the author' because it shows that no work of fiction in its essence is original. It shows that no matter how present the author is in his work, it becomes a separate entity once it is written, which ultimately takes away the importance of the author.

Conclusion

The New York Trilogy is a work that needs unpacking. It is a multi-layered, incredibly complex, highly postmodern work. It is in almost every aspect a 'writerly' text where the reader has to use his own experience to create meaning. Through using Barthes' five codes from S/Z and a general narratological approach, I have found out how Auster challenges the established conventions of detective fiction. Alison Russell argues that the trilogy confirms deconstructionist philosophy. I do agree that this is a work of poststructuralist anti-detective fiction, yet I do not think that the novels ever sought to confirm deconstruction in any way. Auster's own response to Alison's article is rather telling, "I started looking at it, and I must tell you that my only response was to laugh. And I laughed, and I read a few pages, and I laughed some more, and then I put the thing away and never finished it. Because the fact is I've never read a word of Jacques Derrida, I don't know his stuff at all" (Pace 4). I might be entering similar territory, and Auster would probably have just as good of a laugh at my essay as Russell's, yet Auster has put the author both in and outside of his works. The author is clearly displayed, yet he fades away in each one of the novels. Through relying on intertextuality very heavily, the author's importance seems to fade away, and his debt to other writers increases. As mentioned in the beginning, Barthes noted that in the new age, 'the birth of the reader', will come at the cost of 'the death of the author'. Postmodernism, with its many works with similarities to Auster's, ultimately gives us more of the 'writerly texts', something Roland Barthes very much longed for. With *The New York Trilogy*, we have an excellent example of a collection of novels when it is perhaps the reader, just as much as the author, who creates the meaning of the works.

If we one last time think of *The New York Trilogy* from a postmodern perspective, we could go back to what Hutcheon says about the postmodern parody. Auster's three novels are clear parodies of the detective novel genre. Hutcheon's definition, that "parody is repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity" (6), fits very well. *The New York Trilogy* imitates the detective novel in many instances, yet the differences between the trilogy and the classic detective novel are more plentiful than the similarities. In *A Theory of Parody*, Hutcheon sums up her argument by observing that the demands on the reader of parody are high. She writes, "but the reader [...] must share a certain amount of [...] sophistication, if not skill, for it is the reader who must effect the decoding of the superimposed texts by means of his or her generic competence. This is not a matter (as in intertextuality) of a general ability to call upon what one has read, but, rather, it is specific to the particular text or conventions being parodied (86). Therefore, we can take the argument of

The New York Trilogy being a 'writerly' text even further. If *The New York Trilogy* is a postmodern parody, then a lot of responsibility lies on the reader because he or she has to know of the conventions being parodied and create meaning out of the work of parody as well.

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