"What it was all about I had not the slightest idea": Postmodern Anti-detection in the Trilogies of Paul Auster and Samuel Beckett.

By

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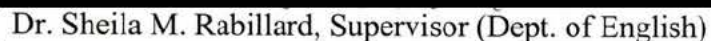

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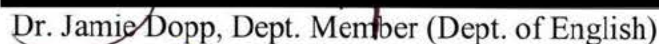

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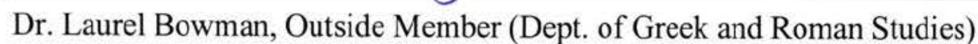

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ABSTRACT

<u>"What it was all about I had not the slightest idea": Postmodern Anti-detection in the Trilogies of Paul Auster and Samuel Beckett.</u>

That a postmodern writer such as Paul Auster in his New York Trilogy employs elements from the traditional detective narrative in creating what has been termed *anti-detective* stories is widely acknowledged, but in doing so, he is close to the narratological experiments of another writer who is rarely included in an anti-detection context, Samuel Beckett. This thesis focuses on two chronologically and stylistically disparate trilogies: Auster's New York Trilogy and Beckett's Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable whose polyphone and notoriously unstable detective/writer protagonists of these two trilogies foreground a parallel between a classical detectivist code and a hermeneutic reading/writing of the world. In their ultimate exposure and rejection of both, they undermine "the detective-like expectations of the positivistic mind," which, according to critic William V. Spanos, is the most immediate task of the postmodern writer. In their play with and parody of elements from the traditional detective story, both writers investigate ontological "culprits" such as language, identity and presence, demonstrating the ultimate collapse of a rationalist worldview.

The thesis investigates literary detection's inherent potential for its own destruction and its consequent appeal to a postmodern imagination. Finally, the study discusses whether these postmodern trilogies, by challenging and parodying generic conventions and structures, simultaneously reinstate and reaffirm these.

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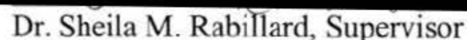

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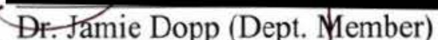

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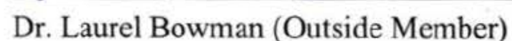

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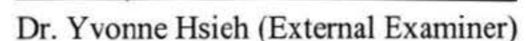

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INTRODUCTION

Mystery novels always give answers;
my work is about asking questions.
- Paul Auster on The New York Trilogy.[1]

Paul Auster's comment on his work's relation to the detective story seems fitting for the beginning of an exploration of anti-detective fiction. It describes perhaps the primary distinction between detective fiction, or what Auster calls mystery novels, and anti-detective fiction; one that pervades the entirety of the trilogies this thesis is going to discuss. Since the three novels of the New York Trilogy have often been defined as detective stories, Auster feels the need to emphasize that his work, by ultimately asking questions instead of providing answers, takes a very different approach. The statement thus offers a good introduction to anti-detective fiction by touching on the relationship between the two modes of writing, conveying a resistant reliance on the classic detective story. Although Auster rejects the notion of his stories as detective stories, he does admit to his use of the genre in the creation of something entirely different and it is this ambiguous relationship to a genre, which will be the focus of this thesis.[2]

The New York Trilogy's obvious reliance on a detectivist code combined with its lack of the detective story's fundamental elements, the crime and the solution, have often frustrated critics attempting to classify this type of writing. But rather than spend time on the discussion of whether these novels can be classified as detective novels, I will right away call the ambiguity that Auster's trilogy demonstrates *anti-detection*; a style of writing that is well defined by Anne M. Holzapfel in her book The New York Trilogy: Whodunit? (1996), in which she writes:

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[1] Interview with Auster rendered in Orr, 159.

[2] Auster has in fact written a "true-to-the-genre" detective novel, *Squeeze Play* (first published in 1982), under the pseudonym of Paul Benjamin (using his middle name, because, as he now says, " it is a novel that made use of two thirds of me for the writing. So I decided to give it two thirds of my name." See Stephen Capen interview with Auster). The novel, an imitation of the hard-boiled detective story, was the first piece of fiction published by Auster and written at a time when he desperately needed money.

> 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. (Holzapfel, 23)

This is one description of anti-detection which to a great extent agrees with that of another postmodern critic, William Spanos, who says about this type of fiction that it is meant to "evoke the impulse to 'detect' or to psychoanalyze – to track down the secret cause – in order to violently frustrate this impulse by refusing to solve the crime (or find the cause of the neurosis)" (Spanos, 25). Both these statements point to one of the most significant aspects of anti-detection: the evocation of the reader's desire to *detect*; a desire that never comes to fruition. However, the statements also seem to imply that it is a crucial element of this type of fiction that it features a crime to "non-solve," a notion that I do not fully support. I do not see the presence of the crime or the absence of its solution as crucial to the plot of an anti-detective novel, but rather its approach to narrative and plot. Neither Auster's nor Beckett's trilogy contain a crime that needs to be solved, and Jorge Luis Borges' "Death and the Compass" (from the collection Labyrinths, 1964) does in fact offer a type of solution, but these stories are still inherently anti-detectivist. What to my mind renders them anti-detective stories is the absence of a hermeneutically accessible universe in which the solution originates and re-establishes an ordered centre. I thus find that a better way to define anti-detective fiction is by its approach to narrative constructions and conventions, specifically in its attempt to subvert and undermine these. This may be seen as one of the main reasons to include Beckett's trilogy in the thesis, since his novels, contrary to those of Auster, rarely are included in an anti-detective context, but narratologically display elements that to me epitomize this form of writing. Molloy, particularly, through its circular structure, its endless repetitions and increasingly disoriented and disorienting protagonists, truly exhaust the detective's (and the reader's) ability as detective, interpreter and narrator.

The anti-detective novel's reliance on the detective genre posits the latter as a necessary pretext to an analysis of anti-detection. This thesis will thus begin by focusing on the detective genre and what I call the *detectivist code*, a term referring to the narrative conventions on which the detective story, with its focus on plot, is based. Chapter 1 presents the argument that the classic detective story creates a narrative form – the

detectivist code – which is founded upon a hermeneutic principle of interpretation and meaning, or what Peter Brooks calls *the hermeneutic code*. Using Brooks' Reading for the Plot – Design and Intention in Narrative (1984), it will be demonstrated how the detectivist code stems from a faith in narrative plot as a guiding principle that grants meaning to a chaotic universe.[3] Based on some of Brooks' key concepts regarding narrative, I aim to show how the detective narrative dramatizes a hermeneutical process that places the reader in the role of the detective, and that this dramatization of the reading process can be said to render the detective story a paradigm for all narratives. The detective story's dramatization of the hermeneutic process, in which the detective reads and interprets the clues of the crime, mirrors that of every reader who attempts to find meaning and cohesion in a narrative. The detective character thus becomes the reader's guarantee that her/his reading and interpretation of the text originates in a meaningful universe, which can be perceived and understood through a hermeneutic reading.

Chapter 2 deals with Auster's trilogy, analyzing how the novels expose and deconstruct a detectivist code, dissolving the traditional textual homogeneity of the detective story in the self-reflexive heterogeneity of anti-detection. By looking closely at how Auster plays with the traditional elements of detective fiction, such as the detective character, the narrator, structure and solution, I will show that the novels attempt a complete undermining of the detective's epistemological search for the truth, undertaking instead a self-conscious investigation of notions of language and identity.

Chapter 3 focuses on Beckett's trilogy by placing his novels in an anti-detective context. Auster's characters echo the relentless isolation of Beckett's, a dark isolation in which all that is left is to tell oneself stories, as Malone does while waiting for the end, and I cannot help but be influenced by Beckettian undertones in my reading of Auster's trilogy. But I am rather trying to invert the usual study of influence and read Beckett through Auster, as this reading reveals a strain of anti-detection in his texts. In the juxtaposition of these two trilogies and by placing a reading of Beckett's trilogy after that

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[3] In my analysis of the detectivist code, I will not distinguish between the different types of subgenres within the detective genre (such as the classic ratiocinative detective story versus the American hard-boiled version) since this code, in spite of vast differences in setting, era and themes, is the structuring principle for them all.

of Auster, a different type of anti-detection emerges: one whose references to the detective story are more subtle than Auster's far more overt use of the genre, but whose narrative experiments in effect prove as subversive and anti-detective. Attempting to dissolve the crucial polarity between detective and mystery and the narrative construction of the self, Molloy can in fact be seen to constitute one of the first examples of a radical critique of the detective story and its attendant epistemology. By pointing to the resemblances between these two trilogies' investigations of epistemology, hermeneutics, and subjectivity, themes that are essential to postmodern anti-detective fiction, I am exploring an aspect of Beckett's writing rarely touched upon by critics. The two trilogies' differences in structure and narrative technique at the same time help to shed light on the critique of a rational worldview that lies at the heart of anti-detection, and its consequent appeal to two so different postmodern writers. To a larger extent than Auster's anti-detective fiction, Beckett's trilogy reveals the ultimately uncertain position of the reader, who is mercilessly dependent on the (here increasingly darkened) reading lenses (the detective's magnifying glass) provided by a fundamentally unstable narrator.

In the conclusion of this chapter, I will place anti-detection in a postmodern context, pointing out how the anti-detective fiction of Auster and Beckett dramatizes a number of the themes and reflections that occupy postmodern and deconstructive critics. Through a subversion and endless deferral of the detective story's logocentric fixed points such as origin, centre, transparency, identity, solution and meaning, both trilogies stress the open-ended, the un-original and the repetitive. Using parody, anti-detection reacts against the traditional textual centre that the detective story projects, demonstrating a linguistic and narrative instability at the core of every discourse. Through parody, however, these novels at the same time reinscribe many of the elements they seek to undermine, and to some extent reinstate the discourse they have perforated. Based on Linda Hutcheon's notions of postmodern parody as "repetition with difference," I will discuss some of the paradoxes that anti-detection finds itself struggling with, or, perhaps, indulges in.

1. DETECTION AND ANTI-DETECTION

When trying to locate the origins of one of literature's most popular narrative styles, the detective story, critics sometimes retreat to Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, asserting a detective impulse deeply embedded in Western culture. The detective story's hermeneutic theme of investigation and interpretation can already be found in this ancient drama of a king using his riddle-solving skill and logic to solve a mystery, thus to reestablish order in his City. Reading the drama in this detective context highlights a long-lasting occupation with the detective's quest, and reveals the detective narrative as perhaps one of the most fundamental of narratives: the detective's quest, as he (the investigator very often being male) sets out to solve the ultimate mystery of existence, can be seen to allegorize man's existential quest for meaning. The drama demonstrates man's ultimate need to plot, to search for knowledge and to unravel the mystery in order to rule out chaos and place Man at the centre of his world. Oedipus Rex, in this sense, also reveals the detective story's complete reliance on plot and plotting, once again manifesting it as perhaps the most archetypal of narratives. In its search for a centre of meaning, a solution, detective fiction depends entirely on narrative construction, the plot of seeking the hidden story that the detective needs to discover.

One might say that there are two different explanations for the genealogy of the detective genre: one suggesting that it is an archetypal narrative, and one that treats it primarily as a distinctive cultural phenomenon linked to aspects of the Enlightenment and the development of modern scientific and rational epistemologies. I am interested in the detective story in an archetypal sense, and I thus see Oedipus as a prototype of the classic detective-hero who embodies many of the rationalist ideals that give rise to the genre. But I also see it as a genre that finds its classical form with the emergence of Edgar Allen Poe's Enlightenment character Auguste C. Dupin, and will partly base my negotiation of these two "genealogies" on Peter Brooks' theories of narrative desire and "the golden age" of the plot.

The drama of Oedipus is relevant to the exploration of detective and anti-detective literature on two levels. Not only does the character of Oedipus prefigure the classic,

rationalist Dupin-detective, but he also incorporates the paradox and inherent self-destructiveness that is essential to the emergence of the postmodern anti-detective. A discussion of the classic detective figure and detective story's inherent potential for de(con)struction will thus finally lead to an exploration of the "deconstructed" detective story, the anti-detective novel.

1.1 Plot, desire and the detectivist code

According to Peter Brooks' Reading for the Plot, plot is essential to the human psyche. We crave plot in texts as well as in life, because we crave meaning. In his theory of plot, Brooks combines formalist narratology with psychoanalysis in arguing that the psychic processes that take place in the human understanding of reality correspond to the processes taking place in the reading of texts:

> We might think of plot as the logic or perhaps the syntax of a certain kind of discourse, one that develops its propositions only through temporal sequence and progression. Narrative is one of the large categories or systems of understanding that we use in our negotiations with reality, specifically, in the case of narrative, with the problem of temporality: man's time-boundedness, his consciousness of existence within the limits of mortality. And plot is the principal ordering force of those meanings that we try to wrest from human temporality. (Brooks, xi)

Plot is the logic and the organizing principle of narrative, and narrative is perceived as a form of understanding and explanation of texts as well as of the world. The plot is thus essential to our perception, and we cannot do without it in moving through a text or the world. Even the most chaotic narrative enables us to make sense of it by reconstructing its connections, and thus to re-plot it in narrative. Although relying on some of the narratological theories furthered by formalist and structuralist critics, Brooks tries to move beyond various formalisms, as they in his mind seem to neglect the play of desire that takes place in the act of reading. His emphasis is on plotting rather than plot: the reader's shaping of the narrative, the desire of the reader to move forward; an act,

which, according to Brooks, "holds the promise of progress toward meaning" (Brooks, xiii).

Contrary to the formalists, Brooks thus defines reading as a part of the plot. The plot is shaped in a dynamic dialogue with the reader who seeks meaning in what is being read. The plot is what makes us strive toward the end of narrative. He calls this desire for meaning a *narrative desire*. The narrative desire drives the reader to the termination of the narrative, a termination that promises to bestow meaning on the rest of the narrative. Brooks suggests, paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, that what the reader seeks in fiction is the knowledge of death, a knowledge which is denied us in real life: "Death is the sanction of everything the storyteller can tell," Benjamin writes (Brooks, 22). Reaching the end of the narrative becomes the sublimation for reaching death, the ultimate termination of all desire. Hence, narrative desire is the desire for the end of the narrative that will finally determine meaning, and the end in this sense *writes* the beginning and middle of the narrative. Desire is therefore inherently paradoxical in its nature, as it essentially craves the end of desire, which will be both its destruction and its meaning. Brooks argues that it is from this absolutism of desire that narrative is born:

> If the motor of narrative is desire, totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning, the ultimate determinants of meaning lie *at the end*, and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire *for* the end. (Brooks, 52)

The destructive paradox of the desire for meaning is reflected in the text, as the text is gradually reduced the closer the reader comes to the desired goal, the end, which is simultaneously the destruction of desire: "The desire of the text is ultimately the desire for the end, for that recognition which is the moment of the death of the reader of the text" (Brooks, 108). Brooks relates narrative desire to Freud's discussion of human instinct in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), in which Freud argues that Eros is related to the death urge. To Brooks, desire and its destruction represents these two psychological processes. The detective story stands out as the most obvious example of a narrative form in which the narrative is driven by a desire for an ending that will bestow meaning on the rest, and Brooks exemplifies his theory of narrative desire by referring to the classic detective story. To solve a puzzle, Sherlock Holmes has to gather all the

necessary clues and find "some common thread upon which they might all hang," as Holmes expresses it in "The Musgrave Ritual" (1893), an early Sherlock Holmes story. To Brooks, this thread is "precisely the interpretive thread of plot" (Brooks, 24). Sherlock Holmes in this sense appears as the ideal reader, who manages to break the hermeneutic code of the text by creating a meaning from the initially incoherent and incomprehensible words and events.

Brooks' definition of plot is partly borrowed from the Russian Formalists' distinction between *fabula* (the events as they take place chronologically) and *sjuzet* (the events as they take place in the text), a distinction that the formalists believed to form the structure of every narrative. A distinction between the *narrative* and the *narration* is essential to the Russian formalists. The *fabula* is the narrated story - "that which really took place" - in its logical chronology. The *sjuzet* is instead the actual narration of the story with all the narrative tricks that this implies, its repetitions, flashbacks, etc.

The formalist terminology is interesting in relation to an exploration of the detective narrative, because precisely the detective story can be seen as the purest example of the distinction between the two. According to Tzvetan Todorov in his essay "The Typology of Detective Fiction," the detective story dramatizes the role of the two and their relation. He argues that the detective story is in fact not one, but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. The two stories, the one story of the crime that is characterized by action, and the other story about the work of the detective, which is characterized by analysis and interpretation, represents the relationship between *fabula* and *sjuzet*. The *fabula* is the story of the crime, where the criminal has sought to bury the traces and thus the story. The *sjuzet*, then, is the story about how the detective manages to reveal the remaining traces and through these unveil and reconstruct the story – re-plot it, as Brooks would have it.

Furthermore, the relation between the criminal and the detective in the *fabula-sjuzet* structure corresponds to that of the author and the reader. The author takes on the role of the criminal, who by his actions writes the story of the crime that needs to be read and decoded by the detective and the reader by way of the clues and traces that the criminal/writer leaves behind. The relationship between the detective and the criminal thus thematizes the relationship between the author and the reader of every narrative.

Because of the detective story's laying-bare of the fundamental *fabula-sjuzet* structure of every narrative, Todorov finds that it represents a narrative of narratives. The detective story can hence be seen as an allegory of narrative.

Brooks relates Todorov's analysis of the detective story to his own notion of narrative desire by exploring the *sjuzet's* reconstruction of the *fabula*. In the classic detective story, the detective always, in a sense, repeats the story of the criminal, and in so doing organizes and structures the story. The *sjuzet* functions as the plot does in relation to narrative. The detective discovers the *fabula* (the story of the crime), one might even say *invents* the *fabula*, and in so doing, plots the narrative. The detective story is, in this sense, what Brooks calls "a self-conscious creation of meaning" (Brooks, 27). The detective, in a retrospective narrative, plots the narrative, and hence wrests meaning from chaos. *Fabula* then depends on *sjuzet* just as much as the other way around, as the meaning of the *fabula* is only found in the *sjuzet*, just as the narrative desire only finds its meaning in the end. Only in the *sjuzet* does the *fabula* become, in Brooks' words, "transmissible." Brooks, once again echoing the words of Benjamin, equates this process to the one of the transmission from life to death. Only in the moment of death does life become transmissible:

> To imagine one's self-composed obituary read at the Judgment Day constitutes the farthest reach in the anticipation of retrospective narrative understanding. It is one that all narratives would no doubt wish to make: all narrative posits, if not the Sovereign Judge [a reference to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Confessions (1782)], at least a Sherlock Holmes capable of going back over the ground, and thereby realizing the meaning of the cipher left by a life. (Brooks, 34)

If the detective story, evoking as it does a God-like Sherlock Holmes figure who imposes meaning on the entire narrative, thus stands as the purest example of this narrative desire in an eternalized anticipation of retrospective understanding, it is in large part because the structure of the classic detective story is quite rigid and simple. It starts with a mystery and ends with the detective's revelation of the hidden order that is the story of the crime. Having reached the solution, the story finds its conclusion. The detective and the reader have obtained the knowledge they both sought. Brooks argues that the detective story is dominated by what he calls the *hermeneutic code*. The

hermeneutic code is a term that he borrows from Roland Barthes, when he relates the formalist *fabula* and *sjuzet* structure to what Barthes in S/Z (1973) terms the *proairetic* and the *hermeneutic code* (Brooks, 18-36). Barthes' notion of the hermeneutic code helps define the specific type of narrative that emerges in the middle of the eighteenth century, a development that will be further discussed in the following section.

The *proairetic code* is that which deals with the logic of actions, i.e. the code that is predominant in narratives giving precedence to the description of immediate and intense action, as for instance the picaresque tale, or the pure adventure novel. The *hermeneutic code*, on the other hand, primarily deals with the interpretation of a narrative, its questions and answers, the puzzles and solutions that structure the story, its suspense, gradual unveiling and eventual resolution. The hermeneutic code enables the reader to sort through the events by restructuring the narrative according to the significance and meaning of events. It is governed by what Barthes calls "la passion du sens" (Brooks, 19), which Brooks translates as "the passion for and of meaning," or, in other words, *narrative desire*.

Plot might therefore be seen, as Brooks writes, as "the overcoding of the proairetic by the hermeneutic" (Brooks, 18). As a narrative that explicitly deals with the complete resolution of an enigma, the detective story is the clearest example of the hermeneutic code, but the hermeneutic code in Brooks' terminology, as an *overcoding* and as a *re-plotting sjuzet*, is to be found in every narrative, and is indeed necessary for its transmissibility, since every narrative, as above mentioned, needs a plot in order to make the narrative available to consciousness. Brooks sets out to prove, through close readings of texts such as Rousseau's Confessions, that even the most proairetic of texts is fully as hermeneutic as the detective story, since any narrative, from the very simplest, is hermeneutic in intention.

Hence, plot is a cognitive instrument that creates meaning and coherence in any narrative discourse. And the detective story's explicit use of the *fabula-sjuzet* dynamic and its laying-bare of the hermeneutic code that structures it, can be seen as a paradigm for every narrative discourse. The narrative desire becomes obvious in the classic, hermeneutic detective story, and this desire, as Brooks describes, can be found in both reader and author, listener and teller:

> Narratives portray the motors of desire that drive and consume their plots, and they also lay bare the nature of narration as a form of human desire: the need to tell as a primary human drive that seeks to seduce and to subjugate the listener, to implicate him in the thrust of a desire that can never quite speak its name – never can quite come to the point – but that insists on speaking over and over again its movement toward that name. (Brooks, 61)

The reader's desire for meaning is reflected in the author or the teller's desire to be heard, recognized and understood. It is a desire to discover meaning by tying the loose ends together, thus to create a coherent whole from the seemingly arbitrary and ambiguous pieces, and, through a re-telling of the narrative, to impose authorial control upon the world. The desire is never wholly satisfied as it is indeed unsatisfiable, and it continues to generate the desire to tell, to enunciate a meaningful and coherent version of the world.

This *narrative desire* to re-plot, to "seduce and subjugate the listener" by imposing meaning on chaos in the eternal hermeneutic search for answers, becomes highly visible with the emergence of the classic detective protagonist in the middle of the nineteenth century. Auguste Chevalier Dupin, Poe's intellectual detective hero, may in many ways be seen as an embodiment of the hermeneutic code with his insistence on analysis and logical deduction in the shaping of the mystery plot. This, what I would call *Enlightenment* characteristic of the detective protagonist, although emphasized in the conflation of detective and scientist in the nineteenth century, can be seen as a derivation of the epistemological investigation of earlier "detectives," such as Oedipus.

1.2 Sons of Enlightenment

> What is the meaning of it, Watson? What object is served by this circle of misery and violence and fear? It must tend to some end, or else our universe is ruled by chance, which is unthinkable. (Sherlock Holmes in "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box" (1893). Doyle, 901)

Peter Brooks calls the nineteenth century the *golden age* of the plot. The classic detective story emerges in an age in which a growing secularization has left a desire for new plots and narratives to be found in literature:

> The enormous narrative production of the nineteenth century may suggest an anxiety at the loss of providential plots: the plotting of the individual or social or institutional life story takes on new urgency when one no longer can look to a sacred masterplot that organizes and explains the world. The emergence of narrative plot as a dominant mode of ordering and explanation may belong to the large process of secularization, dating from the Renaissance and gathering force during the Enlightenment. (Brooks, 6)

The dissolution of "the sacred masterplot," or what the postmodern critic Jean-Francois Lyotard would call the "great master narratives," creates a need for literary genres that impose meaning and order on reality. The individual is no longer born into a meaningful and ordered world, but has to seek and indeed construct a meaning, a plot, from the raw material of reality. Brooks' argument is of course that there is an inherent human desire for plot, and the anxiety experienced at the loss of religion as the "master-plot" thus gives way to another plot, that of historical narrative:

> By the end of the Enlightenment, there is no longer any consensus on this prediction, [that human existence is timeless] and no cultural cohesion around a point of fixity which allows thought and vision so to transfix time. And this may explain the nineteenth century's obsession with questions of origin, evolution, progress, genealogy, its foregrounding of the historical narrative as par excellence the necessary mode of explanation and understanding. (Brooks, 7)

History replaces theology as the key discourse and central imagination, and the scientific fields respond to the need for an historical explanation. This explanation seeks its authority in a tracing of a coherent narrative from the origin to the present. Brooks argues that "the authority of narrative derives from its capacity to speak of origins in relation to endpoints" (Brooks, 276). It is hence natural that this age gives rise to a literary genre like the detective story that is obsessed with a meaningful ending, reached through hermeneutic, rational retrospection, and whose conclusion manifests a rejection of any type of supernatural explanation, fancy or, worst of all, chance. Indeed, Brooks argues,

the detective story of this period, to the relief of its anxious readers, "claims that all such action is motivated, causally enchained, and eventually comprehensible as such to the perceptive observer" (Brooks, 269).

The detective story, as it emerges in the figure of the almost super-human character of Dupin, articulates a desire for a complete form of knowledge, a knowledge that can be reached by discovering the plot, and this desire becomes a structural element of the genre. This ultimate knowledge is reached through the omnipotent gaze of the detective. The classic detective story is thus full of powerful images of the detective eye, and no one's eye is more penetrative than that of the world's first literary detective, Poe's Dupin. Hence, the founding of the classic detective story takes place with Edgar Allen Poe's tales about the withdrawn amateur poet-detective, Auguste Chevalier Dupin.[4] In the creation of the intellectual "detective-semiotician" Dupin, the figure of the scientist and the detective become conflated. Dupin can in many ways be seen as a classic Enlightenment figure. Through his unique combination of scientific logic and the analyst's capacity for intense observation, he seems to incarnate the Enlightenment ideal of mastering the natural world through science and technology, and mastering human passions through an understanding of how individuals work. He (and later Sherlock Holmes, along with their many descendants) is a logician and empiricist whose investigations can be characterized as scientific exercises. His authority as a detective, and thus a storyteller, is gained by the conflation of the analyst's somewhat poetical (and Romantic) vision with the penetrative scientific gaze of the Enlightenment. Dupin describes the desired vision of the detective by comparing it to that of an astronomer:

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[4] Poe's three Dupin stories are "The Murders of Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget" and "The Purloined Letter," all written in the period from 1841-44. Apart from the three Dupin stories, Poe wrote three other stories structured around the solving of a mystery: "The Man of the Crowd" (1840), "The Goldbug" (1843), and "Thou art the Man" (1850) (a kind of spoof on the detective story). Poe considered these stories "ratiocinative" stories – stories testing the method of logical deduction in the resolution of a puzzle. All these stories introduced many of the elements that have later become central to the genre: the locked room, the placing of misleading clues, the analysis and abstract deduction of facts, and the de-coding of coded messages. The analogy between writer and detective have also had an impact on later detective figures – Sherlock Holmes similarly exhibits poetic tendencies, as do later descendants such as Borges' detective Lønnrot, P.D James' Adam Dalgliesh, Colin Dexter's Inspector Morse, not to mention Beckett's and Auster's detectives.

> To look at a star by glances – to view it in a side-long way, by turning toward it the exterior portions of the *retina* (more susceptible of feeble impressions of light than the interior), is to behold the star distinctly – is to have the best appreciation of its lustre – a lustre which grows dim just in proportion as we turn our vision fully upon it. A greater number of rays actually fall upon the eye in the latter case, but, in the former, there is the more refined capacity for comprehension. ("The Murders of Rue Morgue," Poe, 129)

The examining gaze of the detective is literally compared to that of the scientist, linking it to a rational discourse that is able to make sense of a world which appears chaotic. This idealization of the imaginative and intellectual powers of the poetical mind of the detective is naturally a highly Romantic feature, but it nevertheless exhibits a strong *Enlightenment* belief in the individual's mastery, through rationalization and intense observation, of reality.

The extract above emphasizes the gaze of the detective and expresses a firm belief in the power of observation that becomes characteristic of the genre. The detective's ability to plot the narrative, his skill at unveiling the hidden story, is linked to a powerful eye that penetrates a wall of darkness and sheds light on the crime. In "The Purloined Letter," Dupin alludes to the importance of the 'detective eye,' when explaining how he managed to "conceal" this powerful weapon from the minister, thus to conceal his dangerous superiority:

> To be even with him, I complained of my weak eyes, and lamented the necessity of the spectacles, under cover of which I cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the whole apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation of my host. (Poe, 269)

The clear vision of Dupin is even sharp enough to cut through the protection of the human mind and body, as it becomes clear in "The Murders of Rue Morgue," when he explains, and most impressively demonstrates, that "most men in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms" (Poe, 135). With the emergence of the figure of Sherlock Holmes, the "scientific" eye of the detective becomes explicit with the accompanying

magnifying glass helping the detective to discover the truth veiled in darkness.[5] There is an omniscient quality to the vision of the detective, a quality that becomes exemplified in Sherlock Holmes' desire to "hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on" ("The Red Headed League," 1891). Both Dupin's skill at reading people's thoughts, by rationally going through a chain of associations, and Holmes' wish for a penetrative and rather controlling vision express a desire for an almost God-like surveillance of the world, a surveillance that unites that which it supervises. I will later return to the controlling power of this gaze.

Both a poet and a scientist, Dupin seems the incarnation of the semiotic, penetrating and thus mastering an apparently meaningless and incoherent reality. Via his highly developed analytical skills, he manages to see through the seemingly arbitrary signs on the surface, and find, or perhaps rather create, their significance beneath. Through his attack on minds that only occupy themselves with mathematical truths, it becomes evident that Dupin's uniqueness as an analyst comes from the merging of creative and logical powers that is combined in the gaze of the detective. Reasoning is important in the game of detection, but to Dupin, what might be seen as the poet's ability to intensely observe and imaginatively place himself in the position of the person observed is just as important:

> the analyst throws himself into the spirit of his opponent, identifies himself therewith, and not unfrequently *sees* thus [my emphasis], at a glance, the sole methods (sometimes indeed absurdly simple ones) by which he may seduce into error or hurry into miscalculation. (Poe, 132)

His strength comes from what the narrator of "The Murders of Rue Morgue" describes as a kind of split sensibility: "[I] amused myself with the fancy of a double Dupin – the creative and the resolvent" (Poe, 135). The narrator hints at this unique skill

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[5] In the hard-boiled detective stories of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett that emerge in inter-war America, the scientific detective eye evolves into the "private eye" that similarly manages to penetrate the darkness of night.

at observation, when he describes how an excellent whist player combines a mathematical calculation skill with the analyst's intense observation of his fellow players.[6]

> He notes every variation of face as the play progresses, gathering a fund of thought from the differences in the expression of certainty, of surprise, of triumph, or chagrin (…) A casual or inadvertent word; the accidental dropping or turning of the card, with the accompanying anxiety or carelessness in regard to its concealment; the counting of the tricks with the order of their arrangement; embarrassment, hesitation, eagerness or trepidation – all afford, to his apparently intuitive perception, indications of the true state of affairs. The first two or three rounds having been played, he is in full possession of the contents of each hand, and thenceforward puts down his cards with as absolute a precision of purpose as if the rest of the party had turned outward the faces of their own. (Poe, 133)

Again the analyst (or rather the detective in the game of detection) is able to look through the minds and the appearances of his opponents, and once again the analogy has the same "spiritual" feel to it as Dupin's statement about being able to look through the "windows" in most men's bosoms. The detective's apparently intuitive perception seems almost supernatural, but only by appearance. In fact it is founded in a highly scientific approach to the world, an unambiguous analysis, which is acknowledged by Watson when he says: "I had no keener pleasure than in following Holmes in his professional investigations, and in admiring the rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions, and yet always founded on a logical basis, with which he unravelled the problems which were submitted to him."[7]

The powerful combination of rationalist discourse and the piercing gaze of the scientist results in the all-revealing eye of the detective that can solve even the darkest and most intricate of mysteries: those of the human mind. Four decades before the founding of a new science by the name of *psychoanalysis*, the detective eye, piercing its way into the mind, takes on a function similar to that of the psychoanalyst. The postmodernist critic William V. Spanos alludes to this similarity when he writes:

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[6] Poe hereby develops the analogy between detection and game-playing that becomes characteristic for the classic detective story. Dupin continuously compares detection to different types of strategic games, whether it be chess, even or odd, or whist.

[7] From "The Speckled Band" (Doyle, 159).

> Just as the form of the detective story has its source in the comforting certainty that an acute "eye," private or otherwise, can solve the crime with resounding finality by inferring causal relationships between clues which point to it (they are 'leads,' suggesting the primacy of rigid linear narrative), so the "form" of the well-made positivistic universe is grounded in the equally comforting certainty that the scientist/ psychoanalyst/social scientist (and reader) can solve the immediate problem of deviation by the inductive method, a calculative interpretive process involving the inference of relationships between discontinuous "facts" that point to or lead straight to an explanation of the "mystery," the "crime" of contingent or differential existence. (Spanos, 18)

The classic detective is in a sense a proto-psychoanalyst, combining poetic sensibility and science in the conclusive analysis of existence. The association between the figure of the detective and that of the psychoanalyst becomes even tighter, when we look at how each in a sense plots and takes authorial control of the narrative in a complete and conclusive explanation of the "hidden story."

The classic detective story portrays a society in which the scientific gaze has become a metaphor for the search for complete knowledge. Only the sharp eye of science can dig out and consecutively present a truthful explanation of existence. The emphasis on the analogy between the scientific gaze and an analysis that leads to complete knowledge implies a belief in the transparency of the signs, of language. The role of Dupin as the perfect semiotician, who gathers all the superficially arbitrary signifiers and thus reveals the great narrative, presupposes a trust in a clear and unproblematic relationship between language and that which it represents.[8] Dupin approaches the world as if it were a text that will reveal itself if only read closely and attentively. The signs he

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[8] Umberto Eco, himself a semiotician, self-consciously plays on the role of the detective as a master-semiotician in his portrayal of the Sherlock Holmes-like character of William of Baskerville in his anti-detective novel The Name of the Rose (1980). William's primary task consists of deciphering signs, both them left behind by the murderer, but also the obscure signs that meet him in the labyrinthine library and in the texts that he needs to decode in order to find the murderer. In the end William reflects on the detective's fatal presupposition, when he says, "I have never doubted the truth of signs, Adso; they are the only things man has with which to orient himself in the world. What I did not understand was the relation among signs. (...) I behaved stubbornly, pursuing a semblance of order, when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe." (Eco, 492)

reads, if read properly, will reveal to him their fundamental meaning. The firm belief in the penetrating gaze mirrors a belief in the penetrative ability of language.

In The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception (1963), when discussing the medical gaze that emerges in the Enlightenment, Michel Foucault addresses this epistemology that focuses on seeing:

> Over all (…) endeavors on the part of clinical thought to define its methods and scientific norms hovers the great myth of a pure Gaze that would be pure Language: a speaking eye. (Foucault, 114)

In line with the above-mentioned controlling quality associated with the detective gaze, Foucault here explains how the clinical gaze establishes itself in a position where it dominates that which is its object. A firm hierarchy is established between the eye of the scientist and that which it beholds, and the gaze is thus dedicated "to the endless task of absorbing experience in its entirety, and of mastering it" (Clinic, xiv). The "speaking eye" seeks to know, and it seeks to dominate. It is the eye that purely renders what it sees, explaining the world.

Endowed with this Enlightenment gaze, it is obvious how Dupin, despite his withdrawn, anemic existence behind closed curtains in a dark living room, seems almost omnipotent in his powers. But at the same time it becomes obvious how this figure seeks to dominate and control the narrative. Under cover of the honorable search for truth, one sees how his underlying intention is always to win the battle and outwit the criminal. Dupin's ultimate purpose is always that of mastering the game, or rather, the narrative. As Peter Thoms writes in Detection & Its Designs for Dupin, successful detection means gaining control of the hidden story of the crime." (Thoms, 49) Control of the story is the key to the power of the detective, a feature reflected in the genre's recurring portrayal of the detective's semi-sadistic dominance over his loyal companion to whom he will continually have to explain the story of the crime, each time, in a sense, giving him the chance of manifesting his own status as author.[9] Gaining control of the chaotic *fabula*, the

[9] Dupin has a loyal and somewhat submissive follower in the anonymous narrator of the tales, and Sherlock Holmes, according to his slower-witted companion Watson, because of his "masterful nature," similarly "loved to dominate and surprise those who were around him." ("The Hound of the Baskervilles" (1902)) A

sjuzet plot of the detective imposes order on narrative. The poetical nature of the detective renders him even more adept at fashioning stories, and Dupin thus asserts an authorial control over the illegible narrative, imposing on it his own boundaries by shaping it with his conclusive explanations.[10]

Detection can thus be compared to a storytelling skill, and the investigation of the detective is an analogy for the struggle of authorial control. Dupin is, in a sense, appropriating the story, an image that becomes explicit with his acquisition of the stolen letter in "The Purloined Letter." In this story, the goal of detection becomes literally the acquisition of "the hidden story." This story, in particular, presents a strong metaphor for the struggle between detective and criminal for authorial control, and hereby introduces the idea that the difference between them may not be so significant. The culprit in the story, Minister D-, is also both a poet and a mathematician, and similar to the detective, he also possesses a remarkably clear vision, compared to that of a "lynx" (TPL, 259). Dupin and the Minister have met in the past, when the Minister did him "an evil turn," (271) and Dupin's investigation of him is thus an act of revenge:

> I knew him, however, as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity (…) I felt, also, that the whole train of thought, which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now, concerning the invariable principle of political action in searches for articles concealed – I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the minister. *He* could not be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as his commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the Prefect. (Poe, 268)

The fact that the Minister is also a poet makes him a worthy combatant in the struggle for the title as the author of the "hidden story." The struggle between Dupin and the Minister over possession of the *letter,* via similar methods of rationalization, can be interpreted as the struggle for authorial control, and the boundary between detective and

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later detective such as Agatha Christie's arrogant Belgian, Hercule Poirot, similarly finds his sidekick in the submissive Hastings.

[10] Holmes' "Retrospection," a summation in which his authorial voice dominates the concluding pages, similarly demonstrates the detective's ability to "put into a single connected narrative one of the most singular and sensational crimes of modern times." ("The Hound of the Baskervilles," Doyle, 145)

criminal is transcended. The *authority* of the detective is undermined by his desperate appropriation of the word, of language, and his claim to truth is exposed as just another writer's version of it. The detective, by laying claim to a conclusive explanation of reality, seems to paradoxically expose the vulnerability of his explanation and reveals its status as just another plotting of the narrative. Read this way, every detective story holds the germs of the detective's destruction; a notion which is confirmed by the ancient drama in Thebes.

1.3 Oedipus and the blind detective

> Oedipus: Man, must you still wrap up your words in riddles?
> Teiresias: Were you not famed for your skill at solving riddles?
> Oedipus: You taunt me with the gift that is my greatness?
> Teiresias: Your great misfortune, and your ruin. (Oedipus, 38)

Sophocles' Oedipus Rex can be seen as one of the world's first detective stories, written long before detective Dupin solved Parisian mysteries. It features a puzzling murder, a culprit and a detective. It differs from the classic detective story in many ways, however, for instance by the fact that the reader knows the identity of the murderer long before the detective does. But it most crucially differs from traditional detective stories in that detective and culprit are one and the same. The conflation of detective and culprit most thoroughly undermines the authority and credibility of the detective figure and simultaneously undermines the structure of the entire narrative, shaped as it is from the gaze of the detective, Oedipus, who is searching for the man who killed his father. The story of Oedipus demonstrates that the detective ultimately is blind. The man who claims to see in fact sees nothing. Such firm belief in the power of reason and detection as Oedipus shows only leads to the destruction of the detective himself. As the ancient drama can thus be seen to inherently challenge the plot of the detective story, *Oedipus Rex* proves the ideal departure point for a discussion of the anti-detective novel.

Oedipus is, like his "Enlightenment" descendants Dupin and Sherlock Holmes, a skillful reasoner who, via his sharp intellect, successfully solves an enigma. It is indeed his skill for solving riddles that earns him the position as King of Thebes, and just as

Dupin takes pride in outwitting the criminals, Oedipus prides himself on his ability to outwit the Sphinx, the event that determined his future as king. Thus when confronted with the blind prophet Teiresias' dark prophecies, he emphasizes his riddle-solving skill as proof of his superiority, mistaking his own abilities for divine "insight." Oedipus taunts the old prophet with his blindness, and equates his blindness with powerlessness. Again, power is linked to the notion of seeing clearly, and to be blind is to be deprived of the *light,* the truth: "Living in perpetual night, you cannot harm/ Me, nor any man else that sees the light" (Oedipus, 36).

The paradox of the vision-metaphor is of course that when Oedipus thinks he sees, he is blind, and he is indeed the one rendered powerless by his strong reliance on vision as a weapon, a reliance that in fact blinds him to the truth, and sends him, his family and all of Thebes into a state of chaos. Demonstrating firm belief in his own mental powers, he starts out with the questions posed by the classic detective, seeking the hidden truth,

> Where shall we hope to uncover/ The faded traces of that far-distant crime? (...) One thing might point the way to others, / If once we could lay our hands on the smallest clue. (Oedipus, 29)

Oedipus, like the classic detective, seeks to oppose chaos with skill and reason, believing in his own ability to discover the truth. As such, he tries to unveil the chain of events by calling in witnesses, gathering clues in order to find the cause of the crime and the tragedy, with the firm intention of setting things right and wrestling a meaningful design from a hostile chaos. Again caught up with a belief in the attainability of complete knowledge, he believes it is only a matter of applying the right method, the right reading of the clues. The skillful reader will unveil the hidden story and bring everything into the light. It does not occur to him that there are mysteries that can never be solved. He is even warned by Teiresias that sometimes wisdom, or reason, is not the way, and that sometimes leaving things in the dark, to stay "blind", metaphorically speaking, is to be preferred: "O, when wisdom brings no profit, / To be wise is to suffer." The chaos of incest and murder that lies at the heart of the mystery that Oedipus sets out to solve threatens to completely dissolve him. He gradually disintegrates as he realizes the chaos

at the core of his own being. His belief in the certainty of detection, the solving of the mystery, ultimately ruins him.

As described, the figure of Oedipus has many things in common with Dupin and Holmes, and his trust in reasoning and detection similarly renders him, figuratively speaking, a classic Enlightenment figure. Like his detective descendants, he struggles to become the author of his own story, gathering the clues and piecing the story together. He, too, believes in the hermeneutic code of the narrative – constructing a plot by asking the right questions and finding the right answers. To be blind is to be powerless, and Oedipus believes in the power of vision. He wants to see the truth, and as a consequence of that has to blind himself.

Subsumed by chaos and the inherent paradox of his search, the fact that detective and criminal, investigator and investigated are one and the same, Oedipus may be said to embody the paradox of every detective and thus prefigure the ambiguity of the postmodern detectives. His story serves as a symbol of how each detective is thoroughly implicated in the mystery he is trying to solve, and how he may be seen ultimately to be investigating himself. Oedipus, as his later descendants, is positioning himself in the scientific role of the analyst, "I will start afresh; and bring everything into the light" (Oedipus, 29) - the role that Dupin seems to take to a level of caricature - but discovers that the withdrawn analyst's position is unattainable. In Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (1819), Schopenhauer writes: "The knower himself cannot be known precisely as such, otherwise he would be the known of another knower" (Schopenhauer, 2:19).

The statement problematizes the stance of the objective observer by questioning the basic opposition between subject and object. It is an interesting statement in a detective context since the premise for the detective character is the notion of a knower separate from that, which is to be known. Dupin's role presupposes an autonomous stance from which he can know the world. But to be known as a knower involves another knower. The knower and the known cannot be the same, or both are cancelled out. But if the detective is in fact investigating himself, knower and known conflate, ruling out the possibility of

maintaining a distanced, separate stance. And if another knower is involved in the knowing, the privileged position of the supreme knower, the detective, is challenged.[11]

Dupin's assertion of authorial control becomes apparent by the way that he with his explanations shapes the narrative, and thus imposes his own powerful vision upon it. He exerts his power by excluding what does not belong to the story, and can thus defend his presentation of himself. As Thoms describes the role of the detective: "Dupin becomes an unchallenged storyteller who egotistically transforms the real figures of the mystery into characters who inhabit his authorial vision" (Thoms, 61). Poe's stories about Dupin invite us to consider him a withdrawn analyst, whose very seclusion and reliance on scientific reasoning ensures his objective perspective upon the world, at the same time as they undermine the notion of a completely innocent vision. When we turn the detective's piercing eyes to the detective himself, he emerges, particularly in a story like "The Purloined Letter," not as the opposite of the criminal, but as an ambiguous figure who shares the criminal's desire for authorial control. The stories expose the *story*, as it emerges in the vision of Dupin, as a *construction*, inviting a kind of reading that counters the interpretive work of the detective, undoes his assertions of power and returns us to the mystery. Dupin's firm belief in his own sharp vision, leaving no room for other visions, leads us as readers to doubt his omnipotence as a seer and to realize the existence of other seers who have been excluded from the plot. We thus realize that he, who says he sees, may very well be blind, and the undisputed authority of the *seer* vanishes; with it the legitimateness of that which he says he sees. The comforting distance between detective and mystery dissolves, and he is no longer an objective observer of a chaotic existence,

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[11] Schopenhauer describes a paradox similar to the one described by Owen Barfield, when he comments on the use of language in our investigation of language. We use language as if it were external to and objective for us - as if it were our possession - forgetting that "you cannot study anything without speaking and reading and writing about it (…) You can dig into the earth with a spade in order to get beneath the surface. The spade is itself a product of the earth, but that does not bother you. But if, by some mysterious dispensation, the spade were part of the very path of earth you were splitting up, you would be rather nonplused, because you would destroy the instrument by using it. And that is the sort of difficulty you are up against when it is not the earth you are digging into, but consciousness; and when it is not a spade you are digging with, but language (. . .) However quickly you turn around, you can never see the back of your own head" (Barfield, 21). This observation of language as both tool and object is central to postmodern fiction, and both Auster's and Beckett's texts are hyper-conscious of the fact that they employ language in the investigation of, first and foremost, language.

but instead a hapless part of it. This is the detective that emerges in the anti-detective narratives.

Jorge Luis Borges demonstrates the inherent impotence of the detective in his effort to double Poe's three Dupin stories with three detective stories of his own.[12] His stories differ from those of Poe's in a significant way: where Dupin solves the mystery and outwits the culprit, Borges' detectives, at least in the first two stories, are outwitted by the people they pursue, trapped in a labyrinth fashioned from the detective's ability to follow a trail, or, rather, *detect,* until he arrives at the chosen spot for his death. In "Death and the Compass," detective Lønnrot thinks of himself as a kind of Auguste Dupin, and prides himself on his excellent skills for logical deduction. But as is the case with Oedipus, precisely the detective's skill for detection becomes his ruin. Lønnrot is trapped in his own trap, but his pursuit of the criminal has in fact already been undercut by the fact that the criminal he is pursuing is his own double. The name of the culprit is *Red Scharlach*; "deep red" as in *Lønnrot.* The detective is, once again, pursuing himself. In a note to "Death and the Compass," Borges writes: "The killer and the slain, whose minds work in the same way, may be the same man. Lønnrot is not an unbelievable fool walking into his own death trap, but in a symbolic way a man committing suicide" (qtd. in Irwin, 35).

Borges subverts Poe's stories, turning the reasoning gaze of the detective against himself in his portrayal of the detective's symbolic digging of his own grave. What we as readers expected to be the final solution to the mystery proves only to be the inevitable death of the detective himself, and the signs that were supposed to show us the way turn out to be false and meaningless, and only there because of the detective's urge to detect. The detective undoes himself, and with him the entire detective story. Discovering that the only truth there is to be found is that the truth does not exist, he cancels out the plot of the story. His reading and shaping of the narrative have proven violently false. By eliminating the pursuit of truth, his role as a detective is rendered obsolete and he self-destructs.

Borges' "Death and the Compass" is exemplary of *anti-detective fiction,* the "anti-genre" that becomes predominant in mid-/late twentieth century fiction. The anti-

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[12] I am thinking of "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941), "The Library of Babel," (1941) and "Death and the Compass" (1942), all from Ficciones (1945).

detective story can be seen as a reaction to the hermeneutic code that dominates the classic detective story. It rejects the comfort of the rigid linear plot that leaves us with a resounding understanding in its conclusion, and instead takes us around in a circular movement that returns us to the mystery. As discussed in relation to the figure of Dupin, the deconstructive trait may be seen as a powerful undercurrent that runs through the detective story in its entirety. A deconstruction of the detective hero reveals an authorial claim to truth that is effectuated by his "omnipotent" gaze; a claim which is based on a faith in a meaningful centre to which the reader and the detective can gain access. It is this decontruction that the postmodern anti-detective novel undertakes.

1.4 The anti-detective story

> But the facts of the past seemed to have no bearing on the facts of the present. Quinn was deeply disillusioned. He had always imagined that the key to good detective work was a close observation of details. The more accurate the scrutiny, the more successful the results. The implication was that human behavior could be understood, that beneath the infinite façade of gestures, tics, and silences, there was finally a coherence, an order, a source of motivation. But after struggling to take in all these surface effects, Quinn felt no closer to Stillman than when he first started following him. He had lived Stillman's life, walked at his pace, seen what he had seen, and the only thing he felt now was the man's impenetrability. (City of Glass, 105)

Michael Holquist was probably the first critic to recognize the mystery narrative as a central pre-occupation for postmodernist writers such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges.[13] In the hands of these writers, Holquist argues, the detective narrative takes on a remarkably different form, and becomes a *metaphysical* detective story:

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[13] Here he particularly thinks of Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommes* (1953) and *Le Voyeur* (1955), Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962) and Borges' "Death and the Compass." Within the last decades, the anti-detection formula has become almost commonplace for many detective-style narratives. Among its many literary exponents are Umberto Eco (The Name of the Rose), Thomas Pynchon (The Crying of Lot 49), and Italo Calvino (If on a Winter's Night a Traveller). The formula has also in recent years become immensely popular in the cinema, in films such as The Usual Suspects (1995), Memento (2000), The Pledge (2001) and Insomnia (2002).

> The metaphysical detective story does not have the narcotizing effect of its progenitor; instead of familiarity, it gives strangeness, a strangeness which more often than not is the result of jumbling the well known patterns of classical detective stories. Instead of reassuring they disturb. They are not an escape, but an attack. (Holquist, 173)

Whereas the classic detective story can be seen as an escape from a hostile chaos, the anti-detective story, or what Holquist calls the "metaphysical detective story," might be seen as an attack of chaos. It does not provide us as readers with a meaningful plot, but returns us to the mystery.

William V. Spanos, the first critic to use the term "anti-detection," links this attack to an existentialist critique of Western rationalism.[14] The universe does not respond to the human search for meaning, and the individual's meeting with the world will thus always be absurd. Albert Camus writes in The Myth of Sisyphus (1942) about the absurdity of existence that "the absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (Camus, 31-32). Because man dreads the "unreasonable silence of the world," he "obsessively attempts by coercion to fix and stabilize the elusive flux of existence from *meta-ta-physika* (after or beyond things-as-they-are), from the vantage point of a final rational cause that is beyond the reach of free play" (Spanos, 17).

Spanos almost echoes Brooks' definitions of *narrative desire* in his description of the "problem-solution perspective of the "straightforward" Western man of action":

> It is based on *seeing* temporal experience at once (spatially), that is, in a monolithic certainty that immediate psychic or historical experience is part of a comforting, even exciting and suspenseful well-made cosmic drama or novel, more particularly, a detective story … in the manner of Poe's Murders in the Rue Morgue or Conan Doyle's Hound of the Baskervilles or Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express. (Spanos, 17-18)

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[14] William V. Spanos coined the term "anti-detection" in "The detective and the Boundary: Some notes on the postmodern literary imagination," in boundary 2, I (Fall, 1972), a key text in anti-detective scholarship. This term is most widely used, but many critics, like Michael Holquist and Patricia Merivale, prefer the term *metaphysical detective story*. The *anti-detective story*, the *metaphysical detective story* and the *postmodern mystery*, as is also used, all describe the same tendency: the postmodern parody of the detective genre. I prefer the term *anti-detection* since it denotes the use of detection against itself.

The impulse of nineteenth-century writers was thus to provide solutions to the "crime" of existence, conducting investigations in order to *exclude* the mystery, or any type of uncanniness or "difference." Spanos believes that postmodernist writers such as Samuel Beckett, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Thomas Pynchon, etc., take their lead from the existentialists when refusing to fulfill these causally oriented expectations. They propose an "anti-Aristotelianism," a rejection of coherently structured fictions, or indeed sentences, with beginnings, middles, and ends, in an effort to break with the "well-made" nineteenth century play or novel, an analogue of the "well-made" positivistic universe delineated by the Enlightenment structure of consciousness. The postmodern imagination thus insists on the disorienting mystery, on letting in the uncanniness that resists naming and solving. As Beckett describes the new form of art in an interview:

> What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else…To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now. (Driver, 23)

The new type of artist is in search of new laws of art, laws that will acknowledge the dreadful "silence of the world," and not make it fit into a comfortingly structured universe. Hence, the most immediate task of the postmodern writer "is that of undermining the detective-like expectations of the positivistic mind" (Spanos, 48). The most efficient way of dissolving those expectations is by first evoking them, and Spanos therefore argues that the formal purpose of the anti-detective story is to:

> Evoke the impulse to "detect" or to psychoanalyze – to track down the secret cause – in order to violently frustrate this impulse by refusing to solve the crime (or find the cause of the neurosis). (Spanos, 25)

Stefano Tani, who with The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern Italian and American Fiction (1984) has probably done the most extensive work on anti-detection as a genre, similarly associates the emergence of the genre with postmodernism. Tani, too, addresses the admittance of chaos: "the anti-

detective novel substitutes for the detective as central and ordering character the decentering and chaotic admission of mystery, of non-solution (Tani, 40). Since the detective story is dominated by the hermeneutic code, this genre most efficiently frustrates the anticipation and expectations of the reader. By not offering a solution to the mystery, the anti-detective story attacks the reader's sense of reason instead of confirming it. It makes use of the structural elements of the genre in order to expose and undermine those, or as Tani describes the task of the writers of anti-detection: "they use the detective conventions with the precise intentions of expressing the disorder and the existential void they find central to our time in a genre designed to epitomize the contrary" (Tani, 34).

The appeal of the detective genre for the postmodern writer is precisely its complete reliance on plot, since it then proves the most efficient narrative in the attempt to underscore the arbitrariness and instability at the heart of every narrative. The use of the detective formula combined with the postmodern refusal to provide solutions make the anti-detective story an ideal instrument in the project of exposing the reader's expectations, and by breaking and disrupting those, it demonstrates its own status as fiction. The anti-detective fiction thus conjures up the paradox that is characteristic of *metafiction*, fiction that is characterized by Patricia Waugh in Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction (1984) as "the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion" (Waugh, 6). Metafiction is constructed around the awareness of fiction – the ambiguity of a piece of fiction that points to its own fictitiousness.

The ambiguity of anti-detection demonstrates growing doubts about the legitimacy of telling a story, and a general suspicion toward the ordering principle of plot. In its effort to dissolve the authority of its story, it simultaneously dissolves the authority of the author. With the detective-protagonist serving as a stand-in for the figure of the author, the anti-detective stories show a strong unwillingness to be the teller, the narrator, the one who imposes plot/meaning on narrative. The narrators of the stories withdraw, but it is a very different kind of withdrawal than the arrogant and reserved withdrawal of Auguste C. Dupin. The state of continuous withdrawal that both Beckett's and Auster's protagonists are in, instead constitutes an attempt to escape their own stories, their own voices as they continuously undermine their authority by questioning their identity and

agency as detectives and storytellers. And yet, in its parody of the detective plot, the anti-detective fiction relies heavily on the structure of the detective story and the narrative desire of the reader. Brooks alludes to the continuous dependence on plot, when he writes:

> In our own century [the twentieth century], we have become more suspicious of plots, more acutely aware of their artifice, their arbitrary relation to time and chance, though we no doubt still depend on elements of plotting, however ironized or parodied, more than we realize. (Brooks, xii)

Although suspicious of the hermeneutic consciousness that structures plot, postmodern anti-fiction, by parodying the mechanics of the detective story in order to evoke "the impulse to detect" in the reader, or what Brooks would call arousing the reader's narrative desire, is still as reliant on plot. In this sense Brooks may be right in saying that every story is essentially hermeneutic and utterly dependant on plot. The function of anti-detection in relation to classic detective fiction could therefore be said to be a repetition of its plot, but one, which demonstrates a complete awareness of its implications. Its aim is to create an insight that is already self-consciously doubled back upon itself. Linda Hutcheon calls this practice *postmodern parody*; parody in this respect being, in Hutcheon's words, "repetition with a difference." This postmodern practice reinstates some of the elements of the genre that it parodies, and does it with a subversive and perhaps ironic distance that exposes its unavoidable ideology and questions the transparency of every representation. I will deal with this *parodic* aspect of the anti-detective novel in the final chapter.

In the following, I will analyze the application of the detective genre in two postmodern trilogies. I want to explore how Auster and Beckett in very different ways parody the detective narrative, and how both trilogies demonstrate the impossibility of the detective's "speaking eye," or any such transparent signified. The chronologically and stylistically disparate trilogies have many things in common, and characteristic for both is the fact that the impossible task of writing takes place in an irrational world, governed by chance and coincidence, whose author cannot be known. Both also represent isolated and fundamentally powerless characters who are, in some sense, writers, and who all look for

answers, but have to satisfy themselves with the ultimate 'failure' of only being able to ask questions. The trilogies' polyphone and notoriously unstable detective/writer protagonists thus foreground a parallel between a detectivist code and a hermeneutic reading and writing of the world in their subversion of both, consequently frustrating "the detective-like expectations of the positivistic mind." In their play with elements from the traditional detective narrative, they investigate such ontological concepts as language, identity and presence, and demonstrate the impossibility of the writer's detective journey.

2. Paul Auster and the Lost Detective

Defeating the Object 3: Watching Quinn - A Memorial by Hamish Robertson, 2001.

> Reality is something we invent…I would say that since the eighteenth century, we've put this rational machine to work in deciphering the world, and it produces certain kinds of stories. And these stories are, so to speak, "realistic," when in fact they're not, they're just another interpretation of reality.
> - Paul Auster (Interview with Pace).

The development from the detective to the anti-detective story, as we have seen, has to do with a radical change in relation to narrative. As shown, the detective story has traditionally been one of the literary genres most reliant on narrative, rendering it a genre with a unique appeal to postmodern writers who show a growing suspicion of narrative. The detective story has been structured around the emergence of the hidden narrative, whereas the anti-detective story renders it impossible for a narrative to emerge. The conflict is no longer between the detective and a hostile criminal or mystery, but between the detective's attempt at creating a coherent narrative and a reality in which such an attempt is absurd.

It is this conflict that pervades the novels of Auster's New York Trilogy, and the novels can be said to be three versions of the detective's attempt at solving a mystery that is insoluble, and the writer's Sisyphean attempt at narrating a story. As with Beckett's three novels, we are thus introduced to three versions of the same story, as the narrator of the last novel in the trilogy, The Locked Room (TLR), tells us: "These three stories are finally the same story" (TLR, 149), each one referring to itself and the others as a piece of complete fabrication. Since these stories can be seen as three different approaches to some of the

same themes, the analysis will, for the sake of clarity and space limitations, primarily focus on the first novel in the trilogy, City of Glass (COG) (1985), but will draw on the other two when necessary.

In Auster's anti-detective stories, the role of the detective has undergone drastic changes. Whereas the quasi-omniscient figures of Dupin and Holmes inhabit the centres of their respective narratives, Auster's detectives are on the contrary ever receding into the background of their stories, retreating to a place where they seem to have reached a point zero of their narratives and identities. They are all, in some sense or another, looking for missing people, people that seem to vanish before their eyes, and in the process turn into missing people themselves, or rather discover that they have never really been there in the first place. The immunity that, according to Todorov, always protected the detective - "Nothing can happen to them: a rule of the genre postulates the detective's immunity" (Todorov, 44) - does not apply to these detectives as they set out on their self-destructive journeys. Gradually they each seem to vanish both physically and mentally: Daniel Quinn seems to have been reduced to the paper in his red notebook which is all he leaves behind; Blue has retreated so much from his existence that he has become a visitor to his own vacated life; and in the last of the trilogy's novels, Sophie, the wife of the narrator, tells him to stop searching for the mysteriously vanished Fanshawe, because, as she says: "You're so close to being gone already. I sometimes think I can see you vanishing before my eyes" (TLR, 137). Each of these characters desperately tries to piece together a narrative and to construct a solid identity. When the narrative is in pieces that are impossible to gather and reunite, so is he.

2.1 The anti-detective and the insoluble mystery

> In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so – which amounts to the same thing. The world of the book comes to life, seething with possibilities, with secrets and contradictions. Since everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked. Everything becomes essence; the centre of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The centre, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end. (COG, 15)

The words are Daniel Quinn's, describing his attraction to the detective genre. Quinn is a writer of detective stories who himself becomes a detective, although only an impersonation of one, in the metafictional detective story of City of Glass. Right from the beginning of the novel it is clear that Auster's detective is very different from the classic Dupin character. Hence, when we meet Daniel Quinn, he is a deeply unhappy man on the verge of losing himself. His life has fallen apart since he years earlier lost his wife and son, and Quinn tries to escape his existence in every way possible. His crisis and the beginning of his disintegration as a man and writer is clear from the trinity of persons he has become in his work: formerly a poet and a writer of plays and essays, Quinn now only writes detective novels, books that he writes under the name of William Wilson about a tough private eye by the very "hard-boiled" detective name of Max Work.[15] Max Work is a character that Quinn finds himself wanting to slip into more and more:

> Over the years, Work had become very close to Quinn. Whereas William Wilson remained an abstract figure for him, Work had increasingly come to life. In the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist, Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise. If Wilson was an illusion, he nevertheless justified the lives of the other two. If Wilson did not exist, he nevertheless was the bridge that allowed Quinn to pass from himself into Work. And little by little, Work had become a presence in Quinn's life, his interior brother, his comrade in solitude. (COG, 12)

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[15] "William Wilson" is also the name of one of Poe's tales (from Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, 1840) in which the narrator is haunted all his life by another William Wilson, his identical double in everything except moral standards, who continuously threatens to expose him to the outside world. He ends up killing his "twin," and thereby of course kills himself. As in Poe, the notion of the "doppelgaenger" and doubling is very central to Auster's fiction: names, faces and initials are doubled in a maze of indistinguishable identities. The doppelgaenger motif is interesting in relation to both City of Glass and Molloy: Both Auster and Beckett portray characters that are somehow haunted by doppelgaengers, or characters whose persona or identity they either slide in or out of, or eventually "collapse" into. Furthermore, a hostile, even violent, relationship between "doubles" is often implied in both novels. Stefano Tani comments on how Poe's William Wilson highlights the doubled, divided status of the artist, dramatizing the paradox of creativity in which "creation implies destruction, ultimately destruction of the artist himself" (Tani, 14). The notion of the ultimate self-destruction of the artist is highly relevant in an anti-detection context, in which it seems to be the fate of the detective, as a stand-in for the author, to undo himself.

Normally, a writer would probably refer to the character of his book as the dummy and not the other way around, but Quinn's insistence on being the dummy in the enterprise seems to be the purpose of his writing. He seeks to elide his own identity in every way possible, and writing, particularly under a pseudonym, is one way to escape:

> Because he did not consider himself the author of what he wrote, he did not feel responsible for it and therefore was not compelled to defend it in his heart. William Wilson, after all, was an invention, and even though he had been born within Quinn himself, he now led an independent life. (COG, 9)

New York City similarly provides Quinn with a means of escape. Searching for what could be seen as a state of unconsciousness, he finds solace in the streets where he wanders aimlessly about, finding comfort in the feeling that "all places became equal and it no longer mattered where he was. On his best walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere" (COG, 9). Here he can almost lose himself:

> New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighbourhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well. Each time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind, and by giving himself up to the movement of the streets, by reducing himself to a seeing eye, he was able to escape the obligation to think, and this, more than anything else, brought him a measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within. (COG, 8)

Hence, it is no wonder that Quinn is attracted to the opportunity of becoming someone else, indeed someone who is the epitome of the "seeing eye" and close to the detective persona that he has created in his books. The opportunity comes when he receives the classic "detective-style" phone call in the dead of night, and a voice asks for Paul Auster from the Auster Detective Agency.[16] Quinn's physical state and spontaneous

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[16] Auster himself claims to have received such a call late at night and a man asking for the famous Pinkerton Agency; the incident that inspired him to start writing City of Glass. In contrast to Quinn's calls, though, the caller only rang twice, and Auster was never given a third chance to pursue the mystery. (See The Red Notebook, True Stories (1992), 55)

reaction at the very beginning of the case is very telling for the mission that he is about to undertake: surprised by the accidental phone call, he is very hesitant at first, and after having hung up, Quinn stands "on the cold floor, looking down at his feet, his knees, his limp penis" (COG, 13). This image of the detective as an irresolute and impotent character, who indeed only becomes a detective by chance, would be unimaginable in traditional detective fiction.

By becoming the detective "Paul Auster," Quinn finds the same relief from his own self as he does in writing under a pseudonym.[17] He does not have to believe in what he does and he does not have to be fully there, something which permits him to withdraw into the *nowhere* where he longs to be. He models the persona of "Paul Auster" on his own detective character, Max Work, and finds in this persona an opportunity to live in the world, but at one remove:

> If Quinn had allowed himself to vanish, to withdraw into the confines of a strange and hermetic life, Work continued to live in the world of others, and the more Quinn seemed to vanish, the more persistent Work's presence in the world became. Whereas Quinn tended to feel out of place in his own skin, Work was aggressive, quick-tongued, at home in whatever spot he happened to find himself. The very things that caused problems for Quinn, Work took for granted, and he walked through the mayhem of his adventures with an ease and indifference that never failed to impress his creator. (COG, 16)

The aggressive "quick-tonguedness" of his detective character is reminiscent of the wise-cracking attitude of the hard-boiled detectives of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, and it is exactly upon this American version of the detective that Quinn builds the detective persona of "Paul Auster." The detective's universe appeals to Quinn with its simplicity and the powerful detective at its centre:

> 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

[17] The character in the book by the name of Paul Auster will for the sake of clarity, and in true postmodern style, be defined as "Paul Auster."

> them Private eye. The term held a triple meaning for Quinn. Not only was it the letter "I," standing for "investigator," it was "I" in the upper case, the tiny life-bud buried in the body of the breathing self. At the same time, it was also the physical eye of the writer, the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him. (COG, 15-16)

The identity of the detective and that of the writer here become interchangeable. Quinn clings to the role of the writer as one who demands of the world that it reveal itself to him, and he wants to escape into this literary universe of the good old detectives. The beginning of City of Glass thus sets up the scene on one hand for a typical detective story with the mysterious phone call in the dead of night, on the other an enigmatic tale about a resistant detective, who is indeed not a detective.

Quinn's assignment as a detective is to keep an eye on the father of one Peter Stillman, Peter Stillman, Sr. He is hired by Stillman Jr. and his wife, Virginia. The character of Virginia fits perfectly into the Chandleresque universe Quinn finds himself drawn to.[18] She is described as the classic *femme fatale* of that literary universe: "dark hair, dark eyes, and a look in those eyes that was once self-contained and vaguely seductive. She wore a black dress and very red lipstick" (COG, 23), and Quinn, fashioning his character on the tough guys from detective fiction, is instantly drawn to her. Everything seems to fall into place in the stereotypical detective scenario Quinn is "writing" himself into until he meets the man on whose behalf he is going to act.

Because of his father's linguistic experiments, Peter Stillman Jr. was kept isolated in a dark room for nine years from when he was about two years old, without any human contact except for the occasional beating from his father. Stillman Sr. was a Professor of theology and philosophy at Columbia University, where he was researching theological interpretations of the New World with a particular interest in the "Fall of Language." His son's seclusion seems to have been a test case, in line with other earlier experiments with

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[18] The portrayal of women in the trilogy is oddly stereotypical, and not only in this parody of the *femme fatale*. Women only surface in the narratives in very classic and traditional roles: as mothers, wives, sisters, seductresses and prostitutes. This can be seen as another parallel to Beckett's trilogy: the woman is seen as something Other to the self, and as such as a clear threat to the coherence of the protagonist's identity, representing "the tiny hole between self and not-self," (TLR, 59) where the narrator of The Locked Room finds himself when falling in love. An analysis of the role of women in the trilogies is too far-reaching for this study, though, as that in itself could easily fill up another thesis.

children in which people hoped to discover man's "natural language," and through which Stillman Sr. hoped to gain insight into the "original language of innocence" dealt with in his scholarly dissertations. Consequently, Peter Stillman Jr. did not learn to speak until he was in his teens, and the character Quinn encounters is a robot-like person, so mechanical in speech and movements that it borders on the non-human:

> Quinn had never seen anyone move in such a manner, and he realized at once that this was the same person he had spoken to on the phone. The body acted almost exactly as the voice had: machine-like, fitful, alternating between slow and rapid gestures, rigid and yet expressive, as if the operation was out of control, not quite corresponding to the will that lay behind it. It seemed to Quinn that Stillman's body had not been used for a long time and that all its functions had been relearned, so that motion had become a conscious process, each movement broken down into its component submovements, with the result that all flow and spontaneity had been lost. It was like watching a marionette trying to walk without strings. (COG, 25)

The fact that Stillman Jr. is dressed completely in white stresses the blankness and non-identity of his character. Even his name begs the question of his humanity: Still-man?[19]

The father of Stillman Jr., Peter Stillman Sr., is being released from prison, and it this event that has made the Stillmans contact "Paul Auster," alias Quinn. The older Stillman is to arrive at Grand Central Station the day after, and Quinn's task is to keep an eye on the old man. At this point in the novel, the plot still demonstrates a tight association with traditional detective fiction, despite its somewhat unconventional depiction of its characters. A man is in danger, and a detective is put on the case. However, the fact that the detective is not really a detective and that the man he is looking for seems impenetrable complicates the detective story premise:

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[19] Considering the novel's metafictive play with literary themes, Stillman Jr. can be seen to embody the situation of the author and the impossible conditions of writing. In his earlier semi-autobiographical work, Invention of Solitude (1982), Auster discusses the fact that every book is an expression of loneliness and the author's struggle with the fact that the meaning that he wants to express inevitably escapes language. The premise for Peter Stillman Jr.'s existence is similarly a fundamental isolation and loneliness, illustrating the ultimate gap between language and experience - the fact that language is inherently incapable of fully communicating reality or experience, and distorts and hides the meaning of that which is to be expressed.

> Quinn looked at the picture of Stillman's face, hoping for a sudden epiphany, some sudden rush of subterranean knowledge that would help him to understand the man. But the picture told him nothing. It was no more than a picture of a man. (COG, 51)

The non-revelatory image of Stillman Sr. foreshadows Quinn's encounter with the man whom he is supposed to follow. The first encounter between the two underscores the futility of Quinn's assignment, as there happens to be, at the time of Stillman's arrival at the central station, not one, but *two* Stillmans. The men look exactly alike, and Quinn has no way of knowing which one is the *real* Stillman. This doubling of the "criminal" in reality undermines the entire enterprise that Quinn has embarked on, but in his desperation to remain inside a detective universe, he has to rely on the very anti-detective matter of chance and choose which one to follow: "Quinn froze. There was nothing he could do now that would not be a mistake. Whatever choice he made – and he had to make a choice – would be arbitrary, a submission to chance. Uncertainty would haunt him to the end" (COG, 90).

Chance never played a part in Dupin's and Holmes' rational investigations, but in Quinn's pursuit it is all he has. Chance thus governs his pursuit right from the beginning (right from the accidental phone call), and will continue to do so.[20] Normally, the significance and importance of these seemingly accidental events would be retrospectively revealed at the end of the novel, but in City of Glass this conclusion is pre-empted right from the beginning, when the narrator tells us: "Much later, when he was able to think about the things that happened to him, he would conclude that nothing was real except chance" (COG, 7). Hence, Quinn's pursuit of Stillman Sr. is absurd from the beginning and becomes gradually more so. Stillman, as Quinn did earlier, wanders aimlessly about on the streets of Manhattan, and Quinn becomes disillusioned, not feeling that he comes closer to any kind of truth about the man. The old man does not seem to have any intention of contacting his son; instead he just walks around picking up garbage from the streets. The longer Quinn follows him, the more impenetrable the man seems:

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[20] Chance and coincidence play a major role in Auster's universe, his fiction as well as his non-fiction (many of his stories from The Red Notebook are thus remarkable stories from his own life of strange coincidences). In Paul Auster and Postmodern Quest. On the Road to Nowhere (2002), Ilana Shiloh discusses the nature of chance in Auster's novels, which, she argues, is often associated with 'the fall,' gradually and inexorably pulling the heroes to their downfall.

> Quinn was deeply disillusioned. He had always imagined that the key to good detective work was a close observation of details. The more accurate the scrutiny, the more successful the results. The implication was that human behaviour could be understood, that beneath the infinite façade of gestures, tics, and silences, there was finally a coherence, an order, a source of motivation. But after struggling to take in these surface effects, Quinn felt no closer to Stillman than when he first started following him. He had lived Stillman's life, walked at his pace, seen what he had seen, and the only thing he felt now was the man's impenetrability. Instead of narrowing the distance that lay between him and Stillman, he had seen the old man slip away from him, even as he remained before his eyes. (COG, 105)

Quinn clearly bases his idea of "good detective work" on the literary tradition of Dupin and Sherlock Holmes, for whom "close observation of details" was the key to any mystery. Quinn's lack of penetrative reading abilities stand in sharp opposition to the capacities of his literary ancestors, exemplified for instance by Dupin's earlier mentioned almost frightening capacity of "reading" other people's minds. By way of observation and logical deduction, the detective was capable of doing exactly what Quinn finds himself devastatingly incapable of: penetrating "the infinite façade of gestures, tics, and silences," and revealing the dark secrets that lie beneath.

Quinn constantly tries to apply the logic of the Poesque detective story to his pursuit, and grasps at every little clue that might help uncover the hidden plot. He imagines that there has to be a pattern to Stillman's seemingly aimless wandering, and in a very Dupin-inspired vein, he starts to draw a map of his movements, "ransacking the chaos of Stillman's movements for some glimmer of cogency" (COG, 108-9). After playing around with different patterns, deciphering his notes and making calculations in his little red notebook, he terrifyingly discovers that Stillman's daily journeys spell out the letters OWEROFBAB, and Quinn, having read Stillman's dissertation about the recovery of an original language, feels he might have found the 'secret writing' that is the key to the mystery:

> The solution seemed so grotesque that his nerve almost failed him. Making all due allowances for the fact that he had missed the first four days and that Stillman had not yet finished, the answer seemed inescapable: THE TOWER OF BABEL. (COG, 111)

What disturbs Quinn about his newfound pattern, however, is that it seems to be entirely without purpose, "like drawing a picture in the air with your finger" (COG, 111). Is it a message, and if so, who would the message be for? When he learns Stillman's rationale for his wanderings the explanation does little to unravel the mystery. It turns out that Stillman is conducting a new experiment, and his project is to infuse broken things with a new meaning. He wanders the streets of Manhattan in search of a lost pattern, gathering broken items and naming them in the attempt to invent "new names that will correspond to the things"(COG, 123), and thus tries to reassemble the fragments that constitute a lost order:

> For our words no longer correspond to the world. When things were whole, we felt confident that our words could express them. But little by little these things have broken apart, shattered, collapsed into chaos. And yet our words have remained the same. They have not adapted themselves to the new reality. Hence, every time we try to speak of what we see, we speak falsely, distorting the very thing we are trying to represent. It's made a mess of everything. (COG, 121)

When a broken umbrella no longer functions as an umbrella, to use one of Stillman's examples, it should have another name. When we continue to call it an umbrella, we falsify and distort the thing itself, as that word "can no longer express the thing. It is imprecise; it is false; it hides the thing it is supposed to reveal" (COG, 122). Words have lost their meaning and Stillman's is an Adamic quest to reunite the two and re-establish man's mastery over the world. Stillman is another detective whose quest, as a linguistic Sherlock Holmes seeking to fill the gap between signifier and signified, is similar to Quinn's and equals that of the writer.

Quinn's conversations with Stillman do nothing to help Quinn with his case, and the very day that he has decided was to be the day for a major breakthrough, Stillman has vanished altogether: "Stillman was gone now. The old man had become part of the city (….) a brick in an endless wall of bricks" (COG, 141). Quinn has lost the case that has come to consume his entire life. He has ultimately failed as a detective, and is left with a missing person whom he realizes he will never locate: "There were no clues, no leads, no moves

to be made" (COG, 141). Furthermore, the disappearance of Stillman seems to be a premonition of Quinn's own disappearance, blending into the city walls.

Not knowing where to go from there, Quinn looks up "Paul Auster," the detective he has been impersonating. "Auster," as it turns out, is not a detective either, but just a writer like Quinn, whose only detective work consists of his current investigation into the real authorship of Don Quixote. "Auster's" life in many ways seems to remind Quinn of the comfortable family life he used to have. Like Quinn, "Auster" has a young son, named Daniel like Quinn. Although helpful and hospitable, he cannot help with the case, and Quinn has to leave this last vestige of "home-ness" in his universe. The visit with "Auster" has almost been like a visit to his own secure past, and although he tries to cling to it, he must leave. At the threshold, ready to exit the apartment, Quinn's namesake Daniel says, "Goodbye, myself!" (COG, 158) The farewell seems appropriate, since it seems that there is nothing left for Quinn; he is at the threshold of complete disintegration.

Although he has lost contact with the old Stillman as well as the couple that hired him, and has come to the realization that the detective persona of "Paul Auster" was an illusion, Quinn is still not able to let go of the case. Instead he takes up residence in the alley across from the Stillmans' and resides there for weeks. Once in the alley, Quinn might as well have disappeared from the surface of the earth altogether. As the narrator tells us, "Remarkable as it seems, no one ever noticed Quinn. It was as though he had melted into the walls of the city" (COG, 178). Even the narrator here seems to lose track of Quinn and the story, "We cannot say for certain what happened to Quinn during this period, for it is at this point in the story that he began to lose his grip" (COG, 173). While he resides in the alley, the detective plot that Quinn desperately tried to write himself into begins to collapse entirely, and he begins to realize that nothing is definite except the fact that the world is in a state of constant flux: "Even in its blackness, the sky did not rest. Clouds drifted through the dark, the moon was forever in a different form, the wind continued to blow" (COG, 180). Quinn's logocentric detective story collapses in the face of the chaotic, continually fluctuating universe he has been trying to observe and

decipher,[21] and he has come to a place where he no longer remembers why he used to write detective stories, and feels sorry "that he had bothered to write about the Stillman case at all. For the case was far behind him now, and he no longer bothered to think about it. It had been a bridge to another place in his life, and now that he had crossed it, its meaning had been lost" (COG, 199-200).

The detective story has been a safe haven for Quinn, who was clinging to it far beyond the point where it stopped making sense. Detective story fiction provided Quinn with a meaningful centre, the one described earlier when he professed his fascination with the detective genre: a firm structure based on a solid and meaningful centre. In Quinn's detective story universe, the author has traditionally inhabited this centre, as he is the epitome of "the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him" (COG, 16-17). In "The Detective and the Author," Madeleine Sorapure comments on how the novel questions the position of the author:

> This novel, like most anti-detective fiction, calls into question not the ability or efforts of the individual detective, but rather the methodology of the detection itself, a methodology that

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[21] I think of logocentrism in a Derridean context. To Derrida, logocentrism denotes a metaphysics of presence, upon which all Western philosophy and metaphysics is based. It is hard to find a brief and concise definition of the concept by Derrida himself, as he famously resists definitions, but one of the most accessible that I can find is this from Of Grammatology: "All the metaphysical determinations of truth [...] are more or less immediately inseparable from the instance of the logos, or of a reason thought within the lineage of the logos" (Grammatology, 11) Derrida here describes the centrality of Logos, Greek for the concepts of reason, thought and speech. In a metaphysics based on Logos, writing is excluded as 'secondary' to speech, since speech denotes a *presence and truth* that precedes a writing that can only report it. Jonathan Culler describes Derrida's 'investigation' of logocentrism thus: "In characterizing philosophy as logocentric, Derrida identifies its basic project as that of determining the nature of truth, reason, being, and of distinguishing the essential from the contingent, the well-grounded from the factitious. Since Descartes, the logocentrism of philosophy has emerged particularly in its concentration on epistemology." (Culler, 151). Auster's anti-detective fiction undertakes an undermining of logocentric concepts such as presence, centre and truth, and in that sense the anti-detective novel can also be called a *deconstructed* detective story, particularly in the perforation of language that Beckett's trilogy similarly, and even to a larger extent, demonstrates. In City of Glass, Stillman Sr. stands out as the most clear exponent of logocentrism with his firm belief that knowledge is rooted in a pure, but now fallen, language given by God to humans, for them to decipher and gain access to some form of origin. Stillman calls to mind an ancient biblical hermeneutic, professing: "In the beginning was the word." He believes in the resurrection of the lost transcendental signified, an essence untouched by the flux of existence, which governs the structure of the universe and acts as a foundation for all thought and language.
I am not interested in doing an exclusively deconstructive reading of the trilogy, but the novels each demonstrate several deconstructive topics and reflections, such as the untenability of logocentrism and the consequent endless deferrals of the transcendental signified, that I find highly relevant to a discussion of anti-detection in its subversion of Enlightenment epistemology.

> valorizes the powers of reason in the face of mystery, that validates the hermeneutic enterprise, and most importantly, that allows for an authoritative position outside the events themselves from which omniscient knowledge is attainable: in short, the position and knowledge of the author, toward which detective and reader strive. (Sorapure, 74)

The omniscient author position is unreachable, and detective and reader are left with the fragmented, imperfect understanding that they started out with. In his deconstruction of the detective-author's position and identity, and with his countless digressions, references and metafictionality, Auster breaks down the detective story's traditional meaningful centre, which is constituted by the eye of the detective hero/author. His authors are placed in an impenetrable and polyphonic maze of narrators and author characters, none of them trustworthy. As Dragana Nikolic argues:

> The writing thus, as Barthes would say (S/Z), becomes the destruction of every point of origin. Disintegration on a metaphysical level brings about the shattering of unitary consciousness of the author as originator and ruler of the truth. Auster's text speaks in a multitude of voices without any one being singled out as the author's unique discourse. (Nikolic, 8)

Auster, in line with a deconstructive spirit, underscores the open-ended, the insoluble and the fragmented.

2.2 The Detective as Hawthorne's Missing Person

The *New York Trilogy* is full of people who mysteriously disappear. Without any form of explanation, people just drop out of the text of City of Glass for instance, from Virginia and Peter Stillman, Stillman Sr. and Quinn himself. As Alison Russell writes in "Deconstructing the New York Trilogy. Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction," it is as if the characters in the narrative die "when their signifiers are omitted from the printed page" (Russell, 75). None of them are granted a meaningful ending but simply seem to implode into the darkness of the text, or perhaps rather they seem to have come to the limits of the narrative, of writing, and disappear into that unknowable which cannot be

represented. During their search for meaning, the many detectives of the trilogy eventually lose themselves, gradually disintegrating into the unknown mystery they have pursued.

This missing-person motif seems to be partially inspired by a writer who has been thoroughly studied by Auster: Nathaniel Hawthorne.[22] In one of Hawthorne's tales, "Wakefield," an ordinary man called Wakefield one day for no particular reason steps over the threshold of his home and does not return for the next twenty years.[23] From a distance, he spies on his wife and his home until he one day, inexplicably, decides to return. In what seems an obvious allusion to Hawthorne's tale, Quinn returns to his home after many months of living a ghostly existence in the alley across from the Stillmans' apartment, only to find his apartment rented out and, consequently, himself homeless. Quinn has been banished from his home and from himself, and there is no return: "He had come to the end of himself. He could feel it now, as though a great truth had finally dawned on him. There was nothing left" (COG, 191).

"Wakefield" contains many of the key motifs that are highlighted in Auster's postmodern fiction, from the ontological thresholds transgressed by these detectives to the uncertainty of selfhood that follows. In "Approaching the Threshold(s) in Postmodern Detective Fiction," Richard Swope points to the similarities between "Wakefield" and Auster's missing persons. He points out that in contrast to Wakefield, who manages to return to his home at the end of the story, Auster's missing persons have potentially crossed a threshold of no return:

> Yet Wakefield's exile, though highly disruptive, is only temporary. As we will see, that is not always the case for Wakefield's literary descendants, figures who not coincidentally crop up alongside the metaphysical detective, the gumshoe who ought to be able to locate them, to restore them to their positions in society. Again, though, the metaphysical detective no longer achieves resolution; the questions of existence remain questions, as even the metaphysical detective himself becomes vulnerable to losing his way in the postmodern labyrinth. Unlike the original Wakefield, the postmodern missing person, or metaphysical Wakefield, must confront the

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[22] Poe and Hawthorne are obvious sources of inspiration to Auster, and many other of his works similarly refer to these two storytellers.

[23] "Wakefield" is from Nathaniel Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales (1837).

> possibility of never returning, of having no home to return to, or even of not knowing which self is to return. (Swope, 207)

Hawthorne's "Wakefield" can be seen to function as a mise-en-abyme in the trilogy, a foundational missing person narrative upon which Auster draws, and the trilogy is full of such postmodern "Wakefields," forever banished from their homes and identities. In Ghosts, the many references to "Wakefield" rise to the surface of the text, as Blue's target, Black, recounts Hawthorne's story. Blue, the neat detective and avid reader of *True Detective* magazine leads a completely isolated existence in an apartment from which he can keep an eye on Black in the apartment across from him. Blue's isolation seems a somewhat Kafkaesque existence, not knowing why he is to spy on the man across nor when his assignment will end. As was the case with the original Wakefield, the memory of his fiancée (the "future Mrs. Blue," as he calls her in his mind) continues to haunt Blue, reminding him of the life that he has left behind, and he keeps a picture of her on his wall in the optimistic hope that he will someday, in "Wakefield" style, return. In what seems an obvious revision of "Wakefield," Blue encounters his fiancée in the street one day many months after his disappearance, but in this case she *does* recognize him. The incident holds no promise of returning Blue to his former existence, though, as "the future Mrs. Blue" has already replaced Blue with another man, and Blue "realizes that he has thrown away his life," a realization that leads him to believe that "this is truly the beginning of the end." [24].

Once again the pursuit of a man, a man who is in danger of disappearing in the crowd, leads to the inevitable disappearance of the pursuer, the detective, who loses his place in the world. Just like the lonely, mysterious and near-invisible Black whom he constantly watches, he has "fallen" out of the world, so much so that he has become a ghost of himself. Ghosts focuses on the period of Wakefield's exile in which it seemed that Wakefield could not return to his home even if he desired to do so; in which, as the narrator of "Wakefield" informs us, the "dead have as much chance of re-visiting their earthly homes, as the self-banished Wakefield" (Hawthorne, 293). Blue now belongs to the legion of the dead who will never be able to re-visit. The mystery, so to speak,

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[24] Ghosts in The New York Trilogy (all three novels in one volume). New York: Penguin Books, 1990. 196.

subsumes the detective, and there is no safe return, Wakefield or Sherlock Holmes style, in the end.

When Black tells a disguised Blue the story of Wakefield, the story seems almost a warning from Black to Blue not to lose himself completely, and Blue senses that Black knows something he does not:

> [E]ven though the talk had nothing to do with the case, Blue cannot help feeling that Black was actually referring to it all along – talking in riddles, so to speak, as though trying to tell Blue something, but not daring to say it out loud. (Ghosts, 211)

Black, reflecting the *nothingness* that is at the heart of Blue himself, is also the one who utters the naked truth about Blue's, his own, and all the other postmodern detectives' tragic existence, namely that Blue would cease to exist were it not for Black. Blue is at this point completely dependent upon his relationship with the object of his investigation, as it is the only thing in his life that confirms his existence:

> It all boils down to one question, then, doesn't it? says Blue, forgetting all about Snow now and looking Black straight in the eyes. Does he know you're watching him or not?
> Black turns away, unable to look at Blue anymore, and says with a suddenly trembling voice: Of course he knows. That's the whole point, isn't it? He's got to know, or else nothing makes sense.
> Why?
> Because he needs me, says Black, still looking away. He needs my eyes looking at him. He needs me to prove he's alive. (Ghosts, 216)

The ending of Ghosts subverts the happy homecoming of "Wakefield." Blue has no home to return to, and the minute he kills his double there is not even a self to return. Similar to Poe's William Wilson from the tale of that name, which Auster already referred to in City of Glass, Blue kills himself when he kills his double. Blue does not die, as was the case with William Wilson, but he erases himself from the story, his signifiers "having been omitted from the page," and has at that point already lost himself completely. Instead of returning home, he too disappears into the unknowable: "For now is the moment that Blue stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door. And from this moment on, we know nothing" (Ghosts, 232).

The Locked Room is the story that most clearly fabulizes on the "Wakefield" theme, and the name of Fanshawe is thus also a direct reference to Hawthorne, being the name of his first novel.[25] Fanshawe has left his wife and child in a repetition of the Hawthornian prank. He, too, has stepped outside his normal existence for a moment and got lost in the wilderness. Like Wakefield, he at times keeps close to his prior existence, camping outside his wife's apartment to spy on her, and at the same time he is far, far away in an infinite chaos, unable to ever return. The nameless narrator of the story, Fanshawe's childhood friend, becomes a "literary" detective who obsessively pursues him and becomes lost himself. He travels to all the places in the world that have mattered to his friend, marries his wife and adopts his son, publishes his writing and even finds himself starting an affair with his mother in a symbolic attempt to penetrate the hidden past and fleeing identity of this man whom he is himself gradually becoming.

In an inter-related reading of all three novels, the narrator can be seen to be the woman moving into Quinn's uninhabited apartment in City of Glass, and the future Mrs. Blue's new fiancée in Ghosts; he is the man who has replaced "Wakefield," or Fanshawe, as the former ventured out to explore the nothingness that lies beyond his own existence. The fact that Wakefield's "replacement," the detective meant to find him, similarly disappears into the chaos that has consumed "Wakefield" himself, suggests an infinite labyrinthine structure of gradually vanishing postmodern detectives. The disappearance of Wakefield and his postmodern descendants evokes the fear of losing one's place, of crossing a threshold of no return and breaking the boundaries of rationalism that the detective normally helps secure. Hawthorne's Wakefield returns home, and, as in the classical murder mystery, the rational replaces the irrational, the mysterious missing person is found, the mystery is, if not unravelled, then at least resolved. And yet, the last few lines of Wakefield's narrative open up towards the infinitely mysterious chaos in which the postmodern detective later loses himself:

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[25] The name of *Fanshawe* evokes associations with failure, the premise of the anti-detective's quest, since Hawthorne decided to withdraw that story from circulation, calling it a fiasco. This theme of self-willed failure, rather than the actual story of *Fanshawe,* runs as an undercurrent to the entire trilogy. Hence, Fanshawe of The Locked Room never wanted any of his many works published, and is furious with the narrator for publishing them.

> Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one another, and to a whole, that, by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever. Like Wakefield, he may become, as it were, the Outcast of the Universe. (Hawthorne, 298)

Hawthorne's story provides some of the key ontological questions that occupy postmodern anti-detectives. It is thus "by stepping aside for a moment" that all of Auster's detectives become lost to the world and to themselves. More frightening, even, is the fact that these missing persons are all, in one form or another, detectives, the high priests of order and logic, sent out to locate missing persons, the "Outcasts of the Universe," only to become such missing persons to themselves. Not only do they fail to solve the case or to unravel the mysteries they set out to solve, but the detectives themselves gradually become the missing persons whom they cannot locate within the complex labyrinth that is the universe, and inevitably, their own identity.

Another interesting literary ancestor to Auster's missing detectives is Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" (1840). The story is not usually affiliated with the detective story, but has many analogous affinities with the hard-boiled or "private eye" detective story. The story, as Patricia Merivale points out in "Gumshoe Gothics," has been sidelined as a detective story partly because it lacks a "real" detective, and partly because it "enacts a definitely insoluble mystery," some of the primary characteristics of the anti-detective story (Merivale, 104). In this story, the narrator starts pursuing a complete stranger, a man of the crowd, whom he sees through the windows of a London coffee house. The man looks so curious that the narrator feels the urge to follow him through the streets of London. Many critics have already commented on the symbiotic relationship of the narrator and the man he pursues, the fact that the mystery man can be seen as the double of the narrator,[26] but Merivale is the first to point to the relationship between this overlooked Poe mystery and its literary anti-detective (or in Merivale's terminology "metaphysical" detective) followers:

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[26] See i.e. Patrick Quinn, who in The French Face of Edgar Poe (1954) saw the narrator and the man he pursues as two different sides of his personality: "Dr. Jekyll foresees the Mr. Hyde he will become."

> Rather than dealing with a Body on the Carpet and another (clearly "other") character who put it there, a metaphysical detective story is likelier to deal with a Wakefield, a Missing Person, a person sought for, glimpsed, and shadowed, gumshoe style, through endless, labyrinthine city streets, but never really Found – because he was never really There, because he was, and remains, missing. One was, as postmodernist detective after postmodernist detective discovers, only following one's own self. (Merivale, 105)

Quinn's shadowing of Stillman Sr., Blue's of Black and the narrator's of Fanshawe, are indeed reminiscent of the narrator's pursuit of the man of the crowd, and Merivale's comment points to the postmodern detective's impossible pursuit of himself. The infinite labyrinth that these postmodern detectives find themselves lost in is the dark and impenetrable chaos of their own identity. The inherent failure of the enterprise of ever catching up with themselves is emphasized in Quinn's rephrasing of Baudelaire in his red notebook:

> Il me semble que je serais toujours bien la ou je ne suis pas. In other words: It seems to me that I will always be happy in the place where I am not. Or, more bluntly: Wherever I am not is the place where I am myself. Or else, taking the bull by the horns: Anywhere out of the world. (COG, 168)

The eternally insoluble mystery is the self, impossible for the detective to gain access to and impossible for the writer to write. Auster's detectives are doomed to fail and to disappear into the unknowable, as the detective, or rather the author, comes face to face with the limits of knowledge and writing.

2.3 New Babel

Auster's rendering of the anti-detective and the methodology that fails him can be seen as a dramatization of the relationship between the detective and the writer, a relationship that

becomes explicit in the case of Stillman Sr in City of Glass.[27] Stillman's attempt to rediscover an original, pure language puts focus on the relationship between language and the world that it tries to represent. Madeleine Sorapure says of Stillman's project:

> As an author, Stillman attempts to infuse words with meaning, and to secure that "real" meaning and guarantee the connection between the word and what it means by virtue of his "genius" (123), his God-like ability to endow broken things with their new and proper names. Of course, the absurdity of his project of renaming the garbage found on a particular configuration of New York's streets highlights the impossibility of an authorial practice that presupposes a true and instrumental language to which the author, as deus artifex, has special access. (Sorapure, 81)

In its rendering of Stillman Sr.'s project, the trilogy demonstrates an occupation with the status of language that is crucial to deconstruction and firmly links Auster's writing with that of Beckett. The absurdity of Stillman's project highlights the absurdity of the author's act: to name useless things, trusting language to be transparent like glass. As a linguistic Sherlock Holmes, Stillman is caught up with a belief in a hermeneutical and logocentric universe, searching for the signifier that reunites language with a centre and an origin.

This project of recovering an original, lost language is not new to a Western imagination, which Quinn also points out.[28] Stillman's old dissertation, "The Garden and The Tower: Early Visions of the New World," accentuates the stories in the Bible that have become a departure point for later times' search for this prelapsarian language, "The Myth of Paradise" and "The Myth of Babel" (COG, 67). We become familiar with this linguistic and biblical discourse through Quinn's readings of Stillman's dissertation at Columbia Library. Here we are led through a labyrinthine chain of readings and interpretations, structured somewhat like a nest of Chinese boxes: our reading of the narrator's reading of Quinn's red notebook that tells of Quinn's reading of Stillman Sr.'s

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[27] Madeleine Sorapure comments on the detective-writer complementarity: "This configuration – professional author-amateur detective – is not unusual. Indeed, we perceive a certain continuity between the activities of writing and investigating, which may explain the frequency with which, in fiction, authors find themselves playing detective and detectives find themselves "playing author" by writing about their adventures. The two pursuits are, we assume, complementary" (Sorapure, 72-73).

[28] In The Search for the Perfect Language (1995), Umberto Eco gives an account of a continuous European occupation with the idea of a perfect, paradisical language.

dissertation, which is based upon Henry Dark's (which turns out to be another pseudonym, this time for Stillman Sr.) pamphlet "The New Babel," which again is based on Milton's Paradise Lost, which is based on the Bible. In the process, origins and authors have been thoroughly deferred and deconstructed. It is this constant deferral and subversion that Stillman, as a pilgrim, strives to circumvent in order to reconstitute the original, lost Order of the universe. His project is about recapturing an innocent language, and hereby recapturing innocence inside Man:

> If the Fall of man also entailed a Fall of language, was it not logical to assume that it would be possible to undo the Fall, to reverse its effects by undoing the Fall of language, by striving to recreate the language that was spoken in Eden? If man could learn to speak this original language of innocence, did it not follow that he would thereby recover a state of innocence within himself? (COG, 76)

In Stillman's universe, language used to denote a presence that is now lost. The very beginning of language coincided with the beginning of the world, created in the presence of God. The world was thus created as a result of speech: "God said: "Let there be light!" (Genesis 1: 3-4). Adam was by God granted the role as *nomothete* – name-giver of all things in paradise, and the paradisical language was thus a divine language since God gave Adam the authorization to give things their proper names. This was a time when, according to Stillman, language and that which it represented were one and the same, a unity that was forever broken with the Fall:

> Adam's one task in the garden had been to invent language, to give each creature and thing its name. In the state of innocence, his tongue had gone straight to the quick of the world. His words had not been merely appended to the things he saw, they had revealed their essences, had literally brought them to life. A thing and its name were interchangeable. After the Fall, this was no longer true. Names became detached from things, words devolved into a collection of arbitrary signs; language had been severed from God. (COG, 70)

The presence that was constituted in the naming of the world has been destroyed. Man no longer has access to the divine language, and language can thus no longer reveal essence or truth, but has become a *Confusio Linguarum*.

Stillman's interpretation of the state of language and of Man has close affinities with a classical hermeneutical tradition. Hermeneutics as a philosophic concept did not emerge until later but it was inspired by a method of interpretation and charting of texts that emerged in relation to early interpretations of the Bible. For the early interpreters, it was imperative that the language and the stories of the bible be unambiguous and coherent in order to authorize the Christian doctrine. Since the Bible was perceived as an intentional and authoritative text, any incoherence and contradiction could only be apparent and superficial, and the right unequivocal meaning of God would emerge when subjected to the proper Christian analysis, the right "eyes" so to speak.[29] The detective story is tightly associated with a hermeneutical tradition in its traditional pursuit of the final resolution: the revelation of the truth, as it comes from the word of God, in his incarnation of the author, and *his* incarnation, the detective. Seen in this perspective, Stillman's project can similarly be seen as an attempt at 'healing' the gap that has evolved between literature and reality in the development from detective story to anti-detective story. In her essay "The Detective in Search of the Lost Tongue of Adam: Paul Auster's City of Glass," Norma Rowen comments on the relationship between Stillman's project and that of the anti-detective story:

> [T]he detective reader (...) is in difficulties because clues and the things they point to, signifiers and the signified, no longer match up. In repossessing the prelapsarian tongue, Stillman aims to clear up these difficulties. By giving things their right names again, calling back to its signifier the wandering signified, he finally will be able to achieve a reliable reading of the world and formulate, once and for all, the correct, clear, accessible, and unified text of reality. (Rowen, 228)

If this development is seen as an analogy to Stillman's linguistic Fall, the detective story can be seen as the prelapsarian narrative, in which a transparent, uncorrupted relationship between narrative and reality, clues and meaning was governing. The anti-detective story is thus dramatizing a condition in which this original, natural correspondence has been broken, in which leads no longer lead to anything. The New York Trilogy, by way of its

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[29] This historical account of hermeneutics is partly inspired by Anders Olsson's Den Okande Texten – En Essa om Tolkningsteori från Kyrkofaderna till Derrida (The Unknown Text – An Essay on the Theory of Interpretation from Patristics to Derrida), 1987.

numerous digressions and its attempt to corrupt and distort any pursuit of revelations or resolutions, thus fundamentally questions the detective story's hermeneutical tradition, particularly in relation to language and its capability of capturing reality. In these novels, language has lost its relation to a divine presence and centre and thus floats around, ambiguously and meaninglessly, deprived of its essence, its transcendental signified.

The instability of language and man's absurd belief in its transparency pervades the entirety of the trilogy. Each detective from City of Glass to The Locked Room is obsessed with his little notebook in which he tries to record and capture reality, and everyone fails desperately to do so. [30] Writing does not give access to the clarity that they seek. When Quinn is confronted with the language- and identity-deprived Peter Stillman, his logocentric universe begins to shatter, and he starts to wonder

> if these trees were the same trees that Peter Stillman saw when he walked out into the air and the light. He wondered if Peter saw the same things he did, or whether the world was a different place for him. And if a tree was not a tree, he wondered what it really was. (COG, 59)

As a reaction to these speculations, Quinn buys a notebook, hoping this way to control his observations and the world: "It would be helpful to have a separate place to record his thoughts, his observations, and his questions. In that way, perhaps, things might not get out of control" (COG, 63). Writing, for Quinn, is a way of understanding existence, of capturing and analyzing its mystery. But right from the beginning it is obvious that language cannot provide Quinn with the answers and the clarity that it seemed to promise, but instead raises even more questions casting doubt on even Quinn's sense of identity. At the end of his first writings in the notebook, Quinn thus writes: " On the other hand, nothing is clear. For example: who are you? And if you think you know, why do you keep

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[30] The red notebook seems to link all the narratives together. Stillman Sr. is thus similarly in possession of a red notebook, "it pleased him to know that Stillman also had a red notebook, as if this formed a secret link between them," (COG, 95) and both Blue and Black write in their small notebooks, the colours of which, though, we never learn. In The Locked Room, the little red notebook emerges once more (as does Quinn, in the periphery of the narrative), when Fanshawe in the end of the novel gives it to the narrator, who desperately tries to find the meaning of the mystery inside it.

lying about it? I have no answer. All I can say is this: listen to me. My name is Paul Auster. That is not my real name" (COG, 66). [31]

The failure of language to present Quinn with any kind of truth is further underscored by his attempt to understand Stillman's actions through an accurate recording of his movements. Quinn believes that if he manages to put it all into the notebook, the meaning of these seemingly incomprehensible wanderings will emerge. But when he looks through his notes, "he often discovered that he had written two or three lines on top of each other, producing a jumbled, illegible palimpsest" (COG, 100). Even when he manages to gather something that resembles a name from Stillman's walks – OWER OF BAB – the words do not reveal anything. Not until the end of the novel, when Quinn has regressed so much that he is barely in the world anymore, words begin to mean something again, taking on a life of their own without promising him insight into anything but themselves:

> Quinn no longer had any interest in himself. He wrote about the stars, the earth, his hopes for mankind. He felt that his words had been severed from him, that now they were a part of the world at large, as real and specific as a stone, or a lake, or a flower. They no longer had anything to do with him. (COG, 200)

This questioning of language is similarly foregrounded in the last of the novels, The Locked Room. The narrator desperately tries to evoke Fanshawe through writing, searching for him in his own writings, as another linguistic detective hoping to reunite words with their essence. By writing Fanshawe's biography, the narrator is trying to piece together the story of a man's life, acting the role of Brooks' imagined Sovereign Judge, who at the end of life writes the obituary like "Sherlock Holmes capable of going back over the ground, and thereby realizing the meaning of the cipher left by a life" (Brooks, 34).[32] In spite of all those ciphers that Fanshawe has left behind, a vast amount of letters

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[31] This last statement is close in tone to Moran's final "It was not midnight. It was not raining." Both demonstrate language's self-referential status, pointing to its emptiness, thus underscoring the instability at its "core."

[32] It is a paradoxical situation in which the narrator, as Fanshawe's biographer, has placed himself, at once evoking and burying Fanshawe: "I was digging a grave, after all, and there were times when I began to wonder if I was not digging my own" (TLR, 85).

and manuscripts, the narrator, like Quinn tracing Stillman, never comes any closer to the truth about the man. In the end, when Fanshawe has decided to die, he wants the narrator to have his notebook as an attempt at an explanation. But the writing in the notebook, as all the other writing in the novels, does not explain anything. It only seems to raise many more questions:

> I read steadily for almost an hour, flipping back and forth among the pages, trying to get a sense of what Fanshawe had written. If I say nothing about what I found there, 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. I can think of no other way to express it. Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible (…) I lost my way after the first word, and from then on I could only grope ahead, faltering in the darkness, blinded by the book that had been written for me. (TLR, 178-79) [33]

Language promises enlightenment but fails miserably. Yet in their quests for origins and identity, these detectives continue to read and write, hoping to gain insight into the mysteries of existence. The narrator of The Locked Room realizes the impenetrability of identity when he says: "No one can cross the boundary into another – for the simple reason that no one can gain access to himself" (TLR, 80-81). Still, he cannot give up his pursuit.

By questioning the status of language, the trilogy demonstrates a deconstructive undermining of a rationalistic tradition in Western philosophy that has heralded the subject who uses language as a way to define and control his world. From the Cartesian cogito through a Kantian transcendental subject and Habermas' 'enlightenment project,' the subject has been regarded as the centre of rationalization, judgement and will, and language has been regarded a transparent and thus trustworthy vehicle in the pursuit of truth. This logocentric concept of the universe governs each of these detectives at the very

[33] This paragraph similarly associates Auster's trilogy with that of Beckett, as the narrator seems to be describing the experience of reading the confused accounts of Beckett's narrators that also leave the reader "grop[ing] ahead, faltering in the darkness, blinded by the book that had been written for me." The red notebook that follows each of the trilogy's detectives, in which "each sentence erased the sentence before it," can thus perhaps be seen as an analogy to the impenetrable writing of Beckett, the master of "sentence-cancelling."

beginning of their narratives, when they each search for this solid 'I/eye' that observes and categorizes the universe, but Auster's deconstruction of the detective hero and his usual penetrative gaze thoroughly exposes and complicates this universe. The detective's stories that refuse to provide coherence, and their writing that distorts instead of clarifies, denies them this 'transcendental' position from which they can name and control the world. In Auster's trilogy, there is no self outside language, who can use it as a vehicle in his effort to shed light on the dark mysteries of existence. The self is only a fiction, created through writing, where these postmodern detectives find themselves doomed to a perpetual existence as tentative authors of their own narratives.

2.4 Absolute Zero

At the end of his mission, Quinn has lost his money, his clothes, his apartment and so much weight that there is almost nothing left of him. During his pursuit, he has gone through a mental and physical reduction, something that can be said for all of the trilogy's detectives, culminating in his lying curled up on the floor, writing the last remaining pages of his red notebook:

> Quinn put the red notebook on the floor, removed the deaf mute's pen from his pocket, and tossed it into the red notebook. Then he took off his watch and put it in his pocket. After that he took off al his clothes, opened the window, and one by one dropped each thing down the airshaft: first his right shoe, then his left shoe; one sock, and then the other sock; his shirt, his jacket, his underpants, his pants. He did not look out to watch them fall, nor did he check to see where they landed. Then he closed the window, lay down in the center of the floor, and went to sleep. (COG, 194)

As he approaches the end of his notebook, Quinn has receded so much into the background of his story that he seems to have come to the end or the beginning of his narrative and identity. Although he is coming closer to the end as the pages in his notebook dwindles, there is a prenatal quality to Quinn's end that seems to suggest a beginning to life and to narrative, more than an actual end. Quinn returns to a womb-like

existence, having been reduced to the most basic human necessities: lying naked on the floor in the dark, all he does is eat, sleep and write. Quinn's existence at this point is very close to that of Beckett's Malone: Man alone, trapped inside a room where he lies impotent and naked in that indeterminate limbo at the threshold of death and birth, or birth and death that both in Auster's and Beckett's trilogies somehow constitutes the essence, or rather non-essence, of human existence. [34] Non-essence because Quinn is barely alive at this point of his narrative, but has come or rather regressed to a place of non-being:

> Little by little, Quinn was coming to the end. At a certain point, he realized that the more he wrote the sooner the time would come when he could no longer write anything. He began to weigh his words with great care, struggling to express himself as economically and clearly as possible (…) For the case was far behind him now, and he no longer bothered to think about it. It had been a bridge to another place in his life, and now that he had crossed it, its meaning had been lost. Quinn no longer had any interest in himself. He wrote about the stars, the earth, his hopes for mankind. (COG, 199-200)

Quinn, who by writing himself into his own detective novel hoped to find his way to a more solid identity at the centre of his narrative instead of at its periphery, has instead been stripped entirely of identity, gradually deteriorating into the ultimate anonymity that pervades Beckett's characters from Molloy to the Unnamable. Instead of coming to the end of the narrative and the mystery, we in fact find him to have become lost in that nowhere in which he tried to lose himself in the beginning, wandering the streets of New York City. What drove Quinn onwards from there was the narrative desire of the detective story reader, hoping to come to the conclusion and find the answer to the mystery, but at the end of his narrative, Quinn has not come to any type of solution. Leaving the illusory detective "Auster's" apartment and forced to acknowledge the

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[34] In Malone Dies, Malone similarly leads a very humble and bare, almost nonhuman, existence, coming to the end of existence and of himself, and the entire last part of Quinn's narrative is in fact very close in tone to that of Malone's narrative: "But it was not long before I found myself alone, in the dark. That is why I gave up trying to play and took to myself for ever shapelessness and speechlessness, incurious wondering, darkness, long stumbling with outstretched arms, hiding." (Malone Dies (MD), 181) Like Malone's, Quinn's narrative ends when he stops telling himself stories; in his case the detective story he has been telling himself all along.

fictitiousness of his entire pursuit, Quinn has returned to point zero, even to before zero, as he now knows there is nothing to be known:

> Quinn was nowhere now. He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew he knew nothing. Not only had he been sent back to the beginning, he was now before the beginning, and so far before the beginning that it was worse than any end he could imagine. (COG, 159)

Quinn finds himself returned to its chaotic, incoherent beginning. But not only has he returned to the beginning of the story, he is now also far beyond the beginning as he realizes he will never reach its solution. His narrative desire, like the detective story reader's, for the end of the story translates into a desire for its beginning, the origin of the story and its originator, and the fear of its non-solution is rather a fear of it never having originated. This realization is the worst end imaginable, as it renders the entire pursuit utterly futile, a meaningless construct without any foundation. Desire for the termination of narrative, as Brooks shows, is a desire for an end that will bestow meaning upon the rest of the narrative, and deprived of this end, Quinn has similarly been deprived of its origin. Quinn's entire quest can thus be perceived as a quest for origin, for the *original* story and his *original* self. He has been searching for the meaningful conclusion to existence that would, in the above mentioned words of Walter Benjamin, render the narrative *transmissible*, making him able to tell the story about himself, demonstrating the impossible desire of the writer.

As Brooks points out, the detective story is traditionally caught up with a concept of origin, tracing a coherent narrative from its origin to its endpoint, as the core of every narrative, scientific and literary, is this notion of origin, the location of "where it all began." The characters of City of Glass are not only detectives and writers, but detective story readers, searching for that place where it all began, from Quinn in his search for identity, Peter Stillman Jr. looking for his father, Stillman Sr. searching for an original language and "Paul Auster" investigating the *original* authorship of the first modern novel. All these quests are for transcendent clues that will give them access to an origin, to the beginning of their narratives, and all are they as self-destructive as Oedipus' blind search for his. When Quinn is hired to follow Stillman Sr. and prevent a crime which has not yet occurred, he is seeking to solve a crime which has no origin as it has not yet been

committed. None of these novels offer a past crime that can function as a starting point for the detective's quest. Quinn's pursuit instead takes the form of an infinitely regressive movement, reminiscent of that which takes place in Molloy, which similarly suggests a perpetual self-starting, its end returning the narrator and the reader to the beginning. Both narratives of Molloy thus go towards the beginning, symbolically and literally. Molloy searches for Mother Molloy, his origin, whom he never locates and who is seemingly replaced by him in her room. Moran, in the same endless spiral, searches for Molloy, the beginning to his narrative, without ever locating it/him. Furthermore, the end of Moran's narrative in an obvious way returns the reader to its beginning, when Moran repeats the words that he began with: "It was midnight. The rain was beating on the windows" (Molloy, 176). Both narratives of Molloy enact a reversed story, which is acknowledged by Moran when he says: " I started on the story wrong. I started at the beginning."

In a sense, the structure of both Molloy and City of Glass repeats that of the classic detective story which is obsessed with "going back in time," reconstructing the past. But as Tani comments, " To reconstruct the past is to go back to a point (the one of the crime) about which the detective is concerned. There must be a fixed point; otherwise the regression in time would be infinite" (Tani, 45). The detectives of City of Glass and Molloy may thus express the same "archeological" desire as the traditional detective, enacting a search for the point of origin, but in the anti-detective story there is no such fixed point to return to, and the pursuit of origin is infinite. This is acknowledged by Quinn when he remembers Baudelaire's quote about the impossibility of ever entering the core of oneself, as this core will always be out of reach: "Wherever I am not is the place where I am myself" (COG, 168). In both Auster and Beckett's anti-detective fiction, identity is in a state of constant flux, and the search for it always results in a spiral-like deferral of the sought-after core of being.

The artist's search for identity is also a dominant topic for a number of modernist writers, and it seems obvious that Auster has been inspired by a few of them. Hence, in one of his earlier non-fiction texts, the collection of literary essays called The Art of Hunger (1982), Auster explores many of the ideas that he later dramatizes in the New York Trilogy. In the title essay, he discusses the portrait of the "hunger artist" who emerges in modernist literature, particularly that of Knut Hamsun and Franz Kafka. When

reading Auster's analysis of the "artist-hero" of Hamsun's Hunger (Sult, 1890), it becomes obvious where he has found a lot of inspiration for the character of Quinn and the rest of the trilogy's self-destructive detectives. Similar to Auster's trilogy, Hamsun's novel records one man's inner journey, obliterating all time apart from that of an inner sense of duration. The narrator of Hunger, again a writer, starves himself to the point of extermination, because as he says: " I had noticed very clearly that every time I went hungry a little too long it was as though my brains simply ran quietly out of my head and left me empty" (Art, 8). The novel makes it clear that he need not starve at all, but does it from some inner compulsion, a need to bring himself to the brink of chaos. Auster quotes a paragraph from the novel:

> I remained for a while looking into the dark – this dense substance of darkness that had no bottom, which I couldn't understand. My thoughts could not grasp such a thing. It seemed to be a dark beyond all measurement, and I felt its presence weight me down. I closed my eyes and took to singing half aloud and rocking myself back and forth on the cot to amuse myself, but it did no good. The dark had captured my brain and gave me not an instant of peace. What if I myself became dissolved into the dark, turned into it? (Art, 10)

The hero of Hunger uses hunger as a way to bring himself to a place where he is in danger of losing himself, "dissolved into the dark," a place very close to that in which Quinn finds himself. Particularly during his stay in the alley opposite from the Stillmans' apartment, Quinn goes through the same type of physical and mental reduction as Hamsun's hunger artist:

> For Quinn learned that eating did not necessarily solve the problem of food. A meal was no more than a fragile defense against the inevitability of the next meal. Food itself could never answer the question of food; it only delayed the moment when the question would have to be asked in earnest. The greatest danger, therefore, was in eating too much. ... His ambition was to eat as little as possible, and in this way to stave off his hunger. In the best of all worlds, he might have been able to approach absolute zero, but he did not want to be overly ambitious in his present circumstances. Rather, he kept the total fast in his mind as an ideal, a state of perfection he could aspire to but never achieve. (COG, 175)

Quinn can be seen as the postmodern incarnation of the modern hunger artist, claiming as his goal the complete annihilation of self and of desire. He must fail since it is his failure to reach his ideal, the end of hunger, which leaves him desiring it. Quinn's disintegration and his fast approach to zero, the end to his narrative, demonstrates the paradoxical nature of desire, as it simultaneously demands an ending and the infinite deferral of ending. As food only delays the question of food, Quinn's desperate search for that fixed point of meaning instead infinitely defers the question of meaning and resolution. This state of constant open-endedness to the question of food is similar to the one in which Quinn has been placed in relation to the end of the story – in this respect, too, he is denied the satisfaction of his desire.

The paradoxical nature of desire and this state of constant deferral is crucial to Auster's fiction, as it leaves open the possibility of ending, thus leaving open every possibility. Quinn's dilemma is the same as the one that Auster points to in Hunger: "The idea of ending is resisted in the interests of maintaining the constant possibility of the end" (Art, 9). City of Glass demonstrates a resistance to ending that runs parallel to a resistance to language, to naming. Hamsun's artist "peers into the darkness hunger has created for him, and what he finds is a void of language" (Art, 10), just as Quinn experiences coming closer to the end of language by the end of his notebook, when he has retreated to Peter Stillman's empty and languageless room. And yet, while he is coming closer to the end of language there is only language, the language created by the desire to come to the end of language: "The last sentence of the red notebook reads: "What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?" " (COG, 200).

This notion of language as conveying the search for the end to language is similarly prevalent in Beckett's trilogy, which can be seen as one long search for the end of discourse, one long monologue that tries to reach silence. Language communicates the desire for the absence of language as Quinn continues to write in the notebook about what will happen when he has reached the end, by each word deferring the end and leaving open the possibility of ending. For Quinn, Blue and Fanshawe, writing represents the desire for the end to writing. This can also be said about the pursuit of Hunger's artist, as Auster notes:

> He is weak, he has lost control over his thoughts, and yet he continues to strive for lucidity in his writing. But hunger affects his prose in the same way it affects his life. Although he is willing to sacrifice everything for his art, even to submit to the worst forms of debasement and misery, all he has really done is make it impossible for himself to write…But it would be wrong to dismiss the hero of *Hunger* as a fool or a madman. In spite of the evidence, he knows what he is doing. He does not want to succeed. He wants to fail. (Art, 13) [35]

The artist recognizes that success is not an option and strives only to fail. What appeals to Auster about this literature is that it is "an art that is the direct expression of the effort to express itself" (Art, 13). He calls it an "art of hunger," since what it does is to communicate the hunger or desire for expression. It is thus this laying bare of the artist's urge to express himself combined with the inherent impossibility to do so that similarly becomes central to Auster's own writing. In his semi-biographical work, The Invention of Solitude (1982), a form of memoir of his father who has just passed away, he writes about this fleeing object of his writing:

> One could not believe there was such a man – who lacked feeling, who wanted so little of others. And if there was not such a man, that means there was another man, a man hidden inside the man who was not there, and the trick of it, then, is to find him. On the condition that he is there to be found.
>
> To recognize, right from the start, that the essence of this project is failure. (Solitude, 20)

Auster realizes that the pursuit of his father is doomed from the beginning, but just as the narrator of The Locked Room finds himself unable to let go of his search for Fanshawe,

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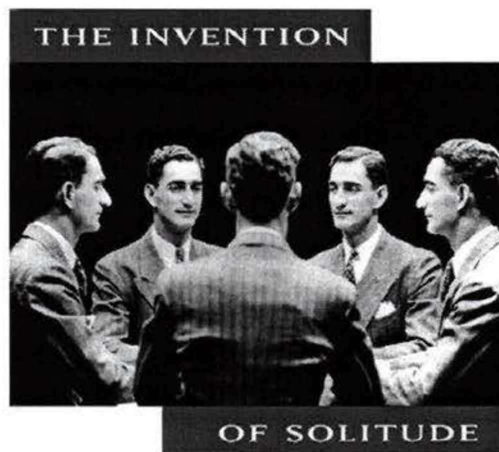
[35] Auster's description of the artist's ordeal is very similar to Borges' abovementioned comment on his hero's self-destruction in Death and the Compass, "Lønnrot is not an unbelievable fool walking into his own death trap, but in a symbolic way a man committing suicide." (Irwin, 35) The hero is setting himself up for failure, authorizing his own annihilation. The modern artist of Hamsun and Kafka is thus on a quest similar to that of Quinn, Blue and Fanshawe, that of self-discovery, but his pursuit is distinct from Auster's anti-detectives in the fact that he is still the author of his own story. The artist is still in command of his fiction, placed at the centre of this destructive, mythical and symbolical universe he has created. In Auster's trilogy, the writer-detective is granted no such centre or unifying systems, and he never achieves the sought-after author's position outside the narrative, but is inextricably caught in an impenetrable web of narratives and authors over which he has no control. Whereas Hamsun's modernist hunger-artist, in spite of his self-destructive exploration of identity, can be seen as the transcendental signified lending meaning to this doomed quest, the anti-detective's quest is utterly meaningless.

he is forced to continue to write. The image on the cover of The Invention of Solitude illustrates the futility of the project. It features a portrait of Auster's father taken in an Atlantic city studio: the image of a man shot from different angles so that the viewer is under the impression that several men are sitting around the table staring vacantly into the space. Auster calls this image 'the portrait of an invisible man.' The image reflects the impossibility of saying anything about anyone: "He was good or he was bad, he was this or he was that. All of them are true. At times I have the feeling that I am writing about three or four different men, each one distinct, each one a contradiction of all the others" (Solitude, 31).



The cover of The Invention of Solitude

Auster's writing about his father thus begins with the realization that there is no truth to be found about the man. All that he can say about his father is true and false and seems to cancel itself out, which leaves him with nothing to say. As Quinn, he finds himself sent back to far beyond the beginning of his father's narrative because he now knows that he knows nothing and never will. All he can do is to ask questions that again will lead to only more questions.

The recognition of the impossibility of ever understanding anyone, including oneself, is echoed by the narrator of The Locked Room, when he has begun writing a biography of his old friend Fanshawe:

> We all want to be told stories, and we listen to them in the same way we did when we were young. We imagine the real story inside the words, and to do that we substitute ourselves for the person in the story, pretending that we can understand him because we understand ourselves. This is a deception. We exist for ourselves, perhaps, and at times we even have a glimmer of who we are, but in the end we can never be sure, and as our lives go on, we become more and more opaque to ourselves, more and more aware of our own incoherence. (TLR, 80)

As the narrator tries with all his power to locate his friend, to evoke him through writing, we realize that this unsurpassable barrier between him and Fanshawe, the locked door separating them when he finally confronts him, similarly separates the narrator from himself. As Auster has tried to reach the inner core of his own being through his father, his own origin, where it, in good old detective style, "all began," the narrator has tried to locate himself in the pursuit of his alter ego, Fanshawe. But, as Richard Swope says in "Supposing a Space: The Detecting Subject in Paul Auster's City of Glass": "The detective is suspended on the very threshold of locating the object of his pursuit, the locked door symbolizing the inability of the detective or subject in general to locate or know the other, a condition which ultimately comments on the ability of the subject to penetrate the self" (Space, 16). The Locked Room's title and subject matter seem a reference to the traditional detective story's "locked room" motif, introduced by Poe, which functioned as an apt metaphor for the detective's success in solving even the most impossible mystery. In the anti-detective story, on the other hand, the mystery remains a final locked room to which the detective, as the author, has no key, as the narrator makes clear by his statement "No one can cross the boundary into another - for the simple reason that no one can gain access to himself" (TLR, 80-81). The other, like the self, is a fiction, and all that the writer can say will similarly be a piece of fiction, something which is acknowledged by Auster putting himself into his fiction, as just another fictive character with as little knowledge about the story as anyone else.

The writer is thus left with nothing to say, except for the expression that there is nothing to express. Auster's trilogy on the detective's impossible quest for knowledge can thus be said to be a dramatization of Beckett's famous statement on the situation of the writer, who is faced with "the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to

express, together with the obligation to express" (Beckett 1965, 103). The trilogy echoes the words and indeed the works of Beckett, suggesting that since the writer cannot know reality, and language cannot express reality, then the only story left to tell is that of the struggle to know and to write.

The Beckettian investigation and consequent preclusion of the author's role runs as a strong and highly visible undercurrent throughout the novels, and is very telling for a trilogy that self-consciously mirrors and borrows from past texts and philosophical concepts, flaunting an all-pervasive inter-textuality. Auster incorporates Beckett's ideas into his texts, and the trilogy thus demonstrates an extreme self-awareness regarding logocentric concepts that Beckett as a writer could be said to, in Derridean terms, have "placed under erasure." Auster's trilogy is thus as much fueled by the energies (perhaps an oxymoron in a Beckettian context) and radical narratological experiments of Beckett's writing as by the detective fiction from which it structurally borrows, and it incorporates both of these worlds into its highly ironic and self-conscious anti-detective universe. Just as the trilogy does not simply repeat the structure of detective fiction, it does not just repeat Beckett's exploration of the paradoxical situation of the postmodern author, but re-works and comments on it in its own investigation of this self-contradicting creature. Doing so, Auster's trilogy employs a narrative technique that in its parodic toying with fictions, genres and narrative strategies exhibits a painful awareness of the implications of Beckett's self-cancelling author, but via its playful *bricolage* of other fictions radically differs from that of Beckett, projecting a tentative clarity in its fiction-making that is only slowly dissolved by its subject-matter. Auster thus undertakes an investigation of the fate of Beckett's postmodern *meta-author*, he who constantly refers to his own fictitiousness by parodying and perforating other fictions and discourses. One of the other literary genres that the trilogy incorporates and parodies is the chivalric romance, and another text that it is intensely pre-occupied with in its un-masking of the author is thus, naturally, Don Quixote.

2.5 Don Quixote and the Search for the Author

> [O]ne book that I keep going back to and keep thinking about is Don Quixote. That's the one for me. It seems to present every problem every novelist has ever had to face, and to do it in the most brilliant and human way imaginable. - Paul Auster (Interview with Stephen Capen).

It is no coincidence that the author in City of Glass, "Paul Auster," is caught up with an investigation of the authorship of Don Quixote, since this novel for Auster seems to represent a catalogue of most of the themes that he grapples with in the trilogy, particularly, of course, that of the notion of authorship. "Auster" has constructed a complex and elaborate theory on the "real" author of this book, regarded, by many critics, as the world's first modern novel, in which Cervantes as author is displaced inside a maze of fictional author-characters much like that of City of Glass itself.[36] The Don Quixote digression in City of Glass most clearly exposes the complete subversion of notions of teleology, origin, plot and narrative, and the novel is thus a crucial pretext to the story.

In "Detecting/Writing the Real: Paul Auster's City of Glass" Carl D. Malmgren comments on the similarities between Daniel Quinn and Don Quixote:

> The phone call intended for Paul Auster gives him the opportunity to translate his impersonation into the "real world," in so doing forging and cementing his connection with the literary hero whose initial he shares, Don Quixote. Both characters try to inhabit and make real the fictional worlds of their favourite fictional forms: "Don Quixote manages to turn himself into a medieval knight; Daniel Quinn is given the opportunity to play the detective" (Rowen 227). Since, as Raymond Chandler has argued, the detective is the contemporary analogue of the knight (Marlowe=Mallory), the parallel is reinforced. Each (fictional) character finds fiction more attractive than reality. Each takes on a role borrowed from fiction and transfers it to the real world in order to accomplish something in that world. (Malmgren. 179)[37]

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[36] As is well known, Cervantes claimed that he was no more than the editor of the translation of a text in Arabic, written by Cid Hamete Benengeli. According to "Auster," "Benengeli" was the alias for the collaboration of four characters in Don Quixote, who worked together to cure Don Quixote of his madness by recording his delusions in the hope that he would then recover from them. "Auster" further speculates that Don Quixote might have orchestrated the whole thing – the madness, and his friends' consequential recording – to have his name and actions recorded for posterity.

[37] The analogy between the knight's quest and the detective narrative is very interesting in an anti-detective context, since this subversion of the genre perhaps most obviously highlights the similarities between the two. When discussing Molloy's reiteration and "exhaustion" of literary conventions in "Molloy and the

Don Quixote read the world as a romance of chivalry and Quinn reads it as detective story, both "safe" literary universes. Both worlds are firmly anchored in an ideal order, in which clues help you along and windmills are knights to be fought. However, the universe upon which they try to force this pattern is prosaic and relative. Many of the characters of City of Glass, and throughout the trilogy, can thus be seen as incarnations of Don Quixote, struggling to maintain and read reality according to their own ideal preconceptions. Their pilgrim journeys to secure a readable pattern are Quixotic crusades that transgress the boundaries of reality. All the detectives of the trilogy are attracted to the logocentric, literary project that Stillman's experiment represents: the presence that his attempt to reunite the runaway signifiers with the lonely signified would guarantee, appeals to their desperate longings for authority and paternity. Stillman Sr., who is also the missing father whom Quinn is ultimately incapable of capturing, is the embodiment of the paternal guarantor, or Author, who promises to reunite the detectives with their own origins, thereby projecting a coherent and meaningful universe. Alison Russell comments on the search for the author:

> Quinn's pursuit of the Father is a search for authority and "author-ity." In looking for the creator of logos, he is looking for his own creator as well, but his investigation is subverted by Auster's authorial duplicity. In many ways, City of Glass is a reworking of Don Quixote, a book that also denies its own authority while claiming to be a true story. (Russell, 74)

The search for the father seems to govern every pursuit in the trilogy, as it did in Auster's futile search for his own father in The Invention of Solitude. But the authorial father who gives meaning to all these pursuits has been completely stripped of his omniscient authorial connotations in the portrait of Stillman Sr. and every other author-character in the book. Auster's placement of "himself" as a fictive author in an

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Reiterated Novel," S.E. Gontarski thus points to both the literature of quest or journey, from the medieval romance and the picaresque novel, but also the detective story, though "not the tale of ratiocination developed in the nineteenth century by Edgar Allen Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, and G.K. Chesterton, but the archetypal detective story of self discovery, of the man who discovered the cause of the plague on the city of Thebes" (Gontarski, 57-65). The detective story of *failed* self-discovery could be another term for the anti-detective story.

impenetrable web of other author-characters further destabilizes any notion of authority. The author's dilemma is embodied in this character about whom we can never be sure whether he is only a marginal character in the plot, or rather its master plotter.[38] In Quinn's and "Auster's" discussion of Don Quixote, the trilogy's exposition of the instability of the relationship between author, narrator and narrative, rises to the surface of the fiction:

> Since the book is supposed to be real, it follows that the story has to be written by an eyewitness to the events that take place in it. But Cid Hamete, the acknowledged author, never makes an appearance. Not once does he claim to be present at what happens. So, my question is this: who is Cid Hamete Benegeli? (COG, 152)

Through "Auster's" attempt at charting the *real* author of Don Quixote, a chaotic network of stories, translations, and representations that accentuates the heterogeneity of the text effectively dispossesses the location of authority. Just as Auster has trouble locating the author in this maze of author characters, the reader of City of Glass is at a loss when it comes to locating the narrator of the story. At the end of the novel we are forced to acknowledge that the story we have just been reading has been construed by another writer-detective, who himself is implicated in the story. From the scraps and notes in the red notebook, he has reconstructed the turn of events, like a true detective deciphering clues and leads, and claims complete objectivity: "I have followed the red notebook as closely as I could, and any inaccuracies in the story should be blamed on me. There were moments when the text was difficult to decipher, but I have done my best

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[38] Seeing "Paul Auster" as the author of the whole plot is a plausible solution, Sorapure argues, thus "neatly tying up the loose ends throughout the novel by suggesting that they are there because they are supposed to be there, as part of an elaborate parody of the detective novel in which, despite the narrator's best intentions and efforts, there is no crime, no solution, and, by the end, no hero. 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" (Sorapure, 84-85). The postmodern withdrawal of the author is combined with a new sense of metamastery that renders the author even more powerful because of the heightened sense of construction, the elaborateness and complexity of the plot. This ambiguity of the author position is a prevalent theme in both Auster's and Beckett's trilogy, as well as in postmodern literature in general, and it is a dilemma that I will discuss further. As Sorapure simultaneously points out, though, this powerful author position, as the master plotter, and the narrative as the master plot in City of Glass, is constantly undercut by the impotent detective-writers getting lost in the wilderness, the indecipherable clues, the lack of any original text or author that all result in a parodic disintegration of the author.

with it and have refrained from any interpretation" (COG, 202).[39] The realization that the entire plot of the novel has been construed by another desperate detective invalidates the notion of any real author-position. The narrator undermines his own authority and the reader becomes suspicious of the stories and their authors.

The author is a suspect character in the plot, from Quinn trying to write himself into a detective story, "Paul Auster" denying any involvement with the plot, Stillman Sr. absurdly believing in the power of language to the vanished writer Fanshawe of The Locked Room. None of them manage to attain that sought after omniscient author position, and instead they force the reader to reflect upon her/his own part in the narrative. Each detective has tried to read reality as a text that will reveal its secret if only closely read, and each do they fail, as does that reader of the trilogy who attempts to read it as a traditional detective story.

There is a theme of a violent struggle for authorial control running as an undercurrent to each of the novels, which further displaces any notion of authority. The notion of doubling is very central to Auster's fiction: names, faces and initials are doubled in a maze of indistinguishable identities. Daniel Quinn shares initials with Don Quixote and first name with "Auster's" son and recognizes himself in the character of "Auster;" Blue and Black resemble each other so much in appearance and behavior that they seem to become indistinguishable, which also happens in The Locked Room, in which it is difficult to separate the narrator from his alter ego, Fanshawe. The relationships between these 'doubles,' however, are often as antagonistic as they are symbiotic: The two Stillmans cannot coexist, and neither can Blue and Black, who finally ends up killing one another. In the final novel, the authorial struggle becomes apparent in the 'duel' between the narrator, trying to become the author of his own narrative, and Fanshawe who in reality controls him. Fanshawe continually threatens to kill the narrator, who similarly fantasizes about killing him, an urge that he finally takes out on an innocent man whom he believes to be Fanshawe (a man incidentally named Peter Stillman, another example of the trilogy's endless blurring of identities). The struggle between the narrator

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[39] The Quixotic theme of the "recovered manuscript" has been employed by a number of postmodern writers, among them Eco and Borges. Auster's idea of the reconstruction of the notebook was probably also inspired by Borges' "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote."

and Fanshawe can be compared to that between Dupin and Minister D- in "The Purloined Letter" in which the struggle was similarly for acquisition of "the story." In his effort to become the author, says Stephen Bernstein, "the narrator is taking authorial control, ensuring Fanshawe's non-existence by authoring his death in the authorized biography" (Bernstein, 97). But neither can these doubles exist without their alter egos, whose being is a guarantee of their own existence, and when they kill the other, they simultaneously "erase" themselves. Tani describes this internal battle facing the anti-detective:

> Reality is so tentacular and full of clues that the detective risks his sanity as he tries to find a solution. In a very Poesque way, the confrontation is no longer between a detective and a murderer, but between the detective and reality, or between the detective's mind and his sense of identity, which is falling apart, between the detective and the "murderer" in his own self. (Tani, 76)

Fanshawe and the Minister D- can both be seen as the impenetrable 'Other,' or the 'murderer' in the detective's own self, impossible to capture in reality or on paper. The narrator of The Locked Room has to face the fact that he cannot write the biography that would have rendered Fanshawe's, or rather his own, life *transmissible*, because it is not. It is as untraceable, incomprehensible, and intransmissible as he is himself. His story is impossible to tell, the author of it impossible to trace.

2.6 Ghosts

> He looks out across the street and sees Black sitting at his desk as usual. Black, too, is looking through the window at that moment, and it suddenly occurs to Blue that he can no longer depend on the old procedures. Clues, legwork, investigative routine – none of this is going to matter anymore. But then, when he tries to imagine what will replace these things, he gets nowhere. (Ghosts, 175)

The trilogy's middle novel, Ghosts, can in many ways be seen as a parable on the three stories, revealing the structural elements of them all. It originates in an earlier one-act play by Auster, Blackouts (1976), and the story is the most abstract and metafictional of the trilogy, functioning as its thematic kernel. Ghosts' thinned-out form works as a self-

reflexive comment on the central formal and thematic principle of the trilogy: the detective quest. Here the detective story is divested of most of its realistic and novelistic features, and its abstractness in a sense lays bare the structural elements of the detective quest. Only the quintessence of the quest remains: the hermeneutical struggle to understand. In that sense it is the story that best leads us to the self-reflexive metafiction of Beckett, and it moreover highlights the theme that I will focus on in the following chapter on Beckett's trilogy: the dismantling of the subject-object relation. Furthermore, Ghosts underlines Auster's preoccupation with Existentialist thought that runs as a philosophical undercurrent to the entire trilogy.[40] Hence, the framework of the detective story of Blue watching Black, who is watching Blue, is in many ways much more redolent of Jean-Paul Sartre than of Conan Doyle:

> The picture is far more complicated than Blue ever imagined. For almost a year now, he has thought of himself as essentially free. For better or worse he has been doing his job, looking straight ahead of him and studying Black, waiting for a possible opening, trying to stick with it, but through it all he has not given a single thought to what might be going on behind him. Now (...) Blue no longer knows what to think. It seems perfectly plausible to him that he is also being watched, observed by another in the same way that he has been observing Black. If that is the case, then he has never been free. (Ghosts, 200)

Blue's assignment is to watch another man, which is what he does for the entirety of the story, and the plot is thus, in the extreme, centered around the gaze of the detective, highlighting the detective's primary activity of looking. At the outset of the case, Blue, the only "true" detective in the trilogy, considers himself a master of the situation, a "free

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[40] Prior to the writing of the trilogy, Auster was involved with the work of Existentialist thinkers via his work as a translator and a critic, which is evident from the collection of essays, The Art of Hunger, and his various translations of works by and on Jean-Paul Sartre. The different detective quests that Auster sends his protagonists on can all be seen to have Existentialist connotations, being Sisyphean quests for meaning when Man faces an absurd universe. As I touch on later in this section, however, the affinity with Existentialism that the trilogy demonstrates, which becomes highly visible in Ghosts, can be somewhat deceptive, implying an opposition between Man and universe that the trilogy rather dissolves. As Shiloh furthermore points out: "Existentialism offers man a ray of hope, which the protagonists of the Trilogy are denied. Camus envisions man as saved by his consciousness of the absurd; for Sartre, man has choice and is essentially free, free to mold his life and to mold his own self, through action (...) But the protagonists of the Trilogy inhabit a universe without hope. They may occasionally delude themselves, act as if engaged in a meaningful, teleological quest, but they invariably come up against a wall" (Shiloh, 66).

man," seeing the world as a case to be solved. His job is to observe Black across the street and to objectively record empirical facts in his notebook, such as "Feb. 3, 3 P.M. Black writing at his desk" (Ghosts, 164). As a "private eye," Blue is the embodiment of the character that Quinn longed to become, "the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him" (COG, 15-16). But like the other detective quests in the trilogy, the apparent straightforwardness of the case and Blue's own part in it is gradually problematized, and the initially distinct opposition between observer and observed, subject and object, dissolves. Black does nothing but sit at his desk and write, and Blue does not know what to put in his notebook. He begins to worry about things that seemed irrelevant to him before, and instead of watching Black, it seems that he is watching himself:

> Now, suddenly, with the world as if it were removed from him, with nothing much to see but a vague shadow by the name of Black, he finds himself thinking about things that have never occurred to him before, and this, too, has begun to trouble him. If thinking is perhaps too strong a word at this point, a slightly more modest term – speculation, for example – would not be far from the mark. To speculate, from the Latin speculatus, meaning to spy out, to observe, and linked to the word speculum, meaning mirror or looking glass. For in spying out at Black across the street, it is as though Blue were looking into a mirror, and instead of merely watching another, he finds that he is also watching himself. (Ghosts, 171-2)

Blue is no longer just a detective observing a criminal but is in reality observing himself, and falls into the timeless limbo, the "kind of blankness, a hole in the texture of things" (Ghosts, 173) that is his own "Blackness." The subject's privileged and autonomous position starts to crumble when Blue realizes that the Other whom he has been observing is in fact himself, and that the windows through which he has daily been keeping an eye on his object are not transparent but reflective. He finds it hard to keep to his usual routine of recording outward facts, because he begins to doubt his access to reality and begins to doubt even the words with which he used to record it. Until this point, words have been "transparent for him, great windows that stand between him and the world, and until now they have never impeded his view, have never even seemed to be there" (Ghosts, 174).

In Ghosts, the self-collapse of the subject becomes obvious with the realization that the detective is not only the one who watches, but is also being watched. The gaze was what constituted the status of the detective, separating him from the outward world that he was observing, but his gaze has been turned against himself, depriving him of this examining yet itself unexamined position. The detached position that Blue as a detective and a free man has been accustomed to, is no longer possible and he can no longer recede from the scene and dominate it from a safe distance:

> One afternoon, as if by chance, Blue comes closer to the window than he has in many days, happens to pause in front of it, and then as if for old times sake, parts the curtains and looks outside. The first thing he sees is Black – not inside his room, but sitting on the stoop of his building across the street, looking up at Blue's window. (Ghosts, 226)

Blue himself is thoroughly implicated in the mystery and must actively participate, with everything, even his identity, at stake. Thus, towards the end of the story, Blue manages to enter Black's room, wanting to read the "secret" book that he imagines Black has been working on all along, but finding only his own weekly reports: "There they are, one after the other, the weekly accounts, all spelled out in black and white, meaning nothing, saying nothing, as far from the truth of the case as silence would have been" (Ghosts, 224). All that Blue faces, when finally entering the sanctuary of Black, is his own desperate attempt at recording reality. Confronted with the meaningless reports on Black's desk, he realizes that Black may have been invented by himself as a character in a book, and this means that Blue has to face his own possible fictitiousness. If the characters of a fictional world can be readers or spectators, Borges suggests in "Partial Magic in the Quixote," then we, as readers or spectators, can also be fictitious (Borges, 196). Blue and Black are thus both "ghosts;" opaque, mirror-like figures only reflecting the ghostly existence of the other, both watching the ghost of the other so that this "object" will confirm his own existence.

But these two "dueling" gazes that both seek to dominate and constitute themselves as the centre of perspective, instead cancel each other out, nullifying the gaze of the detective. "My original fall," Sartre writes in Being and Nothingness (1966), "is the existence of the Other" (Sartre, 301-40). Sartre argues that the Other's look acknowledges

and thus constitutes identity, which is what Black acknowledges when he tells Blue about the man that he is shadowing: "He needs me (…) He needs my eyes looking at him. He needs me to prove he's alive" (Ghosts, 216). But the role of the Other is ambiguous for both Sartre and Auster: just as the Other's perception grants the subject a sense of identity, argues Sartre, it simultaneously destabilizes this identity. The existence of the Other robs the subject of his position as the privileged, sole centre of reference, as the intrusion of the Other's gaze into the field of vision undermines his view of the world, demanding a shift of perspective. As Sartre puts it: "The appearance of the Other in the world corresponds therefore to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralization which it is simultaneously effecting" (Sartre, 343). In Auster's trilogy, this Other that constantly confirms and destabilizes any sense of identity, is the detective himself; a fictitious character in a book that never unfolds. The detective's eye was supposed to render the walls of the city transparent, to hover over the roofs and look through the bosoms of men, but now even the windows have become opaque, and instead of staring out at the world, the detective is forced to examine himself, seeing only "a hole in the texture of things."

The city of glass that Quinn thought he would encounter with his meaning-constructing detective story in hand, turns out to be not made of glass, but of impenetrable mirrors. The relationship between Ghosts' two protagonists, Blue and Black, who mirror one another as the text mirrors and echoes itself, underlines the infinite process of self-reflexivity that permeates the trilogy. Auster's anti-detective novels mock the attempts of any narrative to mirror reality, questioning, to borrow from Linda Hutcheon, the "supposed transparency of every representation" (Politics, 7).

3. BECKETT'S NON-SELF AND POSTMODERN PARODY

> Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not raining. It was not midnight. (Molloy, 176)

In The New York Trilogy, we witnessed Quinn's, Blue's and the other of the trilogy's anti-detectives' impossible quest for a coherent detective story that would provide them with a unified and stable identity. Beckett's trilogy foregrounds this self-creative aspect of writing: in these three novels it becomes clear that narrative creation always and ultimately is self-creation. Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable all thematize the narrator's attempted pursuit of himself through his narrative. Beckett critic Hugh Kenner comments on the trilogy's reformulation of the narrator's/author's role:

> It is a device he employs in all his subsequent fiction, bringing the ambient world into existence only so far as the man holding the pencil can remember it or understand it, so that no omniscient craftsman is holding anything back, and simultaneously bringing into existence the man with the pencil, who is struggling to create himself, so to speak, by recalling his own past or delineating his own present. (Kenner, 94)

In his trilogy, Beckett portrays the struggle of the writer in a more radical manner than perhaps any other writer. The trilogy consists of four "monologues," all narrated by ill-defined men, confined to a room or, in the case of the "Unnamable", a senseless world of placelessness, and the texts constitute the narrators' hopeless struggle to hold together their scattered identities in order to tell coherent stories, and vice versa. All they come up with, however, is the ceaselessly supplementing fabrication of words and fictions, one supplemented by another, rendering the texts themselves undecidable, bordering on intransmissible, as they constantly cast doubt on their own narratological strategies. The novels can be said to attempt a complete breakdown of the epistemological structures that enable a subject to constitute itself, the narrator having trouble even "grounding" himself in discourse, rendering it ultimately impossible to answer the crucial identifying questions "Where now? Who now? When now?" (Unnamable, 291). Beckett's re-working of the detective formula thus differs radically from that of Auster, which helps to shed light on one of the themes that lies at the core of postmodern anti-detection: the subversion of

narrative. Whereas Auster creates tension between the clarity inherent in the form of his narratives and the chaos of the subject matter, using, as Shiloh puts it, "a structured narrative pattern, which is invariably deconstructed" (Shiloh, 9), Beckett integrates form and subject matter: the complete disintegration of man's position in the world is shatteringly reflected in the dissolution of narration.

The New York Trilogy foregrounded many of the elements that I consider quintessentially anti-detectivist: primarily an undermining of the teleological pursuit by its non-solution structure, but also a dissolution of the subject- and author position, using intertextuality, gradually disintegrating detective characters and a blurring of names and identities. Similar to the stories of The New York Trilogy, the first novel in Beckett's trilogy, Molloy, takes the shape of a teleological quest, with, in the words of Lawrence Miller, Molloy as its "ghostly telos" (Miller, 84). It is a search as doomed as the ones we witnessed in Auster, and Beckett's trilogy contains many of the same elements that similarly effectuate a subversion of the detective formula. But it is its narratological experiments that perhaps more than anything else attempt to dissolve the series of binaries embedded in classical detective fiction: detective/mystery, mind/world, subject/object, constituting perhaps the most radical critique of the epistemology that structures the detective's quest. Particularly the first novel in the trilogy, Molloy, subverts the logic of pursuit that is simply taken for granted in the classical detective story: the presupposition that there is a basic epistemological opposition of subject and object. As Molloy is pursued by Moran it gradually becomes clear that any ontological separation between subject (Moran) and object (Molloy) cannot be maintained. Indeed, one of the themes of the novel is, as Jonathan Boulter puts it in his Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett (2001), "the notion that self can never be separated from Other, that the subject always adheres to (or adheres "in") the object" (Boulter, 12). The detective, the pursuer, and the pursued become indistinguishable.

Beckett's trilogy is, as The New York Trilogy, intensely preoccupied with epistemology, hermeneutics, and subjectivity, themes that are essential to postmodern literature, and Beckett's fiction is often said to constitute the inauguration of literary

postmodernism.[41] In the words of Brian Finney, it is characterized by "describing its own process of coming into being (…) Its subject is itself, the narrating voice creating a world out of language" (Finney, 842). Beckett's trilogy is, similar to Auster's fiction, inherently self-reflexive, representing its own processes of composition. Self-reflexivity can be said to be one of the main characteristics of postmodern fiction, which is one of the reasons why Beckett's extremely self-reflexive metafiction, constantly reflecting upon every aspect of its own ontological value, is often considered quintessentially postmodern. Linda Hutcheon's discussion of postmodern fiction points to the themes on which I will focus in Beckett's texts: "The self-reflexivity of postmodern fiction does indeed foreground many of the usually unacknowledged and naturalized implications of narrative representation" (Politics, 33). According to Hutcheon, self-reflexive postmodern fiction questions the transparency of every representation, and my argument is that one of the primary methods that it employs in questioning representation and narratology is anti-detection. As shown, anti-detection is above all self-reflexive. Its strategy is to point to its own fictitiousness, thus implying the fictitiousness of every narrative. As the detective story has proven to be one of the genres most reliant on narrative and its epistemology, it has thus proven the genre most efficient in calling these to our attention by "foregrounding the doxa, the unacknowledged politics, behind the dominant representations of the self – and the other – in (…) narratives" (Politics, 37), as Hutcheon puts it when discussing the self-reflexivity of postmodern fiction.

Beckett's novels, in their constant undermining of their own narration, expose the reader as a detective, whose reading mirrors that of detective Moran's inexorable and hapless reading of Molloy.[42] The detective's crucial epistemological questions of location, subjectivity and temporality, "where, who, when?" become the reader's own in a manner that suggests the urgency and the ultimate impossibility of response. The novels

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[41] Whether Beckett's works belong to a modern or a postmodern tradition is a topic of much discussion, the scope of which is too vast for this thesis. It should be clear, however, that since I argue that Molloy demonstrates a *parody* of the detective genre, a practice that I consider distinctly postmodern, I consider the trilogy a piece of postmodern writing.

[42] Incidentally, the name Moran actually appears in a detective context, namely in the Sherlock Holmes story "The Boscombe Valley Mystery" (1891), in which Holmes says, "I think that I will go in and have a word with Moran, and perhaps write a little note." (Doyle, 85) Moran is the lodge-keeper at the Boscombe Valley Estate and plays no major role in the story.

thus demonstrate Tani's definition of the task of anti-detection, using "the detective conventions with the precise intentions of expressing the disorder and the existential void they find central to our time in a genre designed to epitomize the contrary" (Tani, 34). Beckett's fiction has had a tremendous influence on many of the authors that we call postmodern, but his novels, unlike those of Auster, have typically not been related to anti-detection. Reading his trilogy after having read Auster, however, reveals new aspects of these novels. Hence, the following does not propose to do justice to the complexities of Beckett's texts, but merely attempts (as yet another doomed detective) to *trace* a thread of anti-detection in the trilogy. William Spanos, one of very few critics who has related Beckett to anti-detective fiction, cites Beckett's Molloy as a prime example of this strand of writing, "especially the Moran section" (Spanos, 154). Since I agree with Spanos that Molloy is the novel in which Beckett's parody of the detective genre is most dominant, I am going to focus on the first novel in the trilogy.

3.1 Molloy, Narrating the Self

> For what really happened was quite different. (Molloy, 88)

Molloy consists of two quests, divided as it is into two narratives: that of Molloy for his mother, and that of Moran for Molloy. Molloy's narrative is a confused account of his journey to Mother Molloy, whom he never locates and who is seemingly, at the time of Molloy's writing, replaced by him in her room. He recounts how he sets out on his bicycle, is then approached by a policeman questioning his identity, hits a dog, whose owner, a woman named Lousse, takes him in for a while as a sort of replacement for her old dog. He then breaks off from Lousse, travels through the woods where he comes across and kills a charcoal burner, and is all the while gradually deteriorating physically and mentally into such a state that he has no idea where he is and is increasingly unable to go on:

> Yet a little while, at the rate things are going, and I won't be able to move, but will have to stay, where I happen to be, unless some kind person comes and carries me. For my marches got shorter and shorter and my halts in consequence more and more frequent and I may add

> prolonged (…) Flat on my belly, using my crutches like grapnels, I plunged them ahead of me into the overgrowth, and when I felt they had a hold, I pulled myself forward, with an effort of the wrists. For my wrists were still quite strong, fortunately, in spite of my decrepitude, though all swollen and racked by a kind of chronic arthrisis probably. (Molloy, 88-89)

Molloy's narrative ends with him falling into a ditch just out of the woods. Here he is indeed saved and is supposedly taken to his mother's room where he is writing the tale we have just been reading. His epistemological crisis is the crisis of narrative or discourse; he is unable to "locate" himself even in his own utterances. He seems to be a writer, judging from his opening paragraph:

> I am in my mother's room. It is I who live there now. I don't know how I got there (…) There's this man who comes every week. Perhaps I got there thanks to him (…) He gives me money and takes away the pages. So many pages, so much money. Yes, I work now, a little like I used to, except that I don't know how to work any more. (Molloy, 7)

Molloy's state reminds us of Quinn's at the beginning of his narrative, a writer who does not know how to work anymore. He attempts a narration of his own life story, simultaneously inventing it, as Quinn was doing with his detective story, but Molloy has a hard time even beginning his narrative. He has difficulties identifying himself, and is being disturbed by "the man's" criticism that "I'd begun all wrong, that I should have begun differently" (Molloy, 7). Molloy, although attempting to, never manages to start a reliable narrative as he is constantly confused by his own narration, uncertain about even the most basic facts and incidents and is forced to infinitely start over: "Here's my beginning. Because they're keeping it apparently. I took a lot of trouble with it. Here it is. It gave me a lot of trouble. It was the beginning, do you understand? Whereas now it's nearly the end (…) Here's my beginning. It must mean something…" (Molloy, 8). When he struggles to focus on his own story, trying to recount what happened to him on his journey, he is often unable to remember his reasons for setting out ("My reasons? I had forgotten them. But I knew them, I must have known them, I had only to find them again..." (Molloy, 27), even his own name ("my surname escaped me for the moment,"

Molloy, 22), or that of his mother, and tends to confuse his mother with other women or even himself with her.

In The Implied Reader (1974), Wolfgang Iser comments on the impact of Molloy's self-contradictory rhetoric on the reader: "The text forces [the reader] to find his own way around, provoking questions to which he must supply his own answers" (Iser, 175). Such unreliability dominates Molloy's narration, but comes to the fore when he reflexively comments on his own narrative, admitting its inherent fallacies and misrepresentations:

> And when I say I said, etc., all I mean is that I knew confusedly things were so, without knowing exactly what it was all about. And every time I say, I said this, or I said that, or speak of a voice saying, far inside me, Molloy, and then a fine phrase more or less clear and simple, or find myself compelled to attribute to others intelligible words, or hear my own voice uttering to others more or less articulate sounds, I am merely complying with the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace. For what really happened was quite different. (Molloy, 87-88)

Molloy's statement, "For what really happened was quite different," underscores one of anti-detective fiction's key motifs: the arbitrariness of language. Similar to what takes place in Auster's texts, Molloy's language demonstrates its own emptiness. Molloy is forced to lie every time he utters a word, but the alternative is silence and then his narrative would be over and he would be non-existing. Language is all he has, although all it does is prove its lack of transparency, not signifying anything other than its own meaninglessness. Although Molloy another place states, "If I go on calling that my life I'll end up believing it," (Molloy, 53) his fragmented and infinitely self-cancelling narration never convinces himself nor the reader. His identity and narration never become stable, spiralling down into more contradictions, paradoxes and indeterminacies. What we as readers are faced with is not a coherent self. We are instead confronted with the narrator's desire to believe in a coherent self, a desperate clinging to an entity that is known to be a construct. As both the author and a character in his own fiction, Molloy constantly undermines his *authority* and his fiction-making, leaving the reader as lost as he is.

The second part of Molloy, Moran's narration, is the most interesting section in terms of an anti-detective structure. It works to present the hermeneutical pursuit of what

cannot be thought, or what exists only as a kind of projection of the pursuing subject. Moran's narrative, as I see it, explores the limits of hermeneutical understanding. His "report" in part constitutes an unsuccesful "reading" of Molloy, the object of his quest, a task reminiscent of Blue's futile attempt at "reading" Black, and the nameless narrator's attempt at capturing the ever-elusive Fanshawe. His narrative, in comparison to the unstable Molloy's, opens on a note of self-confidence. Whereas Molloy did not remember his name until well into his narrative, Moran is able to name himself immediately: "My name is Moran, Jacques." The statement is spoken like a true detective stating the facts. Also in the spirit of a true detective, Moran is writing a report, "My report will be long. Perhaps I shall not finish it" (Molloy, 92). And indeed his report will never be finished, since it is endless. Hence, his story opens with the report that he begins writing at the end of the novel: "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows" (Molloy, 92). Like Auster's novel, this beginning creates the impression of the first phase of a detective story, and Moran, unlike Quinn, in fact seems to be a real detective, for a mysterious organization: "Peeping and prying were part of my profession" (Molloy, 94). Through the messenger Gaber, he receives an order from the absent Youdi to track down Molloy and he sets out on his journey, accompanied by his young son also named Jacques. Along the way, Moran experiences the same kind of gradual deterioration as Molloy did, a development similar to Quinn's increasing "disappearance": "physically speaking it seemed to me I was now becoming rapidly unrecognisable" (Molloy, 170). Growing weaker, he, like Molloy, needs a bicycle to carry him further, and the same form of confusion sets in that similarly results in an act of absurd violence: while waiting and wandering in the woods for his son to come back with a bicycle, Moran encounters two men resembling those observed by Molloy in the first part. He kills one of them and notices that the man vaguely resembles himself.

> There I was face to face with a dim man, dim of face and dim of body because of the dark (...) He had a narrow-brimmed dark blue felt hat on his head, with a fish-hook and an artificial fly stuck in the band, which produced a highly sporting effect. Do you hear me? he said. But all this was nothing compared to the face which I regret to say vaguely resembled my own, less the refinement of course, same little abortive moustache, same little ferrety eyes, same paraphimosis

> of the nose, and a thin red mouth that looked as if it was raw from trying to shit its tongue. (Molloy, 150-51)

Once again, the detective is caught in a maze of double identities, blurred names and faces, and there is a symbiotic relationship among all these characters, Molloy and Moran, Mother and Mellose, Moran and his son, and the characters that both Molloy and Moran encounter, who all seem to remind them of themselves or the other. All are they "dim" men, difficult to encircle and capture.

Moran's quest is doomed to fail, and he never manages to find Molloy. He turns out to be another complete failure as a detective, not even being able to remember how to go about finding him nor what to do with him once he is found, the instructions having long since "gone clean out of my head" (Molloy, 137). He returns home to write a report on his unsuccessful mission (seemingly the report that we are reading), having reached the same state of almost complete "reduction" as Molloy and Quinn: weak, wounded and barely able to walk. Again the detective has suffered a transformation that leaves him paralyzed, naked and impotent: "I cried to him that I could not move, that I was sick, that I should have to be carried, that my son had abandoned me, that I could bear no more" (Molloy, 164). All he has left at this point is a number of irresolvable questions ("3. What had become of Molloy? 4. Same question for me. 5. What would become of me? 6. Same question for my son. 7. Was his mother in heaven? 8. Same question for my mother..." Molloy, 168), and the dance of bees that he used to study and still enjoys thinking about:

> The most striking feature of the dance was its very complicated figures, traced in flight, and I had classified a great number of these, with their probable meanings ... And in spite of all the pains I have lavished on these problems, I was more than ever stupefied by the complexity of this innumerable dance, involving doubtless other determinants of which I had not the slightest idea. And I said, with rapture, Here is something I can study all my life, and never understand. (Molloy, 169-70)

The dance of the bees echoes that of the human detectives, dancing around in a complex pattern that, although shaped by rational reflections and presuppositions, is beyond comprehension, even if pursued for a lifetime. This reflection on the futility of the

attempt to understand will never put a stop to the pursuit, though, as is made clear from Moran's observation that "what I was doing I was doing neither for Molloy, who mattered nothing to me, nor for myself, of whom I despaired, but on behalf of a cause which, while having need of us to be accomplished, was in its essence anonymous, and would subsist, haunting the minds of men, when its miserable artisans should be no more" (Molloy, 115). The detective's pursuit is infinite and in effect just claims men as its hostages. Another exiled detective, Moran returns to a vacated home, an empty house and dead animals; a lacuna in the existence that he used to lead: "I turned the switch. No light. I went to the kitchen, to Martha's room. No one. There is nothing more to tell. The house was empty. The company had cut off the light" (Molloy, 175).

The last words of Moran's report have the effect of undermining his entire pursuit and narration altogether, reiterating the beginning of the narrative and exposing it all as pure fabrication: "Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not raining. It was not midnight" (Molloy, 176). The end most thoroughly subverts the detective reader's expectations of a conclusive solution to the questions posed at the beginning, as Moran's narrative winds itself down into incoherence and contradiction, repeating and cancelling out the beginning: "It was not midnight. It was not raining." The end thus effectively negates the truth value of the entire narrative and of the detective's "report." It turns out to be contained within a framework, the premise of which is deemed untenable, leaving the reader in a difficult position. But the reader's hermeneutic desire, even as it is defused in these final sentences, is still present, just as the narrative is still present and has been brought into existence by a writing self in search of something.

The narrative is thus written in an eternal present that precludes Peter Brooks' "Sovereign Judge," the detective story's Sherlock Holmes who goes back over the ground and retrospectively ties things together, "realizing the meaning of the cipher left by a life" (Brooks, 34). Moran instead ends in the present in which he started, excluding the detective story's traditional narrative idea of progression – we end where we started, in an eternal present, suggesting a kind of self-imprisoning narrative, bound always in a narrative moment that denies any notion of progression. Moran is stuck with the chaotic, incomprehensible present in which we all live, and he and Molloy have come to espouse

the same non-progressive (almost regressive) philosophy that is close in spirit to the realization that Quinn came to when he discovered that "He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew he knew nothing"(COG, 159). As Molloy recommends:

> To know nothing is nothing, not to want to know anything likewise, but to be beyond knowing anything, to know you are beyond knowing anything, that is when peace enters in, to the soul of the incurious seeker. (Molloy, 64)

Perfect knowledge is unattainable, and both Molloy and Moran are trapped in a circle that leaves them at the point zero of their pursuits. As they are both unable to reach that conclusive ending that bestows meaning on the present in which they are trapped, or to discover the origins that they're both in search of, they, and we as readers, are left with the imperfect knowledge and incoherent mystery that we, as deciphering detectives, started out with.

The novel demonstrates a complete breakdown of the boundary between the detective and the object of his pursuit. Moran tries to exert a control over the universe and over himself, but gradually begins to resemble Molloy, the object of his search. The coalescence between the two is apparent in the gradual stiffening of their bodies that forces both of them to rely on crutches and bicycles, a paralysis that indicates Moran's gradual loss of control over the world, including his own body. He is initially presented as an archetypal Western rationalist, who insists that he is "cleverer than things" (Molloy, 166), an Enlightenment figure who takes pride in a sort of Adamic dominion over the world, both people (his son and his housekeeper, treated as his belongings) and nature:

> I offered my face to that black mass of fragrant vegetation that was mine and with which I could do as I pleased and never be gainsaid. It was full of songbirds, their heads under their wings, fearing nothing for they knew me. My trees, my bushes, my flower-beds, my tiny lawns… (Molloy, 128)

But Moran's teleological cosmos of rationality and certainty gradually collapses into Molloy's confused narrative of contradictions and uncertainties. In the course of his search, he is transformed from the confident agent and authoritarian father at the start of

his narrative to an uncanny copy of "Molloy, or Mollose" (Molloy, 112), moving from a clear and definable universe into inescapable inexplicability:

> And what I saw was more like a crumbling, a frenzied collapsing of all that had always protected me from all I was always condemned to be. Or it was like a kind of clawing toward a light and countenance I could not name, that I had once known and long denied. (Molloy, 148)

Moran, who stated earlier regarding the coalescence of his son's name with his own: "This cannot lead to confusion" (Molloy, 92), exists by virtue of the distinction between him and the outer world, a distinction that can be said to be derived from that between Descartes' rational mind and that which it perceives, between the eye/I of the detective and the mystery to be solved.[43] He has achieved his sense of identity by means of this distinction, something that becomes clear when he states: "As soon as two things are nearly identical I am lost" (Molloy, 156), and the dissolution of this difference means his ultimate self-collapse.

Molloy is thus a necessary condition for the existence of Moran, as it is against the distinction between them that Moran has formed his own being, as the detective forms his identity against the mystery. When the two coalesce, he is lost. The detective's quest for identity is to be found in his quest for the Other, who is in fact the Other in himself, as Moran gradually comes to realize about Molloy: "Perhaps I had invented him, I mean found him ready made in my head. There is no doubt one sometimes meets with strangers who are not entire strangers, through their having played a part in certain cerebral reels" (Molloy, 112).

Molloy, like the New York Trilogy, here expounds an Existential relationship between the detective and his object: the detective not only objectifies, but has been objectified by

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[43] In his essay, "The Modern Auditory," Steven Connor describes how the eye/vision signifies distance and domination, and has been instrumental in promoting a sense of self in the experience of the world as something separate from the self. Connor argues that the modern self that emerges in the Renaissance, and is being laid out by Descartes, is one that is characterized by a will to know by way of seeing. The rise of the rational self was accomplished by a separation of the active, transforming self from a nature increasingly perceived as passive, constraining and unconscious. Connor's discussion of visualism as generating an epistemized self, a "self-seeing I," is highly relevant for a discussion of how the detective's gaze frames the narrative, and supplements my earlier discussion of Foucault's medical gaze (Modern, 203-23).

the Other. While the detective's identity is being constituted by the Other who he is pursuing, the existence of this Other simultaneously destabilizes his identity. The detective's privileged perspective is threatened by the Other by whom he has at the same time been granted his identity. In Molloy, the paradoxical relation between the two and their ontological interdependency are highlighted as the detective gradually becomes that which he perceives, effectively erasing the opposition between them.

As Moran searches for that Other that constitutes his identity, he gradually vanishes, as Quinn did when searching for Stillman, retreating to a place outside his narrative, where language does not give access to meaning and where the self is not a definable or locatable entity, but a polyphone, decentered and ever-elusive being outside itself:

> I have spoken of a voice telling me things. I was getting to know it better now, to understand what it wanted. It did not use the words that Moran had been taught when he was little and that he in turn had taught his little one. So that at first I did not know what it wanted. But in the end I understood this language. I understood it, I understand it, all wrong perhaps. (Molloy, 176)

The disintegration that Moran experiences corresponds to the gradual disintegration of his initial mastery of language. Unlike Molloy, Moran started his search demonstrating a trust in the perfect transparency and informativity of a language that served as a reliable vehicle in his solving of mysteries. He did not exhibit Molloy's difficulty in naming things, himself or his surroundings. Whereas Molloy spends half a page describing the unidentifiable silver object he stole from Lousse, "It consisted of two crosses, joined, at their points of intersection, by a bar, and resembled a tiny sawing-horse, with this difference, however, that the crosses of the true sawing horse are not perfect crosses, but truncated at the top …" (Molloy, 63), for lack of the proper designator, Moran initially seems to take pleasure in naming things, never cancelling out his own words but rather indulging in the naming of his plants, birds and his son, believing in its informative power. Furthermore, Moran has apparently, like City of Glass' Stillman Sr., given his son his own name, hereby conveying the "hidden" politics of naming that was similarly highlighted by Stillman Sr.'s project. By naming things, Moran manifests a control over the world and his narrative, a control that gradually deteriorates in the course of his search

until it reaches a level of "dispossession" of language and narrative ("I understood it, I understand it, all wrong perhaps") that comes close to Quinn's when he, near the end, feels that language has been completely detached from him: "He felt that his words had been severed from him, that now they were a part of the world at large, as real and specific as a stone, or a lake, or a flower" (COG, 199). Language, from being a trustworthy vehicle giving access to knowledge and reality, is revealed to be opaque, even empty, incapable of capturing reality, and completely out of control.

In the course of Moran's search, language is gradually emptied of meaning along with his gradually deteriorating control over himself and his narrative, culminating in the complete emptiness of words revealed by the final lines of the novel. In contrast, the emptiness of language dominates Molloy's rhetoric to a far larger extent, from beginning to end, and is further pushed to its limits in the rhetoric of the narrators of the following two novels, Malone Dies and The Unnamable. Molloy's difficulty in naming even what seems to be a pair of scissors, only applying more and more signifiers to trace down the absent and fleeing signified, which is only pushed further afield and wrapped deeper in mystery between "thingless names" and "nameless things," demonstrates an endless supplementarity of words, which similarly comes to the fore in his following rejection of language's capability:

> And even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate, as we have just seen I think. And so on for all the other things which made merry with my senses. Yes, even then, when already all was fading, waves and particles, there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names. I say that now, but after all what do I know about then, now when the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, foully named. All I know is what the words know (...) Saying is inventing. Wrong, very rightly, wrong. You invent nothing, you think you are inventing, you think you are escaping, and all you do is stammer out your lesson, the remnants of a pensum one day got by heart and long forgotten, life without tears, as it is wept. (Molloy, 31-32)

The author's God-like ability to create by naming is here most forcefully undermined. Both in language and on their journeys, that which lends meaning to their narration, the sought after and inherently absent signified (the thing itself, Mother Molloy and Molloy), is infinitely deferred by these characters' efforts, by foul language and

doomed pursuits.[44] When Quinn's logocentric world begins to crumble after his meeting with the language-deprived Peter Stillman, he starts to wonder "if these trees were the same trees that Peter Stillman saw when he walked out into the air and the light (...) And if a tree was not a tree, he wondered what it really was" (COG, 59). Moran, who initially starts out naming himself and constantly proclaiming all that he knows, similarly finds it gradually more difficult, in his futile pursuit of the indefinable Molloy, to trust in his own identity and in the words that he has used to narrate himself, and thus finds himself surrendering to that in himself about which he knows nothing, Molloy:

> This was how he came to me, at long intervals. Then I was nothing but uproar, bulk, rage, suffocation, effort unceasing, frenzied and vain. Just the opposite of myself, in fact. It was a change. And when I saw him disappear, his whole body a vociferation, I was almost sorry. What it was all about I had not the slightest idea. (Molloy, 114)

Moran turns out to occupy a subject position just as unsure and unstable as Molloy's. He is in hermeneutical pursuit of the Other, the unknowable, and his quest blends with the reader's desire for knowledge; his quest is ours, ours is his. As in the traditional detective story, the ontological gap between reader and text is thus bridged in a way that accentuates the hermeneutical nature of the textual experience. Jonathan Boulter, along with several other critics, argues that Beckett's trilogy is about the act of reading and interpreting, thematizing the reading process itself: "The novels, in short, are about the philosophical-hermeneutical grounds of understanding" (Boulter, 4). This theme, I argue, is foregrounded by Beckett's use of the detective quest.

The premise of both hermeneutics and epistemology is the basic opposition between subject, the pursuer, and object, the pursued, an opposition that Molloy renders impossible, suggesting an absolute collapse of the category of self and other, subject and object. The text thus decomposes its "detectivist" inheritance by negating the notions of the "subject" and "object" of the quest, as well as the entire nature of the quest itself, removing the possibility of even conceiving the logic of the opposition. Molloy thus

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[44] My discussion of this endless motion between Moran and his goal, between words and the thing they describe, signifier and signified, is, as earlier discussed, partly inspired by Derrida's notions of logocentrism, centre, deferral, and supplementarity.

demonstrates the validity of the earlier-mentioned Schopenhauer quote by undermining the premise of every epistemological pursuit, "The knower himself cannot be known precisely as such, otherwise he would be the known of another knower." To know implies an object to be known, and when the subject and object relation has been dismantled, so has the premise of "knowing."

The detective is the reader's "stand-in," but instead of remaining a solid entity, the detective here once again undergoes a subjective disintegration, hereby reflecting the instability at the core of the reader her/himself, forcing her/him, as Boulter puts it, "into a space where the subject is utterly negated, decomposing" (Boulter, 73). The ultimate object of the hermeneutical quest of Moran and the reader, Molloy, his "ghostly" telos, cannot even be posited: the very terms of the quest are confounded a priori as the end of the quest cannot be thought. The reader who wishes to read Molloy through Moran – or, more precisely, is seduced by the narrative's detective structure into believing in the possibility of reading Molloy through Moran – is placed in a difficult narratological "zone," where the reading lens, as the "magnifying glass," becomes diffused and darkened. Instead of being the reader's traditional magnifying glass, detective Moran has become the reader's own "dim" man, "dim because of the dark," and the reader identifying with the detective thus becomes her/his own "dim" man. Just as Blue watched Black through windows that at first seemed transparent but turned out to be reflective only of his own desire to read, so too Moran, along with the reader, finds himself collapsing into Molloy's "namelessness often hard to penetrate" (Molloy, 31), a namelessness that, like Blue's windows, is self-reflexive and never unfolding.
Molloy and Moran are unable to narrate their stories and their own selves, since language is as indecipherable and perpetually self-reflexive as they are themselves. Moran, as the hermeneutical subject, is thus in a fairly ineluctable state of subjective decline as his narrative proceeds (or recedes), and as the object of his quest becomes more and more ill-defined and the telos or end of the quest recedes into perpetual dimness ("What was I looking for exactly? It is hard to say" Molloy, 126), the narrator as subject – and reader – is slowly dismantled.

The narrators of Beckett's Molloy, as well as the following two novels, can thus be said to be formed in the space between two contradictory impulses: the desire for self-

abnegation and the desire to know, and the two may be the same. The impulses stem from the same desire, namely the desire for the end of desire. As Brooks notes, the nature of desire is paradoxical, which is reflected in the text's elimination of the reader: "The desire of the text is ultimately the desire for the end, for that recognition which is the moment of the death of the reader of the text" (Brooks, 108). The reader desires a meaning from the deciphering of the text, which is only reached by its end, symbolically the death of the reader and the destruction of narrative desire. The reader's narrative desire possesses Beckett's narrators whose fragile identities are constituted by the desire to know, to find meaning in their chaotic narrations, a meaning that will not emerge until they themselves keep silent (meeting their symbolic deaths), when their narratives are rendered transmissible/ narratable. This meaning-endowing moment is of course endlessly deferred by these narrators, who continue to seek and define themselves in their narrations.

In the last of the novels, The Unnamable, the nameless narrator is frustrated with his own endless outpouring of questions, and says:

> But fie these are questions again. That is typical. I know no more questions and they keep on pouring out of my mouth. I think I know what it is, it's to prevent the discourse from coming to an end, this futile discourse which is not credited to me and brings me not a syllable nearer silence. (Unnamable, 309)

Although the narrator has realized that he will not be able to come up with any answers to the innumerable questions posed by himself and the number of narrators of whom he is perhaps the culmination, he continues to ask questions, repeating one of the detective's primary activities. But, as he also says, this discourse that continues, at the same time paradoxically constitutes the search for the end of discourse: "The search for the means to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue" (Unnamable, 301-2). It is a paradoxical search that can be said to constitute each monologue of the trilogy (or the entirety of the monologue, depending on how one interprets the characters): the search for the means to put an end to the epistemological search. The result is that the narrator must speak to be silent: "It's of me now that I must speak, even if I have to do it with their language, it will be a start, a step toward the silence" (Unnamable, 324). What the narrator desires is silence, the end of his narration

and of desire, but as he sends out more and more words to capture silence and eliminate all those words that came before, the narrator's discourse ends up reinforcing the textual labyrinth and pushing silence further away. He is faced with the same insoluble paradox as Auster's detectives and that of the modern hunger artist searching for his true self through art: the search for the self goes on and infinitely defers the possibility of capturing the self.

The search for the self, as we have seen in both Beckett's and Auster's anti-detective fiction, reveals only the fictitiousness of the self, the self as it is construed by narrative. Beckett's and Auster's texts remind us of the ancient detective pursuit of Oedipus, in which the investigation of chaos in Thebes equals an investigation of Oedipus' own creation, resulting and adhering in the self-destruction of the detective. Molloy's journey can even be seen as a parody of Oedipus' quest, as Angela Moorjani points out in Abysmal Games in the Novels of Samuel Beckett (1982):

> Molloy is an anti-Oedipus, for instead of solving the riddle of the sphinx and attaining sovereignty, Molloy in a regressive movement recedes from his mother's room via the sphinx to the killing of the stranger at the crossroads to the final crawling on all fours out of the forest and into the bowels of the earth. (Moorjani, 106)

I wouldn't call Molloy an anti-Oedipus, but instead, perhaps, a self-conscious Oedipus; one who is painfully aware of his innate blindness. Detective Oedipus blinded himself virtually as a consequence of the realization of his symbolic blindness, and Beckett's anti-detective could be said to be the dramatization of this consequence. In Molloy, the failure to *see,* to grasp and to express pervades every word and every utterance. The inevitable blindness of every storyteller lies at the very core of the novel, as it, by dramatizing the impossible act of writing, illustrates how the gaze of the detective/writer traditionally shapes the narrative, and how this gaze has been turned against itself, not trusting what it perceives; contradicting, even blinding itself. Molloy projects a sense of a completely fractured gaze, a decentering of the subject similar to that which takes place in the stories of the New York Trilogy, but one that to a larger extent focuses on an all-pervading sense of indeterminacy in textual enunciation, consisting of nothing but self-annihilating words and fictions.

Molloy, Moran, Quinn and the rest of Auster's detectives, as well as the ancient detective Oedipus all look for the origins of their existences, the beginning of their narratives and the original plot that the detective used to be able to reveal or construct. Quinn searched for a solid identity, Stillman Sr. for the original language, Molloy for the womb that gave birth to him and Moran for Molloy, the beginning of himself and his narrative. All these quests are for transparent clues that will give them access to an origin, but there is an irreparable rupture between the signs and that which they seem to signify, and the detective has been deprived of his authoritative gaze that unites them and constitutes him as the author of the plot. There is no true self to narrate, but only fabrications, contradictions, self-reflexive fictions. And yet, in its parody of the detective plot, the anti-detective novel relies heavily on the epistemological structure of its story and the narrative desire of the reader, as Brooks is alluding to when he says that "we no doubt still depend on elements of plotting, however ironized or parodied, more than we realize" (Brooks xii). However parodied the detective quest is in these two trilogies, their challenging of its narrative form and attendant epistemology still employs and reinstates traditional elements from the genre that they undermine. The paradox of parody is made clear by both trilogies: the detective loses track of himself and the writer fails utterly, and yet the detective continues his search and the writer still writes.

3.2 Epistemology as Parody, or Parody as Epistemology?

> Language has become void; therefore words can only demonstrate their emptiness. Certainty in knowledge is no longer possible; therefore epistemology must become parody. Religion and metaphysics have lost their authority, therefore we shall wait for Godot in vain.
> - Ihab Hassan (Silence, 30-31)

Ihab Hassan, one of the first critics to define and write on postmodernism, argues that Beckett does not describe meaninglessness, but rather that the words he employs become meaningless. According to Hassan, Beckett is thus a practitioner of anti-literature, a literary style that develops by pulling itself apart. Language no longer conveys meaning, but becomes a game. I agree with Hassan that Beckett's literature is a sort of anti-literature, and this could be said to define the essence of anti-detection, but that which

Hassan calls game, I will proceed to call parody. Whereas 'game' usually denotes an apolitical and somewhat 'harmless' activity, 'parody' as repetition can be highly challenging and political.[45] The theoretical developments associated with postmodernism provide an indispensable context for the evaluation of anti-detection, but the full complexity of a discussion of postmodern art and politics is beyond the scope of this thesis as there are a vast number of different and often contradictory definitions and critiques. So I am going to focus on anti-detection as a form of anti-literature, 'pulling itself apart,' and Linda Hutcheon's notions of parody as the epitome of postmodern art and politics.

Hutcheon argues that one of the foremost characteristics of postmodernism is that it foregrounds the politics of representation, and it is this aspect of postmodernism that I find highly relevant in an anti-detection context. One of the primary methods of foregrounding is the use of parody, and Hutcheon has written extensively on parody as a postmodern practice, which she believes has lately become, ironically, a prevailing norm.[46] But the postmodern use of parody, in her view, differs from the traditional notion of parody as simply a method of ridicule, in that it implies a critical distance from the politics of the representational forms it parodies: "Parody, then, in its ironic "trans-contextualization" and inversion, is repetition with difference. A critical distance is implied between the backgrounded text being parodied and the new incorporated work, a distance usually signaled by irony" (Parody, 32). Parody, according to Hutcheon, uses irony to subvert and undermine dominant representations in its repetition of them, and hereby foregrounds the implied politics of these representations. Postmodern parody in effect "de-naturalizes" that which it parodies: "To adapt Barthes' general notion of the 'doxa' as public opinion or the 'Voice of Nature' and consensus, postmodernism works to

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[45] I am not arguing that Ihab Hassan is describing postmodern art as apolitical, as this would be a very wrong evaluation of his criticism that instead treats postmodernism as part of "a vast, revisionary will in the Western world, unsettling/resettling codes, canons, procedures, beliefs" (The Postmodern Turn, xvi)

[46] In The Politics of Postmodernism and A Theory of Parody, Hutcheon is discussing postmodern art in various forms: fiction, film, art and photography. Especially fiction and photography are presented as good examples of the postmodernism that she discusses, since these two forms "most self-consciously foreground precisely this awareness of the discursive and signifying nature of cultural knowledge and (...) do so by raising the question of the supposed transparency of representation" (Politics, 7). Some of the fiction writers that she mentions as exponents of this parodic type of writing are Salman Rushdie, Angela Carter, Umberto Eco and John Fowles.

'de-doxify' our cultural representations and their undeniable political import" (Politics, 3). This is not the only interpretation of postmodernism, however, as Hutcheon acknowledges when she says:

> The prevailing interpretation is that postmodernism offers a value-free, decorative, de-historicized quotation of past forms and that this is a most apt mode for a culture like our own that is oversaturated with images. Instead, I would want to argue that postmodernist parody is a value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations. (Politics, 90)

Hutcheon argues that many critics see postmodernism as largely apolitical and value-free simply because there has been a tendency to focus on the compliant aspects of postmodernism. Others criticize postmodernism (particularly its deconstructive aspects) for only subverting and deconstructing without re-constructing. In its parodies and pastiches of traditional art forms and pieces, its perpetual borrowing of prior texts and conventions, postmodernism is either regarded as harmlessly nostalgic or radically revolutionary. But in a Hutchean perspective it is both; it is a paradoxical approach that involves both complicity and critique. A repetition of a piece of art or a genre, even if it treats those with irony and subverts them, unavoidably reinstates some of the elements of the original, and thus "inscribes and subverts the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces of the twentieth-century western world" (Politics, 11). Although it speaks to a culture from inside it does not render postmodern art apolitical, but in fact even more political, as this approach is perhaps the most efficient, or even the only, way to reach that culture and make it question its self-constructing representations. Precisely its ambiguity, argues Hutcheon, renders parody an emblematic postmodern practice, as it "manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge" (Politics, 1-2). Parody could thus be said to be the clearest demonstration of what postmodernism is about, implying an ambiguity that is inherently postmodern.

This ambiguity of the practice of postmodern parody firmly connects it to what I have described as anti-detection. The most characteristic feature of anti-detection is its ambiguous relationship to the traditional detective genre, as it both challenges and

reinscribes it. Although anti-detective fiction such as Auster's and Beckett's does not read as a classic detective story at any level, it employs and thus reinstates quite a number of the detective genre's traditional elements in its undermining of these. Hence, all the six novels seem to be centered on the perspective of a male protagonist, as powerless and fragmented though as his perspective may be, who is in search of something. The subversive detective stories reassert not only the classic concept of the detective story's male detective, but also the epistemological pursuit itself. This, although challenging, complicity with dominant discourses is a very paradoxical aspect of anti-detection, and one that leaves something to be desired particularly from a feminist point of view. From a feminist perspective, anti-detection, ambiguous and deconstructing as it may be, can at one level appear remarkably traditional. Further, the novels' structure that once again are structured around the pursuit, the quest for knowledge, in fact foregrounds the hermeneutic, interpretative approach to literature and reality that they seek to undermine. Although the novels represent quests that never really seem to commence as they perpetually start over, and that end in an epistemological nowhere, that regress rather than progress, and whose structure is more cyclical than linear, they are nevertheless (de-) constructed from man's quest for knowledge, reasserting the narrative desire of the narrators as well as that of the reader. By simultaneously challenging and reaffirming the detective story's position as the ur-narrative of a rational and scientific age, the novels assert its centrality to Western imagination, citing it as a starting point for posing questions about the status of the postmodern condition.

Stefano Tani describes anti-detection as a *transgression* of the detective genre (Tani, 40), one that maintains visible connections with the detective novel, but creates something that has a basically new meaning. The texts of both Auster and Beckett, in different ways, evoke the Enlightenment epistemology that underlies the detective genre, in self- reflexive narratives that reveal the implications of the genre's epistemological presuppositions. This "mirroring" pervades the entirety of these two trilogies that are both structured around an open-ended process of echoes and duplications. The novels endlessly mirror themselves, as well as outside texts such as Poe's, Doyle's and Chandler's detective stories and the works of Hawthorne, Cervantes and Dante. Furthermore, the novels are full of doubling characters that simultaneously mirror

themselves and others throughout each trilogy, once again suggesting an infinite process of doubling. This internal mirroring teasingly exposes and mocks the novel's classic project of mirroring reality, suggesting that every text "simply" mirrors or quotes other texts. The pervasive echoing and repetitiveness of the novels, heightened by their parodic nature, furthermore challenges every narrative's claim to truth simply via its repetition of it, as Steven Connor points out in relation to Beckett's trilogy. The most fundamentally challenging feature of parody may thus simply be its repetitiveness.

In Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text (1988), Connor deconstructs the trilogy with a focus on its doublings, repetitions and mise en abymes. He argues that Beckett's work shows a strong and continuous preoccupation with repetition, and uses repetition to both confirm and undermine the original text. The effect of repetition on the text that Connor points to in relation to Beckett's texts can also be said about Auster's, except that in his texts repetition does not pervade language to the same extent. The presence of repetition (a structure that the entire narrative of Molloy can be said to be trapped in) fatally destabilizes the text's claims of representing an unambiguous truth about the world:

> Repetition in Beckett's work does not just involve the mirroring or duplication of situation, incident and character. From the beginning, repetition has been the dominating principle of his language: repetition of words, of sounds, of phrases, of syntactical and grammatical forms (…) Repetition comes to be all there is, the only novelty being the variations in the forms of sameness. (Connor, 15)

The repetitiveness of words point to their meaninglessness, the ultimate meaninglessness of language that compiles words on top of one another, shifts them around, continuously repeats itself, and thus demonstrates its non-referentiality: "But instead of saying what I should not have said, and what I shall say no more, if I can, and what I shall say perhaps, if I can, should I not rather say some other thing?" (Unnamable, 308). By using repetition, Connor argues, Beckett undermines any notion of the authentic and the unitary, and

simultaneously draws attention to the process of writing and reading.[47] The same process takes place in the repetition of a genre: the "repetition" divests that which it copies of its self-constructed meaning, revealing its emptiness, and shedding light on the meaning-constructing process. What both Auster and Beckett's novels do more than anything, is to heighten the awareness of the act of reading and writing by confronting the reader with the "plumbing" of narrative construction. The reader becomes acutely aware of the text as *read* and of themselves as readers/detectives in the process of creating meaning from their deciphering of language and narrative.

But if anti-detective fiction can be seen, as Tani suggests, as a transgression of the classic detective novel, does it not then suggest a necessary development of the genre? I have been describing anti-detection as a sort of self-conscious parody that purposefully dismantles that which it parodies by shedding light on its ideological connotations. But does self-conscious transgression not necessarily imply a higher level of enlightenment, the process the fictitiousness of which anti-detection is in fact set on exposing? Mikhail Bakhtin pronounces it a remarkable feature of the novel that it ever criticizes itself, its emphasis on intertextuality, self-reflexivity and deconstructive revision rendering it an ever-developing genre (Bakhtin, 3-40). According to Bakhtin, the novel can thus be seen as inherently a parody of other genres, and ultimately of itself as a genre. Hutcheon suggests something similar in her argument that parody could be seen as the necessary tool in the development of new literary forms. As an example, she argues that Don Quixote can be seen as a parody on the chivalric romance to which it adds "a new literary concern for everyday realism" (Parody, 35). Regarded this way, parody of a genre can be seen as a crucial stage in the development of new literary forms, a view that echoes that of Bakhtin and the Russian formalists. Out of the parody of the chivalric romance, the first modern novel emerged; a new and autonomous literary form. It is hard from this not to conclude a type of literary evolution generated by parody, but this idea of literary progress goes very much against what I have defined as an inherently postmodern project of undermining narrative's progress toward meaning and enlightenment. It is also an idea

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[47] Connor's reading of Beckett is strongly Derridean in its focus on the emptying of language by the infinite deferral and supplementarity of words and meaning.

that Hutcheon, discussing the Russian formalists' view of parody, finds herself struggling with:

> In a more general perspective, however, this view implies a concept of literary evolution as improvement that I find hard to accept. The forms of art *change*, but do they really *evolve* or get better in any way? (Parody, 36)

Nevertheless, it seems hard to deny that postmodern parody is trapped in the same paradox in which every literary genre and indeed system find themselves, however "anti-genre" and anti-systematic they may be: in its attempt to challenge the legitimacy of every narrative, anti-detective fiction has created yet another narrative. The attempt to represent a reality that is unrepresentable poses an impossible problem that is well described by Roland Barthes, when he asks:

> Is it not the characteristic of reality to be unmasterable? And is it not the characteristic of a system to *master* it? What then, confronting reality, can one do who rejects mastery? (Barthes, 172)

CONCLUSION

> For our words no longer correspond to the world. When things were whole, we felt confident that our words could express them. But little by little these things have broken apart, shattered, collapsed into chaos. And yet our words have remained the same (...) It's made a mess of everything.
> (City of Glass, 121)

The postmodern writer is a complex and self-contradictory character. The trilogies struggle with this paradoxical notion more than anything else, trying to find a way around this creature who is supposed to be the locus of meaning. His task seems as absurd as that of Stillman Sr. who invents new words, because "our words have not adapted themselves to the new reality" (COG, 121). Mad as the experiment may be, this is precisely what the postmodern writer does, even if he has stopped believing in the success of his enterprise. He, too, is constantly searching for this "new form that accommodates the mess," as Beckett expresses it, and the anti-detective novel may be seen to be an expression of this search for a narrative form that does not exclude the mess, but rather invites it in.

Inside a detective structure, the mess can be as disruptive as possible, breaking with the golden rules of the genre as well as with the reader's narrative expectations. Here the author can make his disintegration even more radical, since he is supposed to sit with all the answers. Here, his attempt at escaping to the fringes of narrative, or disappearing altogether, becomes the most subversive, since he is supposed to be at its centre, uncovering the mysteries. The "subversive" elements of anti-detection appeal to the postmodern writing subject, who does not trust his own eyes or voice, the two agents of presence that first and foremost have been instrumental in perceiving and representing reality. The anti-detective novel's shattering of these two agents thus foregrounds the notion of a reality that can neither be comprehended nor narrated.

The anti-detective novel thus presents perhaps the most precise rendering of the postmodern writer's situation, as he tries to write himself out of the book and leave only a ghostly imprint, a "hole in the texture of things" (Ghosts), where he used to be. The subversion of a narrative structure that heralds the writer as an "investigating subject" - itself free from examination - is perhaps the best way to represent a situation in which this

position has become untenable, and in which the investigating subject, as the creator and guarantor of meaning, itself is put under thorough investigation. Yet, in this construction of a literary universe that negates his existence, the writer is still present, perhaps even more so. The detective story demands a trust in the premise and framework of storytelling, a faith that we as both readers and storytellers have lost, being suspicious of any narrative that does not distance itself from its own act of narrating, and that does not present us with a type of meta-discourse that acknowledges its own shortcomings, its own lies and loopholes. The postmodern narrator, using irony and parody in the act of narration, generates a meta-narration that questions everything said; that so to speak un-utters every utterance, rendering it impossible to have faith in any narrative or narrator. This meta-narrative, involving a self-reflexive distancing from every representation, at the same time involves a meta-position of the writer that may be said to foreground his position even more. The writer, reflectively rising above his own narration, may be seen to acquire an even more masterful position in a universe that we still long to represent. The structure of anti-detection adds another layer to this postmodern self-reflexivity by foregrounding the status of the author only to undercut any notion of authority, exposing a hapless detective among countless other hapless detectives. Auster's and Beckett's narrators demonstrate an all-pervasive awareness of the author's predicament, but this very new attempt at juxtaposing these two postmodern writers reveals two different ways of realizing a task that is doomed from its outset. Both pursuits of narration are set on failure, but failure is reached differently by the two authors. Auster's decomposition of narrative is realized by pieces of fiction that ultimately dissolve themselves, Beckett's by constantly demonstrating the impossibility of even putting into words and narration that which cannot find a narrative form.

What I have been attempting to investigate is the paradoxes of a postmodern literature that investigates, although perforating the idea of investigation, and that demonstrates the fruitless implications of our passion for truth, although itself fuelled by the same passion. The anti-detective novel constitutes an attack not on the detective story, but on a rational discourse that believes that existential mysteries can be detected, unravelled and consequently excluded from our universe. The mystery is there to stay, but so is our desire to solve it. The investigation that concludes with these words has of

course been conducted by yet another detective who has been "ransacking the chaos (…) for some glimmer of cogency," trying to decipher the illegible writings of the Other, and can conclude as little.

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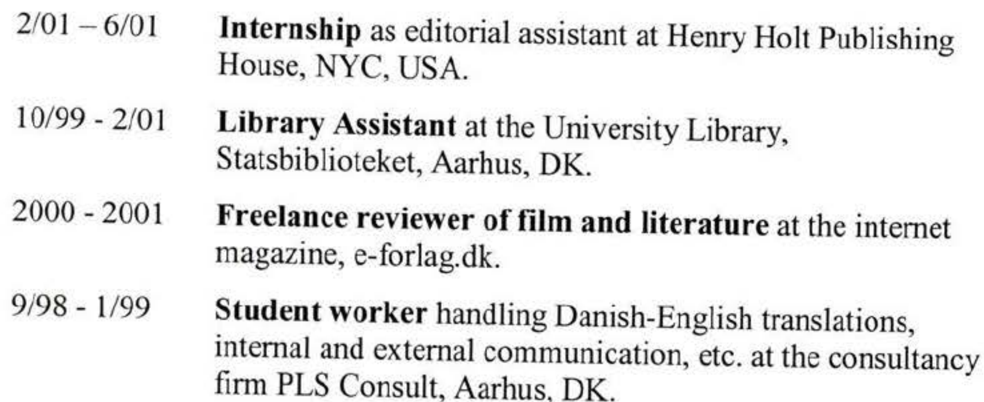

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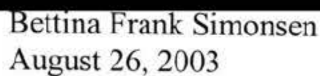

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