The Art of Storytelling in
*The New York Trilogy*

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Jennifer McNamara

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Jennifer McNamara
Kt.: 081276-2429

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Abstract

This essay explores the art of storytelling in the novel *The New York Trilogy* by Paul Auster. Emphasis is placed on the roles of fiction, language, truth and genre in writing. This essay focuses on the tasks of the author and the responsibility of creating a good or innovative novel.

The first chapter of this paper explores the process of creating fiction and the impact this has on the work and the author. The second part deals with the reliability of language with regard to storytelling, with references made to literary theorist Jacque Derrida and his interpretation on biblical literature. This leads on to the exploration on the subject of reality and the question of how to correctly express it.

Special emphasis placed on the role of genre and an exploration into the keeping of old traditions while at the same time creating new ones. Therefore exploring the limits and expectations placed on stories and how they will be accepted. This paper demonstrates how Auster has managed to write a story about the art of storytelling while both using a unique method but also following the older forms.
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Introduction

Before the advent of printing, storytelling was considered an oral art form. It involved a person retelling events from an experience. In those days a storyteller, would be considered as a wise and honorable person, someone that people looked to for guidance. The role of the storyteller was to share experiences so that people could learn something about life, gain insight or understanding about the world.

In recent times the art of storytelling has changed. Now storytelling is more often conveyed through a text. Much like storytelling, the text is a representation of experiences the difference being that it is presented through a form which is fictional. A text is considered to be fictional, as literary theorists believe that language is flawed. Therefore, it is not an accurate system through which to communicate. Therefore certain guidelines have been put in place to ensure some reliability. The concept of Genre is the universally accepted measure. Dorothy Hale states in her book “The Novel; An anthology of criticism and theory, 1900-2000”, that the storytelling is the art of repeating stories. So stories in some way relate to other stories and role of genre is to decipher how to group stories. (Hale 357) This may appear to be a simple task, but if stories are all connected then they must all be a little disconnected in order to be unique.

In postmodernist times, defining literature has become even more difficult, as it questions the very idea of structured forms or rules in general.

The New York Trilogy was written by Paul Auster and published as three separate novels in 1985 and 1987. The book has been classed under the genres; postmodern, meta-fiction, and detective fiction. The novel takes on so many ideas that it is almost impossible to characterize it. Although there are similar characteristics between this novel and other postmodern novels through such characteristics as intertextuality, undermining the link between language and reality, taking the old and reproducing it, breaking away from normal traditions it does tend to break away from this genre. New York Trilogy appears to have no real way of defining itself other than as a work of fiction with no major plot or ending. Nevertheless, the novel tends to explore the process of writing a novel and the effect this can have on a writer.
The Role of Fiction in storytelling.

In order to write fiction an author conveys a real and a fictional world. The real or factual world usually reflects the authors view on reality. The fictional world represents these same views but it does so, on many different levels. It is at this stage when the author can become creative and storytelling begins.

In New York Trilogy Auster, considers the role of fiction in storytelling. Fiction is most often thought of as nothing more than a form of entertainment. Auster, believes that although fiction is subjective it does play an important role for both reader and author. During the process of reading the reader is transported to another world. Auster shows that this is also the case for the writer. Writing is not just a case of following a pattern it is a complicated process which requires personal strength. New York Trilogy is not a typical novel in any sense, there are no apparent patterns and the book appears to represent, the process of writing fiction while at the same time posing as a piece of fiction. That is to say, the role of fiction is examined throughout the novel.

In City of Glass the main character, Quinn, is a lonely isolated man. He has lost his wife and child and his only contact with the outside world is with his publisher. Unable to piece together what is left in his life he turns to fiction as a way of coping. Quinn creates three characters for himself: Max Work, William Wilson and Auster the detective. He takes on the role of author Wiliam Wilson, a writer of detective novels and then that of the detective Max Work. Quinn believes that by writing detective novels he will gain the knowledge he needs to make sense of his life. Quinn is not really a detective so he can only imagine what it is like to be one. The only way he can do this is through the character of Max Work. Work represents Quinn’s image of a detective. Quinn uses Work as a tool to help himself feel confident and successful, as he lacks these qualities himself. Wilson, the pseudonym that Quinn uses, is also fictional. Quinn believes that he can find meaning in his life through these fictional characters, to the point that he takes on the role of Max in the real world. Much like a detective Quinn takes on the case of Peter Stillman Sr, he follows him around, takes notes and proceeds to carry on, even when it becomes clear that there is no actual case and none of the characters exist. Nothing happens and Quinn ends up on the brink of madness and ends up with no further insight into the case. However, the effort hasn’t all been in vain as
Quinn has learned something quite apart from the matter of the case. He has learned something about himself. Quinn is now able to view the world from a different perspective and notice things in a way he not been able to do before. Quinn was able to break free from his personal struggle with grief and find new ways in which to embrace the world.

“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 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.”

(Auster 131)

The most prominent role of fiction is escapism but in this novel fiction is also used as a way of connecting to the world. The character of Blue in the second novel *Ghosts* is an example of this. Blue is a linear character who lives on the surface and often fails to connect with the world as is shown when he attempts to read *Walden*. Blue is given a case in which he must observe and write what he sees. Blue is quite happy with the task as this is how he functions. Many years pass and Blue realizes that he has made no progress. He attempts to read *Walden* as he believes that this will help him understand the case. He is unable to connect with the story and thereby passes it off as uninteresting and fails to read it. Yet when he reads an article about Brooklyn Bridge his response is different. He connects with the story through his memories as it reminds him of his father. Another example is when he reads a newspaper cutting in which a boy finds the frozen body of his dead father which, being frozen, has not aged. Blue feels uncomfortable with these stories, as they all remind him of his father, who died while he was a young boy and these memories stir up hidden emotions. Quinn needed to escape pain but Blue is able to channel his emotions and pain through the stories he reads. They address his subconscious and through them he is able to feel a connection with the world. Unlike Quinn, who needs to escape his pain, Blue feels his pain or emotions through the stories he reads. Fiction becomes a refuge for hidden thoughts and emotions, without which Blue wouldn’t be able to cope in the real world.

A writer or reader can escape themselves through the process of reading and writing. The characters in *The New York Trilogy* all take on new personas. Quinn lacks confidence in himself as a writer and therefore creates for himself the persona of the
successful writer William Wilson in order to write about detective Max Work. Quinn as himself may not be able to produce such stories, but by pretending to be a writer who is, he can write these detective novels. Thus the author takes on a new identity in order to write. The mechanics of writing are built on creating new identities or characters. Auster shows how this is done. According to Morretti “People are nothing but the projection of what one knows about oneself.” So if we can only project what we know about ourselves, how does a writer create fiction? Reading or writing is a process of turnings one’s own experiences in to a work of fiction. The writer is portrayed as detective, looking for meaning in life through his works. There are many autobiographical references throughout the book which may suggest this point. Auster claims that any personal references in his novels are meaningless, yet it could be a way for him to show that writing is a personal process no matter how much the author tries to remove himself from the work. Writing becomes more than just a form of escapism; it becomes a personal journey of finding oneself or one’s place in the world. According to Shiloh there’s a belief within the detective genre that to find the culprit one needs to get inside his mind. This is what Blue tries to do in regard to Black. The experiment fails; Blue is left knowing nothing more than to begin with, other than the knowledge that one can never get inside someone else’s mind (Shiloh 67)

Yet this is the case with the characters in *The New York Trilogy*, they believe that to have a sense of what is happening we need to get inside the mind of another. The only way for a writer to do this is through the characters he creates. Through them the writer can view and experience the world from many different perspectives.

In *Ghosts* Blue takes on the case of Black in which he watches and takes notes a process which covers a couple of years. Blue believes that he knows Black so well by this stage that he can predict every move Black makes. It then appears that Blue and Black are one and the same. Black could be a reflection of Blue as Blue stated so many similarities between the two. He tries to think like him, he starts to resemble him but never really becomes that other person. When Shiloh claimed that one can never enter another’s mind, her point was that one can only ever rediscover a side of oneself. So it is with authors and their characters; the latter reflect different aspects of the former. Thus the encounter in Black’s apartment starts to make more sense. When Blue finally goes to Blacks apartment all he finds is himself. Blue demands that Black tell him the story he is writing. Black claims that Blue already knows the story. (Auster 196)
We see this again in *The Locked Room*. Here the narrator replaces the character of Fanshawe with himself by taking on the role of husband father and writer. The narrator believes himself to be happy in this new role until Fanshawe is revealed to be alive. It is at this point that the narrator panics and becomes confused. The character of Fanshawe, which the narrator created for himself had taken on a life of its own and the narrator was unable to exist a long side of it. Yet in order for him to create this character the narrator needed him to be alive. Fanshawe had now evolved from being a character to becoming the superego of the narrator. Fanshawe was part of the narrator. As is stated in the first chapter “Fanshawe was always there. He is the place where everything begins for me, and without him I would hardly know who I am.”(Auster 201) The line between reality and fiction had intertwined. Here Auster shows that an author takes on a new identity in order to create a character, thereby the character is part of the author. This new character has been brought to life by the narrator, therefore he represents the author but he also represents the authors ideals, as is the case with Fanshawe. The characters in fiction are all processed through the thoughts and views the author has of the world. So although Fanshawe is a reflection of a character he is the embodiment of the author’s view of the hero, of his reality. Fanshawe is how the narrator imagines a successful fiction writer to be. According to Shiloh

“Fanshawe is the embodiment of the American hero, solitary, self-reliant, courageous. He was the creator or author of his own self. The narrator does not wish to find Fanshawe he wants to become him.”

(Shiloh 81)

Fanshawe represents the type of writer the narrator wishes he had become. The latter is a literary critic but is disillusioned by this role and finds it meaningless. This is because he questions his authority as a literary critic, seeing as he himself was an unsuccessful writer. The narrator believes that to gain respect as a critic he too must have respect as a writer. He creates Fanshawe in order to fulfill this notion. Fanshawe is the narrator’s ego and double. As with Blue and Black, these two characters eventually seek each other out to annihilate one another. But they differ from the former pair in the sense that Fanshawe is the narrator’s primary object of identification. Such identifications according to Freud are how egos are formed. (Barry 97) “The narrator’s endeavors to become Fanshawe are thus simultaneously an attempt to measure up to his
super ego and his own ideal self.” (Shiloh 88) The narrator thus creates Fanshawe in order to gain respect and understand what it takes to be successful as a writer.

“A double is the incarnations of those negative aspects that the ego does not want to acknowledge. Super egos are ideal representations that are always socially mediated. In the case of Fanshawe his ideals are mediated by the American hero. But as the narrator discovers the Fanshawe he knew then is different to the one now. Now Fanshawe wants to loose himself by fitting in.”

(Shiloh p.91)

Although the narrator created Fanshawe he realizes that there are sides to his character that are unfamiliar, and the Fanshawe he imagined is not the Fanshawe he created. He comes to realize that he does not need Fanshawe in order to gain respect: he needs to believe in himself and judge his work on its own merits.

“The narrator is striving to achieve an integrated self to measure up to his ideal ego. But his ideal is eventually shattered and he finds himself on the brink of disintegration. It is at this low ebb in his new life that the narrator resorts to his quasi-detective quest. He seeks to confront his ideal image, to examine it, to reintegrate his self. This turns out to be the ultimate goal of the quest. Yet what happened to him is the exact opposite.”

(Shiloh 95)

While in Paris there becomes a blurring of distinctions between the self and the external environment. Consciousness realizes the narrator separates man from the sheer facticity of being: but man partakes of that facticity the self also in the world (Shiloh 96).

Like Blue the narrator discovers that his quest was pointless Fanshawe cannot be found out there in the world, because he exists in the narrators mind.

“This postmodern interpretation of autobiography splices factual events and fictional anecdotes together, in the autobiography Auster becomes another living character. Thus Auster inhabits both the factual and the fictional universe.”

(Barone 11)
In doing this the narrator has set boundaries. To become this person the narrator must know everything and must set off on a journey to discover who Fanshawe is. When the narrator becomes aware of the real Fanshawe it becomes obvious that Fanshawe is not the Fanshawe he knew he is now a different person. This new Fanshawe represents the opposite of everything the narrator had pictured. Therefore he is left lost. It is not until the narrator meets Stillman a man at a bar whom insists on calling him Fanshawe does the narrator realize that he can be a writer of fiction all he has to do is say he is. As this character is not real he is only real in the text. This shows what it means to be a writer and how much control a writer really has. Therefore *The New York Trilogy* is more than a piece of fiction it is a story about the art of self-invention. A detective text is based on facts whereas life is based on chance. Therefore each character is lost and out of touch with their identity. Yet it is the author who is the real detective as he masterminds the events and when they will happen. Auster questions authorship and the role of the author. Many of the characters in *City of Glass* are detectives or authors. Both occupations are blurred. Daniel Quinn is a detective writer who takes on the role of detective, Max Work and William Wilson is a writer of detective novels. Paul Auster detective writer is also mistaken for detective in the novel. “In *City of Glass* however author characters who take on the role of detective are forced to radically revise their understanding of both authorship and detection” (Barone 73)

It was not until Quinn had cut himself off from his own life, that he was able to gain new insight into the things around him. In a way he had stripped himself of all things external in his life. Depriving himself of sleep and food had distorted his vision so at this stage he barely existed. On reaching these depths he is able to see the world for what it is, a world that is constantly changing. For Quinn had in his own way gone back to his natural form of existing and through that had stopped looking for meaning. The way forward for him as a writer was to stop looking for meaning and write what he experiences. This was Auster’s reality of writing fiction. At this point the realization of the isolation of the author from his work is evident. He cannot rely on words as they do not have the capability to express everything and the reader cannot get inside the conscious mind of the author. Therefore the author disappears from the novel and becomes nothing more than a ghost. Revealing that a text is only real in a text as are the characters and authors.
Mechanics of Language

Derrida questions the authenticity of language as he believes that written language is not transparent, since the writer is not there to validate nor to provide the proper interpretations of the text. Just as Derrida was obsessed with the narrative of the tower of babel so too is Stillman:

So if language is constantly changing how do we know how to interpret it? In *Ghosts* the character of Blue believes in transparency of language. Blue represents the classical detective whose philosophy is to collect clues which will inevitably lead to a solution once written as a text, Blue believes that words fit around the things they stand for. This is not always the case and when he is trying to solve the case of Black he does not know what to do. He is perplexed when after years of watching Black and making notes about him, he is no nearer to understanding why indeed he is doing this, and in fact it appears utterly pointless to him. There are no facts no solution.

Language is the medium through which we attain knowledge. Hence it’s not surprising that the accuracy of language as a way of expressing the world comes under much scrutiny. In *City of Glass*, both Stillman Sr. and Quinn believe in the transparency of language. They believe that it can represent the world. When Quinn takes the Stillman case he receives a description of a man he has never seen. He is confident that he will be able to pick him out using only a short description of the man. Of course this is a logical assumption if language does accurately depict reality. Things do not go according to plan when Quinn discovers that there are two men which fit the description:

“Quinn froze. There was nothing that 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. Quinn breathed deeply, exhaled with a trembling chest, and breathed in again. There was no way to know :not this, not anything.”

(Auster 56)
Quinn’s failure to identify the right man signifies the limits of language in capturing reality accurately. Shiloh writes that in a detective novel everything has the capability of having a fixed meaning, in reality, however, nothing is fixed and everything happens by chance. (Shiloh 52)

The title City of Glass may be a reference to transparency of language as the characters in the story are fascinated with language and its meaning. Stillman Sr has dedicated his whole life to proving that there is transparency in language. Through him Auster considers the view Poststructuralist Jacques Derrida had regarding language. He questions the validity of interpretation, as “The writer writes in a language and a logic whose proper systems, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely.” (Barry 69) He believes that it is impossible to accurately express what one means through language as language has many different forms and meanings there is no universal fixed form of language, In the novel Stillman Sr keeps his son from ever communicating with anyone. By doing this he believes that the boy will naturally acquire a truer language and thus prove his point. When this experiment fails Stillman Sr does not give up, he continues his pursuit of a true language. Now he walks the streets picking up objects deemed obsolete and creates new names for them. Again he fails in his quest, it’s motionless and he comes no further in finding real truth in language. By the end of the novel Stillman Sr disappears. He was never able to accurately explain what he means through language.

It is no wonder that language is not transparent as life and language are constantly changing, the latter a reaction to the former. Hence it would be impossible for language to keep up the same pace. As each object in life becomes obsolete a new word must be created to represent the new object. It’s a never ending process as the world will keep changing and so will language. If it would stay the same it would disappear just as Stillman Sr does.

There are many biblical references in the story which again may themselves be a reference to Derrida who was also interested in the story of the tower of Babel. In Craig Bartholomew’s essay “Babel and Derrida Postmodernism, Language, and Biblical Interpretation.” Craig states that Derrida believes God’s punishment towards man was to create many languages in order to allow misunderstanding through different translations. This brings us to the dilemma of interpretation. Blue who is also unable to solve his own case resorts to books as a way of helping him find meaning. His subject, Black is reading Walden. Blue believes that by reading the book he will end up with the
same thoughts as Black has. Not surprisingly, this does not turn out to be the case. Blue’s belief in the transparency of language clouds his judgment of the book. He is only able to concentrate on the words at face value and fails to find meaning.

“Flipping through the pages, he is surprised to discover that the name of the publisher is Black. Blue is momentarily jarred by this coincidence, thinking that perhaps there is some message in it for him, some glimpse of meaning that could make a difference.”

(Auster 154)

As a consequence, Blue assumes that there must be a connection between the publisher and the subject of the case. There is of course no proof of this other than they share the same name. Unable to stop his hunger for meaning Blue believes this to be a sign. There is no doubt in his mind that the name on the book must be the person he is following. As a result of this Blue does not read Walden and describes it as incoherent, pointless, and devoid of meaning.

From this we can assume that Auster wants the reader to know that characters are nothing more than a name printed on paper. To assure us of this, he goes so far as to shuffle names and identities throughout the novel. This shows the ambiguity of names which leads us to the ambiguity of language. Auster becomes a character in the book, which confuses the reader. Although Auster the detective is not Auster the author of The New York Trilogy the reader cannot help but connect the two. This is in keeping with the idea that the text is only a text and the words in a text can only relate to that particular text. Outside of the text the words mean nothing. This can be seen when Quinn blurs fact with fiction each offering a different perspective on things: “When things are no longer able to perform their functions, language as an instrument through which man names his world is distorted and falsified.” (Barone 81)

Auster explores how a writer can write what he means when language is constantly being undermined and lacks reliability. As Michael Holquist states, the classic detective has been replaced by the metaphysical or anti-dective. That is: a detective novel with no real outline or solution. The emphasis is on understanding why we do the things we do or why things happen, not on finding a reason. Language is used to communicate meaning in the universe as it is both cognitive and emotive. But for Blue, writing a description of the things he observed would inevitably give them the right meaning. Auster is showing that different people will interpret different meanings
from any given text. The individual perceptions and thoughts will shape their view of any story. “Whatever he knew about these things he has learned from books, films, and newspapers.” (Auster 7)

From the beginning it is obvious that Quinn heard of the case of Stillman sr. by chance, a simple case of mistaken identity. He has convinced himself that all he has to do is use his knowledge of detective writing. In his view detective work involves taking notes and connecting the facts. When he realizes that the words written down do not necessarily have a meaning, he turns to Auster the detective. In other words Quinn cannot rely on language. When Quinn meets Auster the detective he is disappointed to find that he is of no use to him, for Auster has a case of his own; finding the real author of Don Quixote. Quinn discovers that Auster is a writer not a detective. Quinn listens to the investigation that Auster has conducted and realizes that he is no further in understanding the world than he was at the beginning just as Stillman Sr was no further to finding natural language or Auster in finding the real author of Don Quixote. However Quinn does not want to believe this case is meaningless. As he has invented a new self Quinn has also invented this case, he believes there must be a rationale to Stillman’s behavior like classical detective novels he believes that should be a more meaningful answer. He goes on to follow and write everything Stillman does. As there is no proof for anything that is happening Quinn convinces himself that, since there are words in his notebook, those words are facts.

The existence of the notebook reinforces the idea of something meaningful. This is in keeping with the idea that words only achieve a meaning within their respective texts and mean nothing outside of them. Quinn is real and has to create Max Work as a detective for his fiction. But the line between fact and fiction is now blurred, this does not work, as each is taking on a different perspective on things. According to Majorie Worthington Just as Don Quixotes journey is actually an investigation of the power of fiction, Quinns journey becomes an investigation not only of Stillman but also of the power of language itself. Quinn believes that by relying on the books he has written he will be able to take on the role of detective. He believes that by gathering information and writing it down he will find a logical solution or explanation within his notes. But this is not what happens. His notes lead him nowhere and he ends up frustrated with the outcome. Referring again to Majorie Worthington before the fall according to Stillman?, there was a one to one correspondence between the word and the thing it represented. After the fall that relationship became arbitrary and language was no longer able to
convey unadulterated truth. Stillman Sr wished to reestablish the language of god on earth. In The New York Trilogy, Auster studies how an author can say what he means when language is not transparent. The outcome is that one can never truly represent the world through language. On the other side words written in a text are true to text in itself.
Truth and Reality

Postmodern fiction questions how reality is represented and who controls this. In Paul Auster’s novel the theme of how reality is presented is questioned. He shows that the writer, regardless of his intentions, conveys his interpretation of reality through his novels. He goes on to undermine the reality that is represented through language in writing. Epistemology is under constant scrutiny within postmodern writing and it is also a strong theme in this novel. Each protagonist is consumed with finding the ideal way to represent the real world through their writing and ultimately risks their personal identity in doing so. Auster takes a look at the postmodern world where reality and fiction are at odds and our society is itself confused with what is real and what is fiction. Jean Baudrillard writes about the loss of the real. In contemporary life the pervasive influence of television etc. has led to a loss of distinction between the real and the imagined. The result is a hyperreality; a surface without depth. Once we accept that what we see is what we get, there is clearly very little which a literary critic or theorist can claim to be doing. (Barry 87) An author of fiction is writing fiction that is the result of the reality in which he lives. As postmodernists believe that in writing there is no past it is here only in the present. Therefore we are left with the dilemma each writer faces where the line between their personal life and their life as an author is blurred. As stated by Mark Chenetier “If the world is not made up of texts, no one can talk about it and if it is made up of stories one can only discuss it through them” (Alford 21)

Postmodernist Jean Francois Lyotard claims that the modern presents “the fact that the unpresentable exists” while the postmodern “puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself”. Lyotard mentions that “we have the idea of the world (the totality of what is) but we do not have the capacity to show an example of it. (Barone 100-101)

Auster accepts that there is no constant stable relationship between what we say and what we do, and therefore believes that the only answer is to learn to exist alongside this assumption, and that trying to solve it doesn’t work. “We have to except reality as it is, to the extent that we are able to act in it.” To do anymore than this is not possible.” (Barone 18)

Therefore the novel can also be realistic as the protagonists are only free when they realize that meaning in language is not accurate. In Auster’s view, writing is
accepting the challenges faced by the fact that our perceptions and language itself are always changing. He shows that to grow one must evolve regardless of our knowledge. Adapting is the key.

So, concerned with finding the real meaning behind stories, people look to the author as a way to direct them towards really understanding the story. This is evident in Quinn meeting Auster the detective. Both Barthe and Derrida believe that by finding an author the book is changed as we can only read a reflection of that person’s perspective. He ends up back at square one thrown back into the original quest to lose himself (Shiloh p.53)

So if we look to the author we must also look at other texts as a way to find meaning. The theme of intertextuality is prominent throughout the novel with the appearance of a red notebook in each story. In fact the reader can never be sure if it is the same book that keeps reappearing or not. The red notebook is the source of the story. When Quinn loses his grip on reality it is because he believes the red notebook is no longer reliable. In *The Locked Room* the red notebook also makes an appearance and is now owned by Fanshawe. Auster is now showing the power of multiplicity and Auster himself has also written a book named the Red Notebook and this red notebook contains more books and stories. (Robert Briggs)

It could be right to imply that all books somehow relate to one another. Somehow stories are connected; they feed off each other. How we read a story can be influenced by how we read the very same story earlier. When a reader reads a book for the first time they will interpret it a certain way. If that same reader reads the story again they will most likely interpret it in a different way and notice different themes or meanings. Each new reading will spark a different response. To be a writer works in a similar way. Each story a writer produces will influence the next. The influence will range from writing something similar or something totally different but it will be a reaction to previous experiences.

This leads again to the notion that although fiction is fiction each fiction is based on the thoughts of the writer. These thoughts are shaped through the writer’s vision of the world or ideals which themselves have been shaped by the society in which they belongs. History cannot be true unless we know everything that happened. Therefore fairytales can be deemed true because they never actually happened and also because in their own way they always do happen. Single events don’t tell us much but patterns do. The fundamental values that appear in fairy tales are reflections of those to be found in
real life. The act of telling an honest story reweaves the basic patterns over and over because those patterns are what we need to understand the elements that help us create our identity and our sense of how the universe works. Fiction is true when it develops a pattern through which the reader or writer can relate their own experiences. According to Barthe, instead of establishing truth or identity, texts achieve multible meanings as texts because different readers read them in different ways. The deadly serious search for truth is superseded by a life affirming play. For those characters searching for truth, the red notebook could be taken to be a written representation of a life, but it remains inaccessible to language. The red notebook seems to reappear in one form or another throughout and at first seems to be the link that ties everything together. But when one looks closer the red notebook doesn’t actually appear to have any purpose at all except, a form of trap for the reader, making us believe that it serves any other purpose other than our belief that it should have one. Therefore Auster is showing that this is the way with fiction, just as with the notebook, it may not necessarily have any meaning and you shouldn’t be actively looking for it.

“In accepting the world as one of play, chance, reason and mystery the narrator is hence no longer searching for meaning. He knows that you cannot achieve absolute knowledge.”

(Lawrence Hogue 75)
One may mistake the theme of this novel for one of self-discovery. As the novel really has no solution or conclusion, this would be a false assumption. The novel takes the reader instead on a journey that questions the text. The author is not merely a writer of fiction, he is a storyteller. Regardless of genre the novel will express the views of the author and with this comes scrutiny and responsibility. This questions the ideology of genre and the responsibility that it places on the author. Auster redefines the detective novel by writing a postmodern detective novel that explores the writer’s search for meaning, nature and how his work fits into contemporary writing. “What interested Quinn about the stories he wrote was not their relation to the world but their relation to other stories.” (Barone 79)

In The New York Trilogy, Paul Auster uses the concept of a detective story as a tool to obtain a certain type of reading. He manages to confuse the reader to the point where one is convinced that there is no detective story at all. By use of multiplicity he frames each novel with stories within stories. By connecting or at least seeming to connect all his novels somehow, the reader believes that there must be a solution. Yet it becomes apparent that this is simply a device to keep the reader interested or to engage the reader rather than to serve any real importance. By engaging the reader’s curiosity by making them read the book as a detective novel they cannot stop til they have an answer.

According to Tzvetan Todorov in his “The Typology of Detective Fiction” there is the idea that each new work creates a new genre. (Lodge 158). Therefore a book creates two genres. One which is in keeping with the existing genre and the other with the one a novel creates. However, postmodernist writers are concerned with adopting the rules of a genre, questioning them and finally disregarding them. Postmodernism prides itself with breaking down barriers between high art and popular art. Mixing classical and modern writing and disobeying the rules. While perhaps appearing to have no real substance, this form of writing is said to relate the world we live in today, often described as the world of capitalism or that of the consumer generation. Thereby this is a convention that an author uses in order to convey his perspective on reality. Thus in order to maintain an interest in detective fiction, he needs to define the genre,
understand it and then break from it. Otherwise everything stays the same just as Quinn did by becoming invisible and slipping away from reality. Like life fiction writing must also evolve and to evolve there must be a change in the cycle. Auster does this by allowing Quinn a new lease on life when Quinn realizes his disintegration and gains a new perceptive towards writing. To be a good detective writer is not to refer to other books on the subject but to write about reality, which finally happens by the end of the story with his rediscovery of the world.

“Auster is unhappy with the critical reception that some of his writings have received, his claim that there are no similarities between himself and his fictional counterparts, suggests that these critics have failed to comprehend his postmodernity.”

(martin 23)

Auster does not want to be labeled or classified by a certain genre and hence goes against their rules in order to question the validity of such labeling. This is in keeping with the theories of post modern literature, in which to become labeled is to fail. In this detective novel it is clear that Auster is using personal references in order to enhance the plot of the novel. Auster wants to poke fun at the detective novel and at himself. He introduces himself as a writer of detective fiction in City of Glass. His wife and sons names appear in the book and he also reveals his works. There are names of books, of authors his family members and himself. That is to say; real representations are placed inside the novel. The novel itself is a work of fiction and the reader is aware of this. Paradoxically, to enhance the reality of the book the reader is constantly reminded that it is also a work of fiction. Thereby the detective novel is real, in regards to existence in itself. In relation to the real or the world outside of the novel it is a piece of fiction.

In Foucaults “What Is An Author?” (lodge 196-210) he questions the name of an author in regards to his work. His belief is that a proper name is more than an object; it is a description. When referring to a name that name is a representation of something. As for an author’s name, there are two representations: the author and the individual. Auster mentions author Henry David Thoreau as an example of an author who represents his individual self and literary works. As Thoreau is the author of Walden, he
represents his works and this establishes a relationship between the author and his works.

“Therefore the authors name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture.”

(lodge 202)

Writers face the dilemma of exceeding their own expectations while simultaneously meeting social expectations. The author takes on two separate identities, his personal one and as the writer of the story. If we accept that society is nothing more than a projection of oneself then it follows, that Blue represents an author that is controlled by outside forces.

“They have trapped Blue into doing nothing, into being so inactive as to reduce his life to almost no life at all…He feels like a man who has been condemned to sit in a room and go on reading a book for the rest of his life.”

(Auster 48)

Trapped by the constraints of writing detective fiction, becoming more and more isolated, Blue has become a victim of these external influences. Losing control of himself his life is now dictated to him through Black. He has become a machine and Black is in control.

In postmodern writing authors are concerned with the restrictions placed on novels. They want to squash these restrictions and instead allow freedom in writing. Hence Blue is confined by these very restrictions and in order to succeed as a writer needs to break away from the norm. Blue is unaware of this as he believes himself to be in control but it is only this realization that can allow him to be free. Eventually it starts dawning on him as he comes to realize that he knows Black better than he knows himself. One cannot exist without the other. In order for Black to survive he needs Blue and in order for Blue to exist he needs Black. An author needs literary machines and guides in order to survive and yet needs to break them in order to evolve. Blue attacks Black and leaves him for dead, upon realizing that Black had planned the whole case and had decided to kill them both at the same time. It appears that Blue has taken control of himself, broken free of literary restrictions and is able to express himself in
his own way. Yet at the end of the novel he disappears. The reader is unaware of his whereabouts. Thus, In literature to be a writer means to be under the control of the literary critics. Those same people have both the control to give you success and also to fail you. Regardless of whether a writer does what is expected of him in his work he has very little control of its destiny.

“ The distinction between the critic and the writer lies not only in the secondary and limited character of the critical material(literature) as opposed to the unlimited and primary character of the poetic or fictional material( the universe); this as it were quantitative inferiority, which derives from the fact that the critic always comes after the writer and has at his disposal only materials imposed by the previous choice of the writer, is perhaps aggravated, perhaps compensated by another difference: the writer works by means of concepts and the critics by means of signs. Within the opposition between nature and culture, there is only an imperceptible discrepancy between sets employed by each.”

(Lodge 64)

Literary criticism is under scrutiny in The New York Trilogy. It is at one stage considered a piece of literature in its own right as it uses the same tools as writing. Just as Auster is questioning epistemology, so is literary criticism. It could be said that Auster is investigating whether literary criticism serves as a positive or a negative influence in regard to detective fiction.

Auster is a master at breaking away from tradition, in Ghosts he uses the idea of a detective novel to frame the story. Ghosts is by no means a classical detective novel, underneath this framework is a story about the self. Blue does little else in the novel other than observe. According to Sarte he is observing himself through the other.

“Although everything in a text can ultimately be naturalized or made intelligible, either by reality models or derived from literature, the text’s very existence depends on maintaining the phrase of the ‘not yet known or intelligible ‘ for as long as possible. Narrative texts implicitly keep promising the reader the great prize of understanding-later. They suggest with varying degrees of subtlety: ‘the best is yet to come’ don’t stop reading now thus stimulating interest, curiosity or suspense. In this section I shall examine two ways of sloping down comprehension and creating suspense: delays and gaps.”
The stories appear to have no end result no solution, the characters seem to just disappear and the reader has no clear knowledge of their destinies. The reader must therefore use his knowledge from the book to assert his own ending therefore the reader has taken on the role of the author. In a reversal of roles the reader is now detective. If the reader is now taking on the role of detective, the reader must also be reading in the mode of detective, therefore trying to make sense of the novel and piecing all its evidence together. Quinn declares that in a good mystery novel there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. Even if not significant it has the potential to be so.

While a postmodern novel, as we have seen, Auster shows considerable knowledge of the traditional detective novel. Indeed, his novel breaks from most postmodern fiction by actually providing a sense of realism, and being adherent and linear in narrative. The more common view of postmodernism is in line with that of Dan Holmes: “Postmodernism, on the other hand can be seen as a lack of truth in the world.”
Conclusion

“Alan Wolfe summaries the intellectual trends of postmodernity as indicating that nothing is eternal, all value is relative, meaning is self-referential and the sacred is little more than an ideological construct imposed by those who hold power over those who lack it. But in postmodern times to seek the eternal the valued and the sacred in intellectual trends is to look in the wrong place.”

(Arthur frank 18)

The object of detective fiction is to create suspense and allow the reader to become part of the book. Usually the reader becomes the detective and it is their reading and interpretation that solves the mystery. Within detective fiction are two stories one concerned with the crime and the other with the investigation. The story of the crime is straight forward and logical. The second story is complicated, it is often told through the eyes of a narrator, who describes the book and its reason for being and the reality of it. Therefore the detective novel is both a work of fiction and of reality. With respect to this the story the event did not happen and there are no straight forward explanation of events. The author gets control with the second part, in that he decides how to present these event. So one could say detective fiction contains two perspectives on one piece of work. In order to write detective fiction, the author must convey both a real and fictional world. The importance of the real world is so the reader can relate to the text and the fictitious so the reader can become someone else and escape reality through reading.

The New York Trilogy is a complex novel in that the reader believes straight away that this is a detective novel. As the novel unravels, it becomes apparent that the book belays a much deeper meaning and is in fact a novel about the techniques of writing detective fiction. The author must go on a journey in which he must act as a detective and question his own work and how much authority and importance the author has over that work. In spite of this the only thing the characters are concerned with is the search for identity and meaning. One may mistake the theme of this novel for one of self-discovery. As a novel with no solution no conclusion this is a false assumption. Instead the novel takes the reader on a journey that questions the text. Auster redefines the
detective novel by writing a postmodern detective novel, that explores the writers search for meaning, nature and functions of his work in contemporary life.


