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‘The story is not in the words; it’s in the struggle’:
Identity Construction(s) and Intertextuality in Short Fiction by
Edgar Allan Poe & Paul Auster

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I confirm to have conceived and written this diploma thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references, either in the form of footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors have been truthfully acknowledged and identified in the footnotes.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
 2. EDGAR A. POE: THE MASTER OF HORROR	5
2.1. THE PRINCIPLES OF A TRUE POET	15
2.2. ANALYSIS.....	20
2.2.1. WILLIAM WILSON	20
2.2.2. THE MAN OF THE CROWD	27
2.2.3. THE PURLOINED LETTER	33
 3. FROM POETRY TO AUSTERITY	41
 4. PAUL AUSTER: IN SEARCH OF THE ARTIST	43
4.1. THE FICTION OF AUSTERITY: A NEW ERA	47
4.2. ANALYSIS.....	53
4.2.1. CITY OF GLASS	53
4.2.2. GHOSTS	61
4.2.3. THE LOCKED ROOM	73

5. POE & AUSTER: TWO OF A KIND	79
5.1. THE ABSENT FATHER	79
5.2. WRITING AS A SOLITARY BUSINESS	81
 6. CONCLUSION	 84
 7. BIBLIOGRAPHY	 87
 8. APPENDIX	 92
8.1. ABSTRACT (ENGLISH).....	92
8.2. ABSTRACT (DEUTSCH).....	93
8.3. LEBENSLAUF	95
 9. INDEX.....	 96

1. INTRODUCTION

From one moment to the next,
I seemed to be in a different place,
to forget where I was.
Thoughts stop where the world begins,
I kept telling myself.
But the self is also in the world, I answered,
and likewise the thoughts that come from it.

Paul Auster, The New York Trilogy

Identity is a concept often too complex for human beings to grasp in its entirety. Who we are, why we walk this earth, and what the ultimate meaning of our existence is troubles us deeply, mostly because we are terrified of never finding a satisfactory answer to any of these questions. In the fictional world authors are free to establish and redefine the meaning of distinctiveness as often as they please, and so, when the real world becomes too worrying, they flee to their writing and deal with this issue through their literary islands of imagination.

The fiction of American writers Edgar Allan Poe and Paul Auster has as its core theme man's struggle with himself in a universe where the concept of identity is as instable as reality itself. The following analysis will demonstrate in what way and to what extent Paul Auster has adopted and developed Edgar Allan Poe's treatment of constructing character identities, and how both authors keep inventing and reinventing themselves through their fiction. The exemplified texts, Poe's short stories "William Wilson", "The Man of the Crowd" and "The Purloined Letter", as well as Auster's novel *The New York Trilogy* (which contains the short novels *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room*) will place the writers within their respective eras of romanticism and postmodernism. This will prove that despite the fact that more than a century separates them, their proposals of constructed realities and identities have remained universally applicable through time.

In order to be able to comprehend and appreciate Poe and Auster's fiction, it is essential to consider the biographies of their lives, which "share a similar concern with problems of literary representations: how fictions came to be made and the relation

between these fictions and the people who made them” (Auerbach 8). Both authors experienced a troubled childhood and adolescence, with their fathers rejecting them and, thus, causing them to question where they really belonged in the world if not with their families. The subsequent changes in both writers’ environments have further urged them to ask whether a person can ever truly be in the right place (at the right time), and how this relativity of existence can be justified. Poe and Auster therefore create fictional characters who struggle to find this uniqueness within themselves and in the world. Their protagonists are all, to a certain extent, (pseudo-) detectives who try to establish their personalities through the pursuit of their antagonists who eventually turn out to be their physical and moral doppelgangers. As Auster strikingly notes, “[t]he detective is the one who looks, who listens, who moves through [a] morass of objects in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all of these things together and make sense of them” (Auster, *Glass* 9).

In order to ‘make sense’ of the identities Poe and Auster have designed in their short fiction, this analysis will apply the transcendental ideas and methods of 19th and 20th century literature to the stories of the two authors. With regard to Poe, the concepts of Dark Romanticism and Gothicism will lead to a thorough explanation of the origins of the analytic (or ratiocinative) and metaphysical detective story of the 1830s. A move from Poe to Auster is then made possible through the development of this genre during the late 1800s and early 1900s; in the 1980s the fascination with fictional investigators finally reached Auster and enabled him to reinvent this genre to create the metafictional anti-detective story and establish it as a revolutionary postmodern concept.

This thesis will illustrate the similarities and differences between Poe’s and Auster’s private-eye narratives by compiling some rather recent scholarly works on the topic. This synthesis of research papers includes an evaluation of (historiographic) metafiction and intertextuality, as well as of both authors’ lives and the themes they treat in their respective fictions. Arthur Hobson Quinn’s *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* (1998) as well as Dennis Barone’s *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster* (1995) help to relate the authors’ personal experiences to their stories. Furthermore, Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1984) and Julia

Kristeva's *The Kristeva Reader* (1986) have provided great critical insight into Poe's and Auster's intertextual narrative situations, and have paved the way for Linda Hutcheon to develop her thesis on "Historiographic Metafiction. Parody and the Intertextuality of History" (1989). Modern critical advances in the field of detective mysteries, such as Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney's *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism* (1999), as well as Ilana Shiloh's *The Double, The Labyrinth, and the Locked Room: Metaphors of Paradox in Crime Fiction and Film* (2010) have made it possible to trace the developments of crime novels and the significance of Poe's and Auster's contributions to this advancement.

The (auto)biographical as well as the intertextual approaches provided by the aforementioned academic researchers will, in connection with a thorough independent interpretation, highlight Poe's and Auster's literary treatment of identity crises and (the lack of) existential meaning. The central premise is that, "[i]n effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable. So are the detective and the reader" and thus, identities become blurred in the detective fiction at hand up to a point where the characters as well as the narratives they inhabit become entirely preoccupied with "circularity, or self-reflexivity" (Shiloh 8). As both Poe and Auster propose that the real as well as the fictional worlds are governed by binaries, the following study will investigate how the protagonists in their respective short fiction handle the oppositions of reason and emotion, life and death, good and evil, and, most importantly, 'the one' and 'the other' inside and outside of themselves. As they struggle to relate with only one side of either binary, this study will demonstrate how Poe's and Auster's constructed identities intend to destroy the evil other and thereby 'self-destruct'.

1.1. ABBREVIATIONS OF STORY TITLES

EDGAR A. POE

“William Wilson”	“Wilson”
“The Man of the Crowd”	“Crowd”
“The Purloined Letter”	“Letter”

PAUL AUSTER

City of Glass	<i>Glass</i>
Ghosts	<i>Ghosts</i>
The Locked Room	<i>Room</i>

2. EDGAR A. POE: THE MASTER OF HORROR

Despite the fact that short stories were already a given before Edgar Allan Poe started writing them, it is this genre he managed to influence the most as an American writer and critic. He is most famous for his gothic, grotesque and arabesque tales, which propound, as the genres themselves suggest, death and related deadly concepts (such as decay, decomposition, burial, or mourning), classifying him as a major figure of the Dark Romanticism movement that emerged and prevailed during the second half of the 18th and the 19th century. His preference for subjects as dark as these does not occur in all of his fiction by chance, however, for Poe brought to paper the terror that was his life.

Edgar Poe was born to actor parents Elizabeth Arnold and David Poe, Jr. in Boston in 1809 as their second son. Both William Henry Leonard (most often referred to as Henry Poe), his older brother, and Poe himself were frequently left with their grandparents when Elizabeth and David would go on tour to act. Even though money had always been short for the Poe family, the birth of their third child Rosalie in 1810 spiraled them in an increasingly worrying financial situation. The children travelled through Europe with their parents, moved from city to city, and thus could never enjoy a permanent home from then on¹. When thereby a rather undesirable financial situation ensued, the head of the family gave up hope more and more and resigned himself to alcohol instead of trying to resolve the issues. It has been suggested that in addition to being incapable of accepting responsibility for his family, David's failure as an actor and dancer² may have also been a reason for his excessive alcohol abuse and his abandonment of the family during this time of distress. David imprinted his son Edgar with a

predisposition toward alcoholism and a sensitive nature that would not absorb personal wounds easily. Like his son, David Poe could also be vengeful; he went on record threatening to beat up any critic who ever made a negative comment about his wife's acting. Edgar would also retain something of the actor's flair for bragging and

¹ cf. Meltzer 17.

² cf. Hutchisson 5.

melodrama, exaggerating his talents and achievements to unbelievable degrees. (Hutchisson 6)

Edgar and his two siblings were, thus, left behind with a loving but desperate mother, incapable of fully taking care of her children due to the financial, emotional and physically unhealthy conditions the family father had left them in. Poe's mother Elizabeth

had ended up [...] ill and destitute. Suffering from pneumonia, or possibly tuberculosis, she underwent a rapid decline and passed away on December 8. In her brief life, she had married twice, given birth to three children, and performed onstage more than three hundred times. She was twenty-four. (Hutchisson 6)

As David Poe never returned to the family and died that same year in Norfolk, the three Poe children were left temporarily uncared for. Henry was taken up by relatives in Baltimore, and both Rosalie and Edgar were put under the care of foster families.

Foster parents John and Frances Allan, who never officially adopted Edgar Poe but gave him their last name Allan, accommodated the boy in Richmond and took care of his education while traveling from the United States to England and back to handle John's businesses overseas. Poe soon established a very deep and loving connection with Frances, while any relationship with John remained quasi nonexistent. In this way, the Allan family would become a mirror-image of the Poe family: Edgar mourned the death of his birth mother Elizabeth, just as he would later mourn that of Frances, and would incorporate and praise them both in his writing in order to be able to deal with their passing. Both his birth and foster fathers, however, were never put in a good light in his personal comments or literary works.

John Allan was all hard edges, with blunt facial features – square jaw, high forehead, and Roman nose – that seemed an outward reflection of the driven businessman within. He believed strictly in advancement through hard work and merit and in taking care of yourself. Such a philosophy probably doomed his relationship with Edgar before it had even begun, for the boy was completely without resources – and self-confidence – making him entirely dependent on his foster father. (Hutchisson 8)

During their emigration to and from England Poe's self-confidence took another blow when his foster mother Frances's physical condition deteriorated, making her constantly weaker and increasingly incapable of shielding the boy from the unloving

John Allan. Meanwhile, Poe received his education at several schools in England, soon standing out as a miraculous pupil with aptitudes for languages, history and literature that exceeded those of older or more privileged boys³. John Allan could be more pleased with Poe's academic achievements, but soon realized that his desire to train the boy for the business world was in vain; he made fun of Poe's love and determination for poetry and lyrics as well as his "melodrama" and "intense emotionalism in his private life" (Hutchisson 12). Like before, Poe felt his emotional role model fade away and turned to a family friend, Mrs. Jane Stanard, for stability and support. Whenever he felt Frances needed to be left alone due to her illness, he would turn to Jane; soon, however, she too was troubled with bad health, both physically and mentally, and died only several years later in 1824. As remains clear from Poe's writings, Jane Stanard had become just as much an important mother figure to the boy as Elizabeth and Frances had been in his early life, hence his literary (and personal) obsession with beautiful women and the deaths they had to suffer⁴.

Once again abandoned, Poe's mood in the Allan house would turn rather foul, triggering several severe conflicts with his foster father John, who had just inherited a fortune of \$750000 from his uncle, leading Poe to believe that his future was taken care of. Being the strict and unsympathetic business man that John was, he expected nothing from Poe but complete adherence and gratitude for all his financial and residual support, ever ignoring the boy's need for love and attention. In 1825, Poe fell in love with and proposed marriage to the fifteen-year-old Sarah Elmira Royster; John Allan made it clear once more, however, that he did not accept Poe's actions. To get his son away from both Sarah and himself, he enrolled Poe in the University of Virginia a year later. There, the boy's behavior got even more out of hand. The school had just opened the previous year and was known for its fine academic environment; yet, what was overlooked from the outside was that none of the authoritarian guidelines that dictated student life were actually adhered to by anyone⁵. What ruled the school was in fact not a professional academic atmosphere, but gambling, drinking

³ cf. Meltzer 24.

⁴ „In [Poe's poem] 'To Helen' Jane Stanard became the ideal of feminine beauty, like the Helen who became a visionary classical ideal – perfect, statuesque, and unattainable" (Hutchisson 13). For the full text of "To Helen" see Thompson 47.

⁵ cf. Hutchisson 16.

and fighting. At first, Poe excelled in all the projects he took on despite what was going on around him at the university, studying ancient and modern languages, painting and writing poetry. The loss of his beloved Sarah Elmira Royster, however, embittered him and consequently his writing⁶, and it became clear soon that “the cup of knowledge [...] wasn’t the only cup from which Poe drank” (Bloom 11). Contrary to what was expected of him as a scholarly gentleman, he started to drink and gamble excessively, which resulted in extreme mood swings and abnormality of behavior. As a fellow student of Poe’s, Miles George, wrote in a letter:

Poe, as has been said, was fond of quoting poetic authors and reading poetic productions of his own, with which his friends were delighted & entertained, then suddenly a change would come over him & he would with a piece of charcoal evince his versatile genius by sketching upon the walls of his dormitory, whimsical, fanciful, & grotesque figures, with so much artistic skill, as to leave us in doubt whether Poe in future life would be Painter or Poet; He was very excitable & restless, at times wayward, melancholic & morose. [...] To calm & quiet the excessive nervous excitability under which he labored, he would too often put himself under the influence of that “Invisible Spirit of Wine” which the great Dramatist has said “If known by no other name should be called Devil”. (Quinn 108)

Poe’s gambling soon left him with outrageous debts at his school, and his foster father was unwilling to pay them. He forced the boy to leave school and return home where all attempts to make peace with John were once again in vain.

This acting out of Poe’s rather apparent childhood trauma, rooted in the cruel behavior of both his birth and foster fathers, was further exacerbated when he found out that John Allan had cheated on his wife, Poe’s beloved foster mother Frances, for quite some time. Unwilling to deal with the shock, Poe left the family to join the army in his hometown Boston. He was shipped to South Carolina and was soon promoted to corporal, later to Sergeant Major of the Regiment of Artillery. His success in the army was again embittered when Frances Allan died in 1829 while he was away. Poe, grieving and deeply wounded by her passing, planned to purposefully drop out of the military that same year to visit family in Baltimore: his grandmother Elizabeth Cairnes Poe, his aunt Maria Clemm, her daughter Virginia, and his brother Henry. In 1830, he

⁶ Poe’s poem “The Happiest Day”, first published in 1827, mourns this loss, for “when Poe returned to Richmond from the University of Virginia he realized that he had lost Elmira Royster and that, thus young, his happiest day had already passed” (Thompson 20). For the full text see also Thompson 20.

passed the entrance examination for the United States Military Academy at West Point. There, he was quickly well-liked and received support from his fellow cadets in bringing forth the publication of his poetry collection. John Allan was yet again unwilling to send his foster son money to support him which led Poe to stay away from classes and eventually be expelled in 1831. Around the same time, the young cadet learned that John had remarried, “renewing Poe’s fears that he was systematically shut out of Allan’s life and thus dimming his hopes of an inheritance” (Hutchisson 25). This episode marked the final stage in both Poe’s education and his affiliation with John Allan, for he never returned home to the unsupportive foster father. He wrote that “[t]he army does not suit a poor man – so I left W. Point abruptly, and threw myself upon literature as a resource” (Harrison 345) and coping mechanism.

Poe’s education in history, mythology, rhetoric, and languages, as well as his experiences with both the Poe and the Allan families became core issues of his writing from the date of his severing conflict with John Allan. Temporarily without a place to live, Poe eventually went back to Baltimore to reside with his aunt, grandmother, brother, and cousin. Reunited with his brother – his “immediate family – gave Poe a sense of stability, of an anchor sunk into calm seas. Henry and Poe had much in common, especially in their dreamy melancholia and dark romantic temperaments” (Hutchisson 32). Like Poe, Henry had early on in his life been seduced by drinking and so Poe was again surrounded by the demon that had already once cost him his education. The two brothers wrote poems and short stories and were happily united in both their literary and drinking games⁷. As was already typical for Poe’s life, his happiness was not to last long, for only months after he moved in with his brother, Henry died of complications caused by his alcoholism in 1831. It was once again a female member of Poe’s family, his aunt Maria Clemm, who supported him in his emotional and creative turmoil and urged him to benefit from people’s increasing interest in literature and finally publish his work. He started to send his short stories to magazines, such as the *Baltimore Saturday Visitor* and *The Philadelphia Saturday Courier* but received neither prize money nor recognition to be able to publish a book

⁷ “Their bond as orphaned brothers may also have manifested itself in a symbiotic way: Henry named the hero in one of his tales ‘Edgar Leonard’, symbolically combining their two names” (Hutchisson 32).

of his writings meanwhile compiled. In his desperation, he tried to reconcile with John Allan but was soon disappointed again, for when John died, it was made clear to Poe that he had not been included in the Allan will and would never receive any inheritance. When no other opportunities for income came in sight, Poe decided to take on journalism as a way of income. Thus, in 1835, when Poe was 26, he started to work as a critic and reviewer for the *Southern Literary Messenger* and soon moved to Richmond, where the paper was issued. Shortly thereafter, when Poe's grandmother died and left behind Poe's already elderly aunt and her daughter in Baltimore, Maria and Virginia Clemm joined him in Richmond. Poe immediately fell in love with his cousin Virginia, a girl half his age, and soon proposed marriage to the 12-year-old, only to be married a few months later. As editor-in-chief of the *Southern Literary Messenger* not only did Poe's reviews receive recognition, but his personal writings as well. He was now working as a publishing source himself and used the opportunity to present his works to the public: in 1837 he published parts of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* in the magazine⁸.

Even though Poe was happy with both his professional and personal life, his susceptibility to depression rooted in his alcoholism got the better of him. His mood swings and dangerously instable temper worsened, causing him to lose his current and several of his future jobs as editor while publishing some of his most famous and important short stories, "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "William Wilson", among others. Only a short time later, in 1840, Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*⁹ was brought out by the Philadelphia publishing business Lea & Blanchard, while some of Poe's most prominent critical pieces, like his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*¹⁰, also came out at the same time¹¹.

⁸ "Poe was in the process of leaving the magazine and no further portions of the *Pym* narrative appeared in its pages. [...] Harper published *Pym* in New York in July 1838" (Thompson 429).

⁹ He dedicates this volume to his friend Colonel William Drayton (cf. Quinn 129).

¹⁰ "Poe's understanding of his great rival is in some ways extraordinary, but is explainable. We have only to call up the picture of Poe as he wrote this sentence: 'These effusions of Mr. Hawthorne are the product of a truly imaginative intellect, restrained, and in some measure repressed, by fastidiousness of taste, by constitutional melancholy and by indolence'" (Quinn 334-5).

¹¹ Hawthorne's influence on Poe is discussed in section 4.2.2 of this analysis.

While Poe was on the verge of becoming more successful with his writing, his wife Virginia fell ill at the age of 20 after tearing a blood vessel one afternoon.

In the five years from the first serious evidence of her illness, Virginia had become an invalid, and her increasingly fragile health and the destruction of her body by tuberculosis sent Poe into deep depression. He lived in daily fear of her death, and the pain of watching her body waste away stayed with him until his own death. (Sova 7)

Poe started to feel the death of his loved ones even more when Virginia's sickness turned out to be terminal, leading to the creation of stories such as "Berenice", "Eleonora" or "The Fall of the House of Usher". Out of these, "Berenice" is closest to Poe's situation with Virginia, as it is a story about a man engaged to his cousin who is suffering from a severe mental and physical illness. From this follows that Poe's early tales, as featured in *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, speak of the intolerable pain he felt while having to watch another beloved female waste away. Additionally, his stories show more and more the madness and trauma Poe's life had subjected him to as a whole¹². The opening of his short story "Eleonora" (1842), for example, illustrates the dark place Poe retreated to with his thoughts as he had to endure this devastating process:

Men have called me mad; but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence – whether much that is glorious – whether all that is profound – does not spring from disease of thought – from moods of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect. (Poe, *Complete Works* 310)

The two extremes that had always dominated Poe's life now seemingly brought him to the verge of insanity, treading the fine line between genius and madness and giving the afterworld reason to believe that he may have been bipolar¹³. This manic-depressive disorder is described as an illness that has its victim alternate abruptly between energy or mood levels, ranging from being "miserably depressed and fac[ing] the highest risk of suicide" to "experienc[ing] flights of creative or productive brilliance that have given the world some of its best poetry, music, literature, and art" (Charney, Nemeroff, and Braun 120). Many researchers, such as Kay Redfield Jamison, have found

¹² cf. Poe's stories "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat".

¹³ cf. Charney, Nemeroff, and Braun 120.

believable evidence for Poe's condition, stating that "excesses of all kinds dominate a manic personality" (qtd. in Jovinelly 13). Furthermore, Poe experts have highlighted the artist's personal writings to friends as confirmation for his depressive condition. In an 1848 letter to George Washington Eveleth, for example, Poe describes that he "became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity. During these fits of absolute unconsciousness I drank, God only knows how often or how much. As a matter of course, my enemies referred the insanity to the drink rather than the drink to the insanity" (Ostrom 356). Poe experienced these episodes even in times when he felt "great improvement in [his] circumstances"; in an 1835 letter to John Pendleton Kennedy Poe wrote "I am wretched, and know not why. Console me, - for you can. But let it be quickly or it will be too late. Convince me that it is worth one's while - that it is at all necessary to live, and you will prove yourself indeed my friend" (Robertson 27). Thus, as has been indicated before, even though Poe drank to overcome his pain, the years during his marriage with Virginia were still his most productive as a writer, critic and editor.

As his mind flourished with ideas during this time, Poe succeeded in his greatest literary achievement: while working at *Graham's Magazine* he managed to land a breakthrough in the genre of the detective story with his 1841 composition "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". This literary work presents the world's first fictional detective¹⁴ and thus Poe's protagonist C. Auguste Dupin even predates Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, whose first manifestation dates back to 1887¹⁵.

According to Kenneth Silverman, Poe's success in crime fiction stems from the fact that, during his time, "crime was much in the air, as its prevention became a pressing urban need", and thus the creation of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" directly followed "the establishment of the world's first professional police force in London" (171). Poe's current themes spoke to the crowd like nothing had ever before. The subsequent detective stories he presented, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1843) and "The Purloined Letter" (1844), both center on the same (anti-/pseudo-) detective and also suggest several of Poe's most essential short story ingredients, which can all be

¹⁴ cf. Merivale and Sweeney 96.

¹⁵ cf. Sova 323.

traced back to his own life: the binaries of physical vs. intellectual and reason vs. instinct, or the death of a beautiful woman¹⁶, among others (cf. section 2.2). Also, Dupin himself can be seen as a mirror-image of Poe: the detective seems to be a sometimes lonely but constantly preoccupied man hiding behind his “desire to sequester himself from society and his procedure of entering the mind of the murderer” (Sova 7-8) so as to be able to escape his own thoughts. In this way, Poe threw himself into his writing to flee from his problems, and therefore created characters with minds, aptitudes and characteristics similar to his own.

This became even clearer when Poe published his most famous poem “The Raven” in 1844: the lyrical I he presents is just as tormented by loneliness and the fear of losing his loved ones as he was himself, and the aforementioned themes dominate this poem even more intensively than any of his works before. What then followed the immediate success of this outstanding poem was Poe’s creation of a more theoretical piece, “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846), in which he states that every literary work can and should, like his own, eventually reach a peak of ultimate methodical ‘unity’ (Poe, “Philosophy” 675) or the “ultimate point of completion” (Poe, “Philosophy” 676), as he calls it. In this essay, Poe chases this finishing point by following a series of compositional steps that relate back to “The Raven”. He puts emphasis on choosing a climax to his work first so that all previous happenings can lead up to it and, thus, trigger an effect (in the *dénouement*) that is desired by and significant to a large audience. He goes on to mention the importance of a tone and theme being set before the start of the writing process; these, again, must be “universally appreciable” (Poe, *Philosophy* 678) by a general readership. Unity is ultimately accomplished when the work under consideration does not surpass a certain length; that is, the piece can be read within one session, “for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and every thing like totality is at once destroyed” (Poe, “Philosophy” 677). Even though Poe relates this system to a poem, it can most certainly be applied to his short stories as well. However, it has been called into question frequently whether the author actually created this philosophy before his works of art or vice versa, for the former option might lead the reader to believe that Poe’s “The Raven” is more of an

¹⁶ cf. Poe’s story “Ulalume”

artificial construct than a reflection of his personal demons and the processing thereof¹⁷. Similarly structured but also questionable, though less analyzed by critics, is Poe's later essay and lecture, entitled "The Poetic Principle", in which he repeats several of his demands on works of literature (unity of effect, restricted length, etc). However, the essence of this instructional essay centers on the issue of beauty in poetry, "The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty" (Carlson 290), and the harmony within a work of literature that can only be achieved by targeting "the Beauty above. Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle, by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to eternity alone" (Poe, *Complete Works* 77). What can be discerned from this manifesto is Poe's frequent contemplation of death and his wish for his loved ones to live on in his writing forever if they cannot stay with him forever.

His constant engagement with loss was then to come to another climax: Poe's wife Virginia died in 1847 after many years of poor health and subsequently, Poe himself fell dangerously ill. The medical treatments that followed this complete emotional breaking point¹⁸ illuminated a brain lesion that Poe might have had during his childhood, which can be seen as another explanation "for the erratic behavior throughout his life" (Sova 8). For two years Poe had to suffer both physically and mentally; on October 7th, 1849 he then died in Baltimore. He was found in the streets several days before, confused, uncontrolled and heavily intoxicated, and was taken to the hospital, where he spent the remaining four days of his life. Despite the fact that the ultimate cause of his death is unknown to this day, and whether or not his manic actions can be traced back to a medical condition or not, it remains clear that "Poe's personality [was] strongly actuated by ambivalence and self-division, [and by] vigorously pursuing a goal and then self-destructing" (Thompson xiv). It is ultimately exactly this duality or split identity that approximates him so much to his characters, as will be illustrated with regard to his short stories "William Wilson", "The Man of the Crowd" and "The Purloined Letter".

¹⁷ Cf. Carlson 287-88.

¹⁸ Poe mourns the death of his wife in his poem "Annabel Lee" (cf. Thompson 75).

2.1. THE PRINCIPLES OF A TRUE POET

As has been mentioned before, Edgar Allan Poe's literary contributions are classified as part of the American Romantic Movement. More precisely, due to the dark themes he features in his writing, the majority of Poe's work extends to Dark Romanticism or Gothicism. Melissa McFarland Pennell suggests that

[b]y the nineteenth century, the term 'gothic' was applied to any fiction that inspires terror or horror, even those not set during the middle ages. Such narratives continued to incorporate the supernatural, the irrational, suspense, a sense of foreboding, and an atmosphere of gloom. [...] For Poe, the effects produced by these elements were a means of raising questions about both the psychological states of his characters and the power of the unconscious to influence perceptions and behaviors. (50)

This importance of his characters' psychology is illustrated in his *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, a collection of his short stories published in 1840. One of his most famous short stories, "The Fall of the House of Usher", first published in 1839, has often been presented as an archetype of (American) Gothic. It focuses on the single psychology of Roderick Usher, a man very much like Poe, who suffers from an illness that restrains both his physical and mental capacities. Two of Poe's subsequently published stories, "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" (both from 1843) deal with a murder and an unreliable narrator-assassin whose guilt torments and challenges him until he eventually confesses. In 1845, Poe publishes "The Imp of the Perverse", the title of which refers to people's inclination to do exactly the opposite of what should be done in a certain situation. The imp itself, a mythological creature similar to a demon¹⁹, seduces people to do evil and stands as the metaphor for precisely this 'self-destructive' propensity.

Critical biographers of Poe have [...] identified connections between the tale and the many self-destructive choices Poe made throughout his life and in his interpersonal relationships, including his self-indulgence, his feuds with authority figures, his alcohol abuse, and his erratic treatment of both friends and colleagues. (Sova 84)

¹⁹ cf. Guiley and Zaffis 118.

As it is impossible, however, to restrict Poe to this single genre of the Gothic, and since his entire life and work was always troubled by extremes, it is unsurprising that during his years of the creation of these horror stories he also tended to an entirely different genre, the detective story. His fictional investigator, C. Auguste Dupin, is the antithesis of the ‘perverse imp’. Dupin’s “sharpest mental weapon is ‘ratiocination’, a higher form of reasoning that permits him to detect what others have overlooked or dismissed as unimportant” (Sova 124). The detective’s strengths are logic and intellect, and he does not let himself get carried away by any emotions. Rather, he uses his “remarkable powers of deduction and [...] idiosyncrasies” (Sova 124) to enter the mind of his opposite and create a state of mirroring up to a point where they talk the same talk, walk the same walk and breathe the same air. In becoming the criminal’s double, the detective can thus deduce any aspect of the crime committed. In this process, Dupin does not only become the villain’s doppelganger, however, but also Poe’s. The author’s main concern, both in his life as well as in his writing, is the struggle between “two sides of the self, between emotion and intellect, feeling and the mind” (Davidson qtd. in Kennedy 184). In “The Purloined Letter”, one of three Poe stories under investigation in this analysis, Poe’s striving for logic over emotion is illuminated most prominently: “Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio” („Letter“ 367), the opening line of the story, is attributed to Seneca and translates as “Nothing is more hateful to sense than too much cunning” (Thompson 367). This foreshadows the connection between the mathematician and the poet, which both the detective and the criminal can be classified as, and also how Dupin’s cleverness and rationale can outfox the rogue in his own attempt to trick *him* in turn. This to and fro between the doubles is what Daniel Hoffman calls Poe’s

equating [of] analytical *intellect* with physical *strength* and at the same time calling its exercise a *moral activity*. [Poe] is saying that the analyst glories in his intellectual action, and that action is one which *disentangles*. In short, such a man has that unusual mind which can free the ends of the rope of life from among the twisted knots of human events. (Poe, 105)

Through his invention of Dupin, and the detective’s intellectual (and moral) activities, Poe obviously attempted to free himself of his own ‘rope of life’: he was stuck between good and evil, and was dishonored by John Allan for not pursuing the sensible and logical career his foster father had set him out for. Instead, he chose the more

emotional and aesthetic path of writing, and, through his characters, rids himself of versions of himself he could no longer stand. So it also appears in “William Wilson”, an 1839 story with a protagonist of the same name. Contrary to “The Purloined Letter”, Wilson’s double is not a separate entity from himself, but a possible personified imagination of his own conscience. If this be the case, “he is also his Imp of the Perverse. Which is to say that each half of the split ego has its own Imp of the Perverse – Wilson himself is such an Imp to Wilson²” (Hoffman, *Poe* 213). Returning to this concept, it remains clear that the Wilson case is a lot more extreme than the Dupin case: while Dupin succeeds in his quest for the criminal and is able to eliminate him, Wilson’s “Imp of the Perverse triumphs and rules unchallenged. [...] [T]hat much of the self which survives is condemned to madness in the house of woe” (Hoffman, *Poe*, 213) as Wilson kills off his doppelganger. Much of this idea seems to have been adopted by Paul Auster in his story *Ghosts*, in which the main character equally physically abuses his mirror image until their ultimate separation (see section 4.2.2). “The Man of the Crowd”, the third story relevant to this analysis, “stands as a transitional work between [Poe’s] haunting Gothic tales of the late thirties and the ratiocinative fiction of the early forties, possessing obvious qualities of both” (Kennedy 187). The unnamed narrator searches for a rational explanation for his obsession with said ‘man of the crowd’, and becomes almost insane with this mission, highlighting again Poe’s recurrent theme of the binary oppositions of mental astuteness and madness. This idea is already foreshadowed when Poe introduces his story with the words “Ce grand malheur, de ne pouvoir être seul” (Poe, „Crowd“ 232), a quote taken from Jean de la Bruyère, which translates to “This great misfortune of not being able to be alone” (Thompson 232). In contrast to William Wilson, however,

the theme of the double is inverted significantly: rather than flee his malevolent counterpart, the narrator of ‘The Man of the Crowd’ actively pursues his double, seeking knowledge of the man’s inner nature through a detective-like scrutiny of his outward appearance and behavior. (Kennedy 186)

It is this recurrent appearance of doppelgangers in Poe’s stories “The Purloined Letter”, “William Wilson” and “The Man of the Crowd” that remains at the heart of

this analysis²⁰. 19th century fiction was very much interested in this issue of doubling, and so Poe explored it in more detail in his stories, also because of his own struggle with his internal counterparts. In the introduction to his study *The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction: The Shadow Life* (1991), John Herdman declares:

The significance of the double is always unfolded in action, and is often intimately associated with the idea of fate which reverberates through the ramifications of the plots. An adequate understanding of what is being said through the image of the double can be derived only from close attention to what actually *happens*. (x)

With this, Herdman not only emphasizes the appearance and importance of doppelgangers, but also the immediate connection with chance and destiny, which will later also be analyzed in the context of Paul Auster's fiction. As for Poe, the three aforementioned stories at hand could not be more different in terms of genre and style; still, identity, different forms of crime, self-judgment and self-destruction, as well as binary oppositions of sanity and madness dominate all of them, and thus approximate them to each other. Poe swerves from tales of ratiocination ("The Purloined Letter", "The Man of the Crowd") to Gothic fiction ("William Wilson") and back, and thereby he "was a major advocate of one version of the romantic ideal" (Thompson xv).

As will be analyzed in more detail in the following parts, Poe's tales follow a

romantic program [that] was nothing less than to resolve all apparent contraries of the world into unity: the life and death impulses of existence; the apparent irradiation and collapse of a pulsating universe; the paradoxes of time and space, of matter and energy, of the rational and irrational; the seeming oppositions of the immaterial and material, of the serious and the comic, of imagination and logic, of poetry and science, of art and society. (Thompson xv)

It is this mission that classifies Edgar Allan Poe so much as a major American writer of the 19th century, with his influence ranging from the gothic to the grotesque, the arabesque and the ratiocinative and detective mode, in all of which he presents "an obsessive focus on *isolato* characters, who, even when not completely isolated from

²⁰ E.T.A. Hoffmann deals with a similar phenomenon of doubling in several of his works. In *The Sandman* (*Der Sandmann* (1816)), for example, the protagonist Nathaniel comes to associate an Italian trader by the name of Coppola with the lawyer Coppelius, a terrifying old man who carried out experiments on Nathaniel's father during his childhood. The similarity of their names as well as their appearances leads the main character to take revenge on Coppola for Coppelius's actions (cf. Hoffmann 2008).

others, are often off in some dark place, alone in their own minds, watching themselves go to pieces” (Thompson xvi). It will become clear from the following analyses to what extent this fundamental characteristic equates Poe almost frighteningly with many of his characters.

2.2. ANALYSIS

2.2.1. WILLIAM WILSON

As with most of his short stories, Edgar Allan Poe opens his tale “William Wilson” with borrowed lines: “What say of it? What say conscience grim, that spectre in my path?” („Wilson“ 216) is taken from William Chamberlain’s *Pharonnida*²¹ and immediately foreshadows the problematic relationship between a character and their conscience that apparently stands in the way. The reader is presented with William Wilson, the protagonist of the narrative, who will not reveal his “real appellation”, but designates himself as the “outcast of all outcasts” who will soon commit an “unpardonable crime” (Poe, „Wilson“ 216-17). As he further attempts to characterize himself, it becomes clear that this protagonist could not be more like Poe himself:

I am the descendant of a race whose imaginative and easily excitable temperament has at all times rendered them remarkable. [...] As I advanced in years it was more strongly developed; becoming, for many reasons, a cause of serious disquietude to my friends, and of positive injury to myself. I grew self-willed, addicted to the wildest caprices, and a prey to the most ungovernable passions. (Poe, „Wilson“ 217)

Wilson’s personality retains a direct reference to Poe’s: during his time at college the author lapses into alcoholism and gambling, which worried many of his friends, but did not necessarily cause his creative writing talent any harm. Poe’s foster father John Allen also repeatedly complained about Poe’s temperament, which he obviously shares with William Wilson. The story’s protagonist also divulges information about his family to the reader: he mentions that during his childhood he “gave evidence of having fully inherited the family character”, and as his “parents could do but little to check the evil propensities which distinguished [him]” their “feeble and ill-directed efforts resulted in complete failure on their part, and, of course, in total triumph on [his]” (Poe, „Wilson“ 217). Poe clearly refers to both foster fathers: Poe’s drug abuse

²¹ “Although attributed to *Pharonnida* (1659), a verse romance by William Chamberlayne, this epigraph does not appear in it; a somewhat similar passage, however, appears in his *Love’s Victory* (1658). “Conscience waits on me like the frightening shades / Of ghosts when gastly [*sic*], messengers of death.” These two works were published together in three volumes in 1820” (Thompson 216).

has often been attributed to David Poe, who, like John Allan, abandoned his family, and above all to Poe himself. Both fathers rejected the boy for who he was, leaving him, like William Wilson, to be “the master of [his] own actions” (Poe, „Wilson“ 217). The story’s framework further reminds one of Poe’s own life: it is set in a small town in England, where Poe travelled to with the Allan family during his adolescence²². There he attended several schools which resemble very much the detailed description William Wilson presents of his own school in the story. Despite the fact that all the locations remain unnamed in the story, the reader can see the parallels between the author and his protagonist and can make them out to be doubles of each other as Poe represents a version of his own life story²³. Like Poe, William Wilson’s “ardour, [...] enthusiasm, and the imperiousness of [his] disposition, soon rendered [him] a marked character, among [his] schoolmates” (Poe, "Wilson" 220), and he excelled both on a personal and an academic level. “While up to this point the protagonist has not done anything but describe the circumstances of his life, it is with the appearance of “the person of a scholar, who, although no relation, bore the same Christian and surname as myself” (Poe, „Wilson“ 220) that his troubles and the real action in the story begin. The protagonist does not ascribe much importance to his fear of his double, to the fact that somebody would carry the same name as himself, or to the “equality which he maintained so easily with myself, a proof of his true superiority” (Poe, „Wilson“ 221). It is from this moment onward that Wilson demonstrates an “appalling lack of self-awareness as Jonathan Auerbach has called it, which leads “Poe’s first persons [to] repeatedly fail to recognize themselves in their doubles [...] even as they obsessively seek to confront and kill off their alter egos” (25). He goes on to prove that the characters’ incapability to draw a connection between themselves and their doppelgangers stems from

Poe’s inability to conceive of human relationship altogether. [...] [T]he failure of Poe’s speakers to reflect, to gain some objective distance themselves, is a symptom of a larger cultural disconnection called modernity: the severance of the present from the past; the tyranny of the instantaneous moment; the dispossession of memory by immediate sensation; and, most important for my argument, a kind of paralyzing

²² cf. Sova 191.

²³ cf. section 4.2.: Paul Auster features a character named William Wilson in his story *City of Glass*. Thereby, Poe is not only present in his own Wilson, but also in Auster’s (cf. section 4.1 on intertextuality)

subjectivity that makes it impossible to distinguish between self and other, as if all other persons were simply displaced versions of an inescapable 'I'. (Auerbach 26).

Wilson tries to find differences between himself and his alter ego, but the "feeling of vexation thus engendered grew stronger with every circumstance tending to show resemblance, moral or physical" (Poe, "Wilson" 222). He soon realizes that it is not only their name, but their entire physical appearance that connects them, and so Wilson grows angrier by the day at the fact that somebody is able to destroy his uniqueness. He starts to believe that his mirror image, this second William Wilson, is purposefully attempting to copy him as much as he can, up to a point where "his singular whisper, it grew the very echo of my own" (Poe, „Wilson“ 222). The protagonist is unable to infer what is so apparent to the reader from the very beginning, namely that his double might well stem from his own imagination and might therefore not even be real. Not even "the fact that the imitation, apparently, was noticed by myself alone" (Poe, „Wilson“ 223) is any clue to him towards an understanding of his 'personified' conscience. Interestingly enough, the fact that Wilson might be the only one seeing his doppelganger resembles Blue's situation in Paul Auster's *Ghosts*, in which the detective-protagonist is commissioned by White to spy on Black; Blue, however, does not realize that White is in fact inexistent and only conjured up by his own imagination (cf. section 4.2.2).

William Wilson's anger at his counterpart's imitation of his character heightens so much that he even starts to attend a new school, only to find out soon thereafter that his double had left their old academy too. In his new environment, Wilson starts to relapse into ruinous drinking and gambling, and occupies his time with just these activities so as not to have to deal with his doppelganger. While at Oxford, however, the second Wilson reappears to play a trick on his inventor and reveals his cheating at card games. It is then that the protagonist sees no other choice but to flee the scene, only to find that

I fled in vain. My evil destiny pursued me as if in exultation, and proved, indeed, that the exercise of its mysterious dominion had as yet only begun. [...] Where, in truth, had I not bitter cause to curse him within my heart? From his inscrutable tyranny did I at length flee, panic-stricken, as from a pestilence; and to the very ends of the earth I fled in vain. (Poe, „Wilson“ 229)

Wilson travels the world in desperate need of separation from his double, but can neither escape nor hide; still, he does not realize that he is causing all the misery himself, and that all the “multiplied instances” (Poe, „Wilson“ 230) in which the two mirror images meet are ultimately his own fault: it becomes more and more obvious that the protagonist, like Poe himself, might struggle with his “attempt to come to terms with his own dual nature, to reconcile his self-destructive behavior with the rational need to restrain such behavior” (Sova 191). It is the power of the extremes, the internal fight between the sensible and the irrational that urged Poe to create this “semiautobiographical story” (Sova, 191) and that causes Wilson to imagine such a challenging and mischievous counterpart. It further seems plausible that Wilson subconsciously created this equal character to challenge himself: at several points throughout the story it appears to the reader that his erratic personality fails to excel in his endeavors, and that his life may at times have succumbed to tediousness because he had never been tempted before²⁴. Wilson himself alludes to this point when he assigns to his double an

elevated character, [...] majestic wisdom, the apparent omnipresence and omnipotence, added to a feeling of terror, with which certain other traits in his nature and assumptions inspired me; [the double] had operated, hitherto, to impress me with an idea of my own utter weakness and helplessness, and to suggest an implicit, although bitterly reluctant submission to his arbitrary will. (Poe, „Wilson“ 230)

The word ‘will’ is key to understanding Wilson’s creation of his doppelganger:

The name William Wilson, as the narrator tells us, is a *nom pro tem*. The chosen disguise reveals that its bearer is, in his own view, self-begotten: he is William Wilson, William son of his own *Will*. He has, that is, willed himself into being – willed the self we meet, the one that survives its murder of its double. (Hoffman, *Grotesques* 15)

The protagonist has illustrated this point in the introduction of his own character: he is “the master of [his] own actions” (Poe, „Wilson“ 217) and can do with his life as he pleases. Nevertheless, his conscience, the second Wilson, gets the better of him and robs him of any capacity to disregard anything unpleasant. He seems to be trapped in an endless cycle, one in which he needs the superior alter ego to exist in order to reassure himself, but simultaneously curses it for its existence. As Wilson struggles to

²⁴ cf. Poe, *Wilson* 217.

rid himself of the haunting presence and feeling of his double during his times at Eton and Oxford, the second Wilson keeps reappearing for very short instances, only to whisper a few words in the protagonist's ear and leave again. Wilson is always sure that it is his evil 'partner' who is doing the whispering, despite the fact that he can never see his face because of the lack of light²⁵. This darkness that falls onto the doppelganger's face may be construed as a metaphor for the darkness that is cast over Wilson's identity: he cannot see himself for who he really is and, consequently, cannot make out the analogousness between him and his double. He seems vulnerable, at the mercy of his own illusion and fate, desperate to escape what he has evoked himself.

When during one of his trips to Rome Wilson tries to seduce the Neapolitan Duke Di Broglia's wife at a masquerade ball, his mischievous actions are again interrupted by his counterpart: "At this moment I felt a light hand placed upon my shoulder, and that ever-remembered, low, damnable *whisper* within my ear" (Poe, „Wilson“ 231). Due to the ever-grown frustration caused by his imitator, it is at this moment that Wilson boils over with anger, drags the second man into a private room and bombards him with all the feelings he built up inside:

[E]very syllable I uttered seemed as new fuel to my fury. [...] Upon entering, I thrust him furiously from me. [...] I was frantic with every species of wild excitement, and felt within my single arm the energy and power of a multitude. In a few seconds I forced him by sheer strength against the wainscoting, and thus, getting him at mercy, plunged my sword, with brute ferocity, repeatedly through and through his bosom. (Poe, „Wilson“ 231).

As Wilson turns his attention away from the bloodbath he is causing, he feels that the scene is changing: he suddenly sees a mirror where his antagonist had stood before, a mirror that reflects his own face, his own physical entirety. Unbelieving of what was happening before him, he immediately corrects his observation to say that it was still the second Wilson standing before him "in the agonies of his dissolution. [...] Not a thread in all his raiment – not a line in all the marked and singular lineaments of his face which was not, even in the most absolute identity, *mine own!*" (Poe, „Wilson“ 231). Despite the fact that the protagonist suddenly identifies more with his

²⁵ "This the faint light enabled me to perceive; but the features of his face I could not distinguish" (Poe, *Wilson* 225).

doppelganger than ever before during the story, it is still unclear whether he can really make out their likeness, let alone whether he can identify the second Wilson as his conscience. The veil of darkness that has up to this point been cast over Wilson's identity has disappeared, and so it only remains to determine whether "he does survive the murder of his doppelganger, or whether he speaks his lurid confession from beyond the grave. If he survives, he does so in a condition of madness which his exacerbated prose style embodies and reveals" (Hoffman, *Grotesques* 15). Even though the second Wilson blames the protagonist of having murdered himself, Poe does not present a closing solution to the case: does Wilson really commit suicide? Is the physical battle he fights with his antagonist only a symbol for his inner struggle? In that case, is he just finally able to make peace with his conscience in order to find the right track? As Daniel Hoffman puts it, "What is CONSCIENCE, after all, but that part of the ego which regards the rest as an object which it can judge. The part so regarded is the less developed, the more infantile, regressive, narcissistic. The more primitive, the more uncontrolled, incivil, aggressive" (*Grotesques* 18), and it hovers over the body it inhabits like a ghost that whispers fatalities into its master's ear.

"In its psychological probing, and in the success of its objectifying the twin irrepressible impulses to do evil and to judge oneself" (Hoffman, *Grotesques* 18), the tale of William Wilson makes for the ultimate representation of the 'Imp of the Perverse'. As has been discussed before, this concept stands for people's inclination to do evil, when they intrinsically know that they should not. While it lives in everyone, some are more plagued by its existence than others, which is what makes it possible to equate the imp with the conscience. William Wilson is haunted by a personified conscience that is nothing but mad and evil, and that ultimately provokes him to commit murder. "He cannot objectify it as a character", and so it must remain as an impersonal notion that stands for

many basic postulates of Poe's *donnée*: the division of the self, the destructive opposition of the death-wish and the life-wish; fear of death, blindness, suffocation [...]; the unanticipated eruption of aggressive impulse, and of self-incrimination; the incurable addition to drink (or drugs) which speeds the self-destructive impulse on its way; and the wish-fantasy of escape from all these predicaments. (Hoffman *Grotesques*, 14-5)

The elements mentioned above also summarize once more the anxieties and problems Poe had to deal with in his life. He was haunted by his alcohol and drug abuse, his ever-changing temper and his fear of losing himself and his loved ones. He constructed a literary and narrating self that seems to speak from Poe's soul in "William Wilson": he struggled just as much with the binaries of his existence as Wilson does, he destroyed himself both mentally and physically up to a point where his actions eventually destroyed him. In the story, as in Poe's life, "[e]very interposition of the second William Wilson is resented by the first" until, in the end, "[t]he moral life has triumphed over the sensual life of Wilson, who has defied the principle of identity, which takes its own revenge" (Quinn 287) in death.

2.2.2. THE MAN OF THE CROWD

Published in 1840, Poe presents another first-person narrator who, at the opening of the story, says that “‘er lasst sich nicht lesen’ – it does not permit itself to be read” („Crowd“ 232)²⁶. The reader is confused about the contrary use of pronouns in the respective German and English versions of the quote: while “er” should be translated as “he”, the “it” the narrator uses more sensibly refers to the book about which this statement has been made, meaning that “the book was too shocking to be read” (Thompson 232). However, as with the quote taken from La Bruyère, Poe yet again foreshadows his character’s struggle to either read himself or someone else. In his article “The Limits of Reason: Poe’s Deluded Detectives” (1975), Gerald Kennedy establishes “The Man of the Crowd” as the “beginning [...] of Poe’s ratiocinative cycle” (185), and so it becomes clear that the narrator-protagonist must reason himself into his own mind, as well as that of an ‘antagonist’. When this unnamed storyteller contemplates that “[n]ow and then, alas, the conscience of man takes up a burthen so heavy in horror that it can be thrown down only into the grave” (Poe, „Crowd“ 232), the reader feels as if he were thrown into a new adventure with William Wilson and his struggle to make peace with said conscience. The protagonist at hand, however, handles his case much more efficiently: despite the fact that he suffers from an unnamed illness, he uses his intellect to investigate as much of the world as he can. As he sits in an equally unnamed coffee house in London, he inspects the passersby through the window, absorbing every aspect of the nature of the people: their exteriors, the differences and similarities between their wardrobe, expressions, and overall appearances. Despite the fact that his deep interest in distinguishing between classes and groups of people is only amateurish, the narrator soon establishes himself as a type of pseudo-detective. In this way, he appears to be a predecessor of Poe’s Dupin, a hobby investigator too interested in “the essence of all crime” (Poe, „Crowd“ 232) so as not to dive into any case that presents itself.

²⁶ „According to most critics, Poe meant that the book was too shocking to be read. But the literal translation of the German can be applied to the situation of the narrator trying to ‘read’ (understand) the old man; he will not ‘permit’ himself to be read” (Thompson 232).

As the narrator describes and categorizes the masses of people passing by his window he realizes that it is far from difficult for him to figure out their statuses or main agendas; when one particular man “at once arrested and absorbed [his] whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of [his] expression” (Poe, „Crowd“ 233), however, the narrator is incapable of classifying him like any other person he has seen before. For reasons unknown to himself, he starts to follow his target in order “to know more of him”; he feels “obliged to follow him closely” (Poe, „Crowd“ 236). According to Kennedy, this is exactly what distinguishes this pseudo-private eye from the future Dupin: he “cannot maintain a critical detachment”, and the longer he follows the man of the crowd, the more he undergoes a “shift in [his] attitude from dispassionate objectivity to subjective fascination” (188). While Gerald Kennedy views this protagonist’s actions as inferior to Dupin’s, it appears more probable that Poe’s fiction was in a state of transformation. While William Wilson was far too passive to ever be considered a detective, the narrator in “The Man of the Crowd” actually pursues his target of interest both physically and mentally. As the first of Poe’s (semi-) detectives ever, it is only natural for him to lack the fine tunes of an actual investigator. Paul Jahshan states that “the detective is best seen in Poe as he is engaged in the act of flânerie” (3); the narrator in the given story presents exactly this willingness to wander through the city for as long as it takes to identify his subject, and it is this characteristic that makes him resemble the future Dupin.

What remains to be determined is that the narrator-protagonist is a lot like William Wilson in that he is incapable of seeing what or who he is truly h(a)unting: himself. After pursuing his target for hours with the intention of never being found out, the narrator suddenly stops “fully in front of the wanderer, [and] gazed at him steadfastly in the face” (Poe, „Crowd“ 238). His opposite takes no notice of him, however, as if he were entirely invisible. Yet again, Poe reiterates a thought from “William Wilson” and lays out an idea for Paul Auster’s *Ghosts*: it appears that the narrator in “The Man of the Crowd” is the only one who can see the man with the fascinating expression, while he himself remains unseen as well. Despite the fact that he does not seem to be haunting a ghostly conscience that only resides within himself (like Wilson), but an actual person he cannot understand, it remains clear that Poe repeats his theme of the split personality: “the story is after all concerned with the limits of knowledge and the

ambiguities which frustrate our efforts to penetrate the veil of appearances” (Kennedy 190), both with regard to ourselves and others. The narrator becomes obsessed with the old man he is following, and after several days of the same game, he finally realizes that he has come full circle:

This old man [...] is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds. The worst heart of the world is that of a grosser book than the ‘*Hortulus Animae*’, and perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that ‘*er lasst sich nicht lesen*’. (Poe, „Crowd“ 239)

Referring back to “William Wilson” once more, the reader might even go as far as equating the protagonist-Wilson with the old wanderer in “The Man of the Crowd”, and the doppelgänger-Wilson with the unnamed narrator. They seem to be following and haunting each other in circles; while the one protagonist is actively trying to escape his pursuer, the other is one who is actively pursuing. While for Wilson it was ‘in vain’ to flee, for the narrator it is ‘in vain’ to keep chasing. From this follows that Poe presents the possible interchangeability of his characters²⁷, and even suggests a pseudo-detective possibly in search of a solution to a different story – the William Wilson crime. As will be seen in the following part of this analysis, it is not until the creation of Dupin that Poe treats an actual detective-like persona “who would rationalize the anxieties and fixations of the narrator of ‘The Man of the Crowd’ while attempting to decipher the complexities and mysteries of the cities in seemingly logical and credible ways” (Gutiérrez 156).

The apparent interchangeability of characters in Poe’s stories goes back to what Paul Jahshan calls “the dichotomy between the interior and the exterior” (5), which again points to obvious conflicts of identity. The narrator is sitting in a coffee house, observing and investigating the outside world. While he watches the Londoners hurrying by, he clearly states that he classifies them according to their physical appearances. Of course, he tries to identify their gestures and facial expressions, but does not go further into detail. The old man who catches his attention, however, is of great in-depth interest to him because of his ‘idiosyncrasy’. This suggests that the

²⁷ cf. section 4.2

narrator is in fact interested in his opposite's uniqueness while searching for his own identity. He stands out from the crowd, and the narrator's obsession with finding him out suggests his desperate need to be found (out) himself. Contrary to what he initially claims, the pseudo-detective-narrator in "The Man of the Crowd" is, in part, a victim like many of Poe's characters of the "limited comprehension of their own problems and states of mind" (Gargano qtd. in Kennedy 188). Contrary to Dupin, he only investigates on the surface of the case, but is incapable of entering a deeper level. Insofar, he rather resembles the "comically ineffectual Prefect" (Kennedy 194) of Poe's successive detective stories, a man too unprofessional and inaccurate to ever be able to penetrate the interior of both the criminal and the case itself. Furthermore, as the narrator fails to see while not being seen, it is not just him and his 'antagonist' who are reflections of each other, or of the two William Wilsons. The frame of the story itself, as Jonathan Auerbach has suggested, "can sharply be divided into two parts, two ways of seeing that comment on each other" (28). The first consists of passive descriptions of the exterior world, while the second actively indulges in what the first prescribed. In this way,

[t]he plot actually emerges from a curious double movement: as the narrator descends the social scale, moving *inward* to reflect on his own depravity, the double abruptly appears, compelling him to venture *outward* into the crowd. Leaving his fixed observation post to haunt the streets in quest of the old man's significance, the narrator seeks to escape impending introspection, to flee the torments of self-analysis. The self metamorphoses into an other, the old man, whose wanderings permit the narrator to mingle with the masses he had formerly simply watched. (Auerbach 30-1)

Like William Wilson before and Auster's protagonists following him, this story's narrator is lost in this multitude of people and is as much 'the man of the crowd' as his target is. The city swallows up the old man's confused meanderings, accepts him as just one of innumerable fish in its sea, and cannot see the specialness that the narrator detects in him. The narrator is equally a routinely construct of this London crowd: he sits in the coffee house as a silent observer among dozens of others who similarly made it their habit to watch and contemplate the behavior of their fellow men. He notes that "[t]here was nothing very distinctive" (Poe, „Crowd“ 233) about the majority of the people before his eyes; and it is at this point that the reader realizes that the narrator's trouble is that there is nothing 'distinctive' about him either. He goes in search of the unique features that distinguish the old man from the masses, and thereby tries to

identity what is exclusive about himself, all the while knowing that his opposite is a man who stands *out* of the crowd, while he swims *within* it. Not only does this allude to the dividedness of the structure of this story (passive vs. active), or to the binary oppositions of logic and insanity, but first and foremost to the duality (and interchangeability) of the characters.

Critical interpretation of the tale has dealt primarily with the symbolic importance of the aged peripatetic: the stranger [is] a 'prophetic image' of the narrator's 'future self' [and] represents 'man's abandonment of the moral prescription within which he is supposed to live'. (Davidson qtd. in Kennedy 186)

In this sense, it is suggested that the narrator is hurrying after a prospect of himself that is more capable of accepting who he is and why he is there. The old man seems lonely and abandoned, wandering the streets without any chance of a goal, and yet his actions appear to make sense in his own mind. While the narrator is "at a loss to comprehend the waywardness of his actions", his other half is "resolute not to abandon a scrutiny" (Poe, „Crowd“ 238) of something only he knows where or how to find. In his mystery walk the old man both approximates and distinguishes himself from Paul Auster's characters in *The New York Trilogy*: flânerie in the city is a major theme in both authors' works, and all of their characters enjoy walking, either to clear their heads or to follow their doppelgangers. The man of the crowd roams around the streets of London just as much as Auster's Stillman does in New York in *City of Glass* (see section 4.2.1), but while the latter man leaves behind traces of his paths for the narrator to find, the former is unwilling to disclose any information about where he is headed. In this way, the

search for anonymous experience only increases the individual's sense of self-conscious isolation. [...] [T]he narrating self, the head, tries to plunge into sheer temporality by investing meaning in his narrated self, [...] whose resistance to detection ultimately returns the narrator to his own subjective prison. (Auerbach 30-1)

This 'prison' is established when the narrator first realizes that after hours of chasing down the streets of London, he and his double "emerged once more upon the great thoroughfare whence we had started – the street of the D– Hotel" (Poe, „Crowd“ 237). The old man was leading his follower in circles, if purposefully or not can never be known, for when they reached that same street again after another night of moving around the city, the narrator finally understands the senselessness of his agenda. Poe

repeats at the very end of the tale that the old man decisively “*lasst sich nicht lesen*” (Poe, „Crowd“ 239) so that he remains, like William Wilson, the “outcast of all outcasts” (Poe, „Wilson“ 217) in the masses of London. Ultimately, the

relation between the old man and the urban crowd upon whom he depends, then, mirrors the interaction between the wanderer and the narrator, who follows his fugitive double through the streets of London in order to flee from himself. Their interplay, in turn, represents the relation between author and narrator, as well as the relation between the story and its readers. (Auerbach 33)

As the narrator indulges in his mission, and the reader dives into this adventure alike, the characters and their story allude to both the past and the future of their literary selves: the tale “takes us back to William Wilson’s erasure of [...] moral conscience, to his confrontation with the mob, [and] to [Poe’s] complete and coded psychohistory that compulsively seems to attach itself to his own narrative doubles obeying William Wilson’s final dictum: ‘In me didst thou exist’” (Gutiérrez 172). Simultaneously, the story also transports the reader into the future: the unnamed narrator sees in the old man an upcoming version of himself, just as much as *he* can be seen as an unfinished and impending representation of the ‘real’ detective, Dupin.

2.2.3. THE PURLOINED LETTER

In their study *Detecting Texts: The metaphysical detective story from Poe to postmodernism* (1999), Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney claim that “Poe not only initiated the classical, ‘soft-boiled’, amateur-sleuth story with his three Dupin tales, but also invented the ‘hard-boiled’ detective story with his lesser-known earlier tale, “The Man of the Crowd”” (12).

“The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, Poe’s first detective story to feature his fictional pseudo-investigator C. Auguste Dupin, presents Poe’s classical unnamed narrator who recounts the story of how he met and became friends with the private eye. He describes Dupin, who is not a professional but a hobby detective, as having “a peculiar analytic ability” which enables him to see “that most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms, and [he] was wont to follow up such assertions by direct and very startling proofs of his intimate knowledge of my own” (Poe, *Morgue* 243). It is with this statement that Dupin’s intellectually astute mind and ratiocinative method of investigation is born, and with it “the author’s preoccupation with the relationship between the mind, or rational consciousness, and the sensational influence of the world beyond the self” (Kennedy 185). “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and, subsequently, “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” both bear witness to death: in the former, it is Madame L’Espanaye and her daughter, in the latter Marie Rogêt who are murdered in the streets of Paris. The investigative implications in these stories are obvious; what needs to be stated, on the other hand, is that in these tales Poe also resorts to his beloved genre of the Gothic: after the crime is committed in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, for example,

a search was made in the chimney, and (horrible to relate!) the corpse of the daughter, head downward, was dragged therefrom; it having been thus forced up the narrow aperture for a considerable distance. [...] Upon examining it [the body], many excoriations were perceived, no doubt occasioned by the violence with which it had been thrust up and disengaged. Upon the face were many severe scratches, and, upon the throat, dark bruises, and deep indentations of finger nails, as if the deceased had been throttled to death. (Poe, *Morgue* 247)

From this moment on, a sensation of terror hovers over the story as Dupin intends to logically discover the assassin, who turns out to be an escaped orangutan. Interestingly

enough, in “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt”, Poe moves away from directly addressing or describing the horror that befalls the victim. Instead, Dupin only contemplates the implications of the discovery of Marie’s corpse in the Seine, and imagines the possible circumstances of the felony with the help of clues hidden in newspaper articles. All the while the unnamed narrator remains at the pseudo-sleuth’s side; he is never an active participant in the detection of the wrong-doing, but rather a loyal by-stander who observes Dupin in as much detail as Dupin observes his surroundings and recounts the events to the reader.

When Poe’s creative talent in the field of the detective story reaches its final installment, “The Purloined Letter” (1845), it remains clear that the author’s intention while writing has moved way past the two previous Dupin stories. In “The Purloined Letter”, as the title suggests, “the definite crime [is] the theft of a letter whose contents remain unknown throughout the story, but which is of critical importance to the queen”. In this way, “the titular document goes missing, causing chagrin, apprehension, even paranoia, but no murder or anything of the sort – and hence no body” (Plochocki 24-7). This absence of a corpse and thus, of a murder, is exactly what distinguishes this story so much from its predecessors. In “The Purloined Letter” Dupin’s rational deduction is even more fundamental for the solving of the crime, for, in its core, the tale lacks any sort of obscurity with regard to the case: “The individual who purloined it [the letter] is known; this beyond a doubt; he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession” (Poe, „Letter“ 269). As the Prefect of the Parisian police, Monsieur G–, informs Dupin of the fact that the Minister D– is the thief of the letter, what remains for the amateur investigator to do is to trace back the villain’s thoughts in order to outwit him and be able to recover the letter. Thus, at the heart of the story lies “an identification of the reasoner’s intellect with that of his opponent” (Poe, „Letter“ 375). What is most salient about this analytical practice that eventually solves the crime is that thought takes priority over action. The detective stands as a hyper-rational being whose expertise in psychologically analyzing his fellow men ultimately leads him to understand where the Minister is hiding the stolen letter. Dupin puts himself in the villain’s position and mind to understand what exactly he is planning as he would in a game of even and odd, during which “I fashion the expressions of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of

his [opponent's], and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the [other's] expression" (Poe, „Letter“ 375). Only when Dupin has recognized his antagonist's intentions can he act on his newly acquired knowledge and defeat him.

What the detective stresses in this process of identification with the Minister is that his opponent would commit the crime in a very simplistic and obvious way, because he would expect the police to falsely put it past him to apply a complex scheme. This realization emphasizes the harsh distinction between Dupin and the Prefect's methods of investigation. As the Prefect enters to ask Dupin for his help in the case of the purloined letter he states that “the business is *very simple* [and] excessively *odd*. [...] The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair *is* so simple, and yet baffles us altogether” (Poe, „Letter“ 368). The investigator immediately realizes that “it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts [the Prefect] at fault” because “the mystery is a little *too plain*, [...] *too self-evident*” (Poe, „Letter“ 368) for the police to figure out. Through this, Poe illuminates the binaries of surface and depth that are essential for detecting the letter: the police have “investigated every nook and corner of the premises in which it is possible that the paper can be concealed” (Poe, „Letter“ 370), and have yet failed to detect it. It is striking that Dupin realizes that the Minister's way of concealing the document is so deep that it becomes plain again; therefore, Dupin's challenge is to identify with his antagonist on the deepest level possible in order to reach the surface of the crime. The police force is unsuccessful in finding the letter because they struggle with the same difficulty: despite the fact that they search everywhere, they manage to overlook what is right before their eyes.

When the detective advises the Prefect to do a “thorough re-search of the premises” (Poe, „Letter“ 372) he does not urge him to disassemble or pick apart furniture in the Minister's apartment, but to discover the most logical hiding place “for the matter at hand” (Poe, „Letter“ 374). The officer, however, misunderstands this suggestion and goes to inspect the bureau yet again with the “aid of a most powerful microscope” (Poe, „Letter“ 372). At this point of the story, Poe alludes to the difficulty of surface versus depth through the semantic field of vision: there are items the plain eye cannot perceive entirely, but for which it needs a microscope to get into its detailed

particulars. The Prefect believes to be able to understand the Minister's approach to the crime by inspecting hiding places most commonly known to the police through the depth of this microscope. However, the examination of the premises is only deep on a superficial level, for the Prefect does not consider the Minister purposefully hiding the letter in a place too simple for the police to think of. He demonstrates the superficiality of his inspection by saying that he "divided the entire surface [of the premises] into compartments" (Poe, „Letter“ 372). The use of the word 'surface' suggests this naïve way of aspiring sophistication and complexity when he should be opting for simplicity. The microscope the Prefect relies on so heavily is as much only a helpful device during the physical quest for the document as the pair of green spectacles Dupin feigningly uses to support his "weak eyes" („Letter“, 379) when he eventually raids the Minister's apartment for the letter. However, it is not before Dupin decides to take the action into his own hands that physical vision becomes important for his solving of the case.

When Dupin and his unnamed companion open the story with a friendly sit-in in Dupin's library, darkness encompasses not only the location, but also the countenances and minds of the present characters. This again stresses the significance of the thought, which does not require any source of light and subsequent vision, unlike physical action. This is exemplified when the detective decides that if the officer wants to discuss "any point requiring reflection, [...] we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark" (Poe, „Letter“ 368). From this follows that Dupin's technique of invading a felon's inner core does not make use of actual sight produced by the eyes. Rather, the insight he is determined to get is induced by a mental sort of visualization and imagination.

The aforementioned window to the soul Dupin proposes exists in every person marks the final point of his method of investigation: through his identification with his opponent, the detective mentally approaches to close to the criminal that he becomes his doppelganger. When he has successfully inhabited said mind, he can see through the Minister's window from the inside to detect what is outside. This technique refers back to both "William Wilson" and "The Man of the Crowd": while in the former story the protagonist discovers himself through the help of a mirror, in the latter the protagonist looks through the window of the coffee house to spot himself in the old man of the crowd.

Dupin goes on to indicate another similarity between “The Purloined Letter” and “The Man of the Crowd” which stresses Poe’s theme of identity and psychological self-splitting. The detective states that

the Prefect and his cohort fail so frequently, first, by default of [...] identification, and, secondly, by ill-admeasurement, or rather through non-admeasurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged. They consider only their *own* ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which *they* would have hidden it. They are right in this much – that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of *the mass*; but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them, of course. (Poe, „Letter“ 375)

The ‘mass’ Dupin alludes to can be equated with the London mass of people the ‘man of the crowd’ stands out from. While in the previous tale, the protagonist’s main goal is to haunt the old man to achieve a similar uniqueness as that which he detects in his doppelganger, it appears that in “The Purloined Letter” the Prefect and his team of officers comfortably resort to their places in the mass. Dupin says that the police “extend or exaggerate their old modes of practice, without touching their principles” (Poe, „Letter“ 375) only when this is of extreme necessity, and the “*recherchés* nooks for concealment” the Prefect trawls with such care “are adapted only for ordinary occasions, and would be adopted only by ordinary intellects” (Poe, „Letter“ 376). Thereby, Dupin classifies the police and their methods as ‘ordinary’, while he and the Minister are too extraordinary in their likeness and protrusion from the masses. Dupin is thus, in a way, a mirror image of the narrator in “The Man of the Crowd”: he haunts his double, the Minister, a man as hyper-intellectual as himself and as interesting and unique as the old man of the crowd. What distinguishes Dupin from this narrator, however, can again be traced back to the discrepancy between thought and action. Both their intentions are to unveil the secrets of their doppelganger-antagonists, but while the detective in the story at hand shines because of his mental capacities, the narrator in Poe’s former story finds satisfaction in physically pursuing his opposite. The narrator lacks Dupin’s capability of identification, and thus, the old man’s unwillingness to reveal his inner self brings the superficial investigation to a halt. The narrator must accept that the mystery of the ‘man of the crowd’ and with it the mystery of his own self cannot be unveiled. It is this fact that proves Poe’s literary development between the two stories: while the unknown narrator in “The Man of the Crowd”

served as a prototype for a (pseudo)-detective, Dupin is the well-engineered and matured end product of the author's creation of the 'father of all fictional detectives'. Poe suggests that the narrator and the old man in "The Man of the Crowd" can be compared with Dupin and the Minister, respectively. As the storyteller is a yet unfinished version of the later detective, it can be said that the old man runs from him to be incarnated as the Minister when the narrator's time has come to shine as Dupin. As has already been illustrated in the previous sections, Poe yet again advocates the substitutionality of his characters within and across his stories, a point that is later adopted in the fiction of Paul Auster (cf. section 4.2). In his *New York Trilogy*, the characters frequently jump from one story to the next and often even share names, so that it seems that the reader is presented with different versions of only one story.

As "The Purloined Letter" progresses, it becomes more and more clear that Dupin and the Minister are versions of the same character. The detective knows D– "as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity. [...] I felt, also, that [this] whole train of thought [...] would necessarily pass through the mind of the Minister" (Poe, „Letter“ 378). Due to their mental likeness, when Dupin attempts to reconstruct the Minister's method of concealment, it seems that he need not really equate his mind with that of his opponent, but merely think how he would have committed the crime himself²⁸. Thereby, Dupin relates to what he previously accused the police of, to "consider only their *own* ideas of ingenuity" (Poe, „Letter“ 375); however, this claim is relativized with regard to his own intellect and cleverness, for he, like the Minister D–, is a "*monstrum horrendum*", and simultaneously a "man of genius" (Poe, „Letter“ 381).

What remains questionable is whether Dupin is as much in search of his own identity as William Wilson and the 'men' of the crowd were before him. In spite of the detective and criminal's apparently shared characteristics, Dupin does not seem like one lost part of a pair of identical twins. He appears as an ingenuous man in no need of excessive self-reflection, which is why, despite his numerous in-depth contemplations,

²⁸ An identical situation occurs in Auster's *Ghosts*: "There are moments when he [Blue] feels so completely in harmony with Black, so naturally at one with the other man, that to anticipate what Black is going to do, to know when he will stay in his room and when he will go out, he need merely look into himself" (186).

he ultimately remains as somewhat of a transparent character. In her most recent study, *The Double, The Labyrinth and the Locked Room: Metaphors of Paradox in Crime Fiction and Film*, Ilana Shiloh elaborates on this predicament and simultaneously justifies Dupin's position in the realm of the doubles:

In this tale ["The Purloined Letter"] Poe formulates the dictum that has become the golden rule of fictional and real-detectives ever since: 'the identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent.' Identification does not imply shared identity; it pre-supposes an initial difference. But as the success of the investigation is contingent on the detective projecting himself, in an imaginative heap, on the criminal mind, the difference between the investigator and the perpetrator is gradually obliterated. (5)

The duality between Dupin and the Minister thus primarily resides in their mental features. The detective came to know the criminal as a mathematician and a poet, two identifying characteristics that Dupin possesses himself as well. When D- applies the dual traits of these talents and both steals and hides the Queen's letter, it is not long before Dupin mirrors his behavior. When he eventually finds the purloined letter, the investigator exchanges it for "his own facsimile, in order to gain ascendancy over the Minister" (Shiloh 21). In this sense, it is questionable whether the case is ever *really* solved in a strict sense, for Dupin echoes his antagonist's immoral deed by outwitting him in the same way the Minister wanted to trick the queen. It is with this doubling of the theft that Dupin closes the story and dismisses his "Bi-Part Soul" (Poe, *Morgue* 244), a character trait attributed to him by the unnamed narrator in the first installment of Poe's triad of detective stories. Dupin's friend "amused [himself] with the fancy of a double Dupin – the creative and the resolvent" (Poe, *Morgue* 244); with the use of the word 'resolvent' he alludes to the obvious elimination of a part of Dupin's striking quality as the superior of the doubles in "The Purloined Letter". Even though Dupin steals the letter for different reasons than the Minister, with his imitation of the deed Dupin approximates himself to his 'twin', this time, however, not through his method of ratiocinative identification but through "vanity and the wish to settle old personal accounts" (Shiloh 21). Dupin and Minister D- can from this moment onward be considered doppelgangers, firstly, through the equating of their mental capacities, and secondly, through the repeating of the theft of the letter. By intending to trick Dupin, only the antagonist eventually self-destructs, however: the Minister is found out by Dupin due to his logically deductive aptitude while the detective's thirst for truth and

justice is appeased with the defeat of D—. Even if Dupin mirrors an initially criminal act, his morality is not called into question because of his sincere intentions. Nevertheless, what concludes Poe's tale is the fact that Dupin identifies so much with the Minister that they seem to melt into a single subject and Poe's ultimate point in "The Purloined Letter" comes full circle: if the moral detective can in the end be interchanged with the immoral antagonist, even if his aim is not to commit an actual offense but to teach the villain a lesson, then there is no character in any of Poe's detective fictions that does not struggle (internally) with a split personality and, thus, a doppelganger.

3. FROM POEtry to AUSTERity

In “Mysteries We Reread, Mysteries of Rereading: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story”, John T. Irwin uses “the term ‘analytic detective fiction’ [...] to distinguish the genre invented by Poe, in the Dupin tales of the 1840s, from stories whose main character is a detective but whose main concern is not analysis but adventure, stories whose true genre is less detective fiction than quest romance” (27). The analysis of Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” has shown exactly how little Dupin is interested in this ‘adventure’ because of his natural tendency towards contemplative passivity and ratiocination.

According to Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, Poe invents the “self-reflexive, philosophical, consciously literary detective stories” (4) and thereby establishes a basis not only for the aforementioned analytic, but also the ‘metaphysical’ detective story. Poe’s tales, beginning, to a certain extent, with “The Man of the Crowd”, give birth not only to the classical character-triad of detective, villain and casualty, but also to the issue of self-reflexivity and self-splitting, both with regard to the characters as well as to the texts themselves. The “correspondences” within this triad “suggest the blurring of ethical distinctions, the reduction of meaningful differences into a meaningless sameness. If the investigator, the victim and the perpetrator mirror each other, the pursuit of crime is divested of moral validity” (Shiloh 20), as has been shown with regard to “The Purloined Letter”. Why the art form of the detective story has so far been termed ‘metaphysical’ can be explained by the genre’s ability to be “distinguished [from others] by the profound questions that it raises about narrative, interpretation, subjectivity, the nature of reality, and the limits of knowledge” (Merivale and Sweeney 1). These elements were already existent in Poe’s detective stories of the American Romantic era of the 19th century, and so Auster’s adoption of traditions as old as these make his influence on future writers of detective fiction revolutionary. Probably one of the most famous representatives of the genre of the (post)modern American crime novel is Paul Auster, whose expanding and developing of Poe’s initial ideas has brought about groundbreaking findings and

interpretations within and beyond his field. Auster's work is classified as 'anti-detective', a title that even more elaborately than 'metaphysical' refers to fiction that

parodies or subverts traditional detective-story conventions – such as narrative closure and the detective's role as surrogate reader – with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot. (Merivale and Sweeney 2)

It is with the occurrence of this term²⁹ that a smooth transition from Poe to Auster's detectives is guaranteed. Not only does Auster frequently reference (both directly and indirectly) Poe in his writing so as to pay tribute to the founding father of the detectives, he also adopts his predecessor's obsession with identity crises and (ghostly) doppelgangers, and develops these themes up to the climax of absolute self-destruction of his characters. As has been noted in the previous sections, Dupin as well as the character-pairs in "William Wilson" and "The Man of the Crowd" are later featured in some form in Auster's *The New York Trilogy*: wannabe-, pseudo- and anti-detectives as well as actual private investigators (who turn into villains), observers who become the observed, writers who turn into detectives, and, first and foremost, protagonists whose (lack of) self-reflection ultimately grows to be their worst nightmare. As Auster continues to (secretly) include Poe in his fiction, he casts a light on the importance of metafictional and intertextual elements in any fictional narrative, which proves that his literary achievements rightly fall under the category of postmodernist writing.

The deeper implications of Auster's themes for this analysis, as well as the connection between Poe and Auster will be investigated in the following sections.

²⁹ "In 1972, William V. Spanos coined the term 'anti-detective story' to describe narratives that 'evoke the impulse to 'detect' ... in order to violently frustrate it by refusing to solve the crime" (qtd. in Merivale and Sweeney 2-3)

4. PAUL AUSTER: IN SEARCH OF THE ARTIST

Paul Benjamin Auster, son of Samuel and Queenie Auster, was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1947 as “[t]he grandson of first-generation Jewish immigrants [and] grew up in South Orange [where he] attended high school in Maplewood, 20 miles southwest of New York” (Begley). Like Poe, Auster already felt like an outsider to his family during his childhood, “which was dominated by a lack of fatherly love and attention” (Rubin 62). He spent his adolescent life trying to please and connect with his father, only to find him always busy with work or entirely absent from their home.

When during his time at Columbia High School Auster’s parents got divorced, the disappointment he felt with his parents led him to leave the United States after graduation to head for France.

After my parents were divorced, everyone dispersed: my mother began a new life, I went off to college, and my sister stayed with my mother until she, too, went off to school. Only my father remained [in their home]. Because of a clause in the divorce agreement which stipulated that my mother still owned a share of the house and would be given half the proceeds whenever it was sold (which made my father reluctant to sell), or from some secret refusal to change his life (so as not to show the world that the divorce had affected him in a way he could not control), or simply from inertia, an emotional lethargy that prevented him from taking any action, he stayed on, living alone in a house that could have accommodated six or seven people. (Invention 7)

Paul Auster returned to the United States to enroll in Columbia University and received his master’s degree in 1970 after having spent another year in Paris as part of his education. During this time as a student, he became increasingly interested in literature and started to write and translate poems, primarily by French poets. Auster returned to France again in 1971 and stayed there until 1974 after having travelled around the Atlantic as a seaman. All through these three years, he put great effort into several jobs at once, working in the Parisian bureau of the *New York Times* and as a translator to earn a living. He returned to the United States and got married to Lydia Davis who bore him a son in 1977. Two years later, Auster’s world crumbled with the surprising death of his father and the subsequent impossibility of ever truly getting to know him or making him care for his son.

After many years of not having lived at home and having fallen out with his father for the most part, this tragic event made Auster realize that “[e]ven before his [father’s] death he had been absent, and long ago the people closest to him had learned to accept this absence, to treat it as the fundamental quality of his being” (*Invention* 6). Still, as a devastated son, Auster had to face the legacies of his father’s life as well as the past of his own. His need of coming to terms with this past led him to eternalize the memory of his father’s life in a memoir, *The Invention of Solitude*, which he created only a few weeks after his father’s passing. As the title suggests, Auster dedicated the first half of this work, *Portrait of an Invisible Man*, entirely to recounting the life of his father and his own experiences with him and his absence. Interestingly enough, it is the family mansion his father had lived in alone for the last 15 years of his life that affect Auster the most in his story: just like many characters of his later novels, Samuel Auster had left behind an estate so much like himself – an empty house, “the exact and faithful representation of his inner world” (*Invention* 9). From all of this follows the bitter and yet sad tone in Auster’s memoir, a piece of writing that presents as its ending an homage to Auster’s own son, Daniel, which subtly but determinedly records not only the author’s love for his child, but also his wish never to fall out with his son as much as he did with his own father³⁰.

While the second part of Auster’s memoir breaks with the previous one in terms of chronological and obvious personal life recounts, *The Book of Memory* still deals with concepts that have haunted and occupied Auster’s mind throughout most of his life. He treats elements such as coincidence and chance which clearly relate back to the suddenness of his father’s death and Auster’s own struggle to deal with this injustice in life. He tries to keep a distance from this narrative by referring to his protagonist as “A” or “he”, but makes it clear at the same time that the ‘protagonist’ remembering instances of a certain life in a jumbled order is still himself, a figure in search of a self that he thought he had lost³¹.

The year of Auster’s father’s death was to become even more tragic up to a point where the author found himself “in a state of extreme demoralization” (Rubin 63).

³⁰ cf. *Invention* 69.

³¹ cf. Rubin 63.

Auster had to endure the death of his beloved grandfather as well as his divorce with Lydia, the latter of which further brought on the fear of losing and never being able to see his son Daniel again. Disappointed with the fact that he had to face the issue of divorce he had once found so despicable with his parents, Auster spent a significant period of time in complete isolation at the beginning of the 1980s, feeling the mark separation and death had left on his soul. Auster's reaction to trauma seems strikingly similar to Poe's, and simultaneously both authors can certainly be related to their characters' handling of similar events in their writing.

When Auster learned of the inheritance his father left him, he decides that his spirit must be lifted at some point and puts the money into publishing *The Invention of Solitude* in 1982. Auster finds consolation in his writing and goes on to create his first books of fiction, *The New York Trilogy* (1987), *Moon Palace* (1989) and *The Music of Chance* (1990), all of which show direct references to his personal life: the *Trilogy's* three short novels feature questionable or absent father figures as well as writers searching for themselves and somewhere to belong. In *Moon Palace* and *The Music of Chance*, separation and inheritance both play a role, while the latter novel also deals with a temporarily reclusive protagonist.

What all of Auster's novels seem to have in common is the element of a search for identity, in the form of characters seeking it inside or outside of themselves, in relation to both people and places that surround them, as Auster has done himself throughout most of his life. His personae find themselves lost, deliberately abandoned by the author because

even if we're surrounded by others, we essentially live our lives alone: real life takes place inside us [...] In the end, we know who we are because we can think about who we are. Our sense of self is formed by the pulse of consciousness within us – the endless monologue, the life-long conversation we have with ourselves. And this takes place in absolute solitude. It's impossible to know what someone else is thinking. [...] [W]e're looking at ourselves. But we can only see ourselves because someone else has seen us first. In other words, we learn our solitude from others. [...] What is so startling to me, finally, is that you don't begin to understand your connection to others until you are alone. And the more intensely you are alone, the more deeply you plunge into a state of solitude, the more deeply you feel that connection. It isn't possible for a person to isolate himself from other people. No matter how apart you might find yourself in a physical sense, [...] every thought in your head has been born from your connection with others. (Auster, *Hunger* 299-301)

From this interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory the reader can infer that Auster's characters must deal with solitude while reflecting on their past, present and future actions and relationships in order to find their true place in the world. All protagonists of his tripartite novel *The New York Trilogy*, who are most relevant for this analysis, struggle with this issue of self, be it in respect to themselves, their wives, their absent fathers or the city they live in. The fact that *City of Glass* goes so far as to feature a character by the name of Paul Auster, for example, only underlines the author's own quest for affinity. However, the author also raises the question of what is real and what is fictional, leading the reader to believe what the protagonist believes, namely that "nothing was real except chance" (Auster, *Glass* 3). As Auster himself puts it, "[c]hance is a part of reality: we are continually shaped by the forces of coincidence, the unexpected occurs with almost numbing regularity in all our lives" (*Hunger* 269). So, it is not only Paul Auster's most famous work *The New York Trilogy* that is haunted by this concept of destiny and uncertainty, but all of his writing, just as his more recent books, the *Book of Illusions* (2002), *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005), *Man in the Dark* (2008), *Invisible* (2009) or *Sunset Park* (2010).

"The autobiographical bones on which – perhaps – Auster's art hangs become immediately visible to readers, even if they remain [at times] enigmatic. So, too, do many of his themes. The titles of his books state these themes most explicitly: hunger, chance, disappearance, solitude. This transparency is evident, but tricky" (Barone 2). The same is true for Poe, whose aforementioned story titles feature purloining (of objects or parts of oneself) and crowd (in a city where his characters lose themselves), among others. Poe's and Auster's themes are in part interchangeable as both authors as well as their characters deal with a hunger for affection, the disappearance and passing away of loved ones, and loneliness or isolation with the difficulty of gaining a hold (of themselves) in a big city. Similarly, both men use their writing to deal with the absence of their uncaring fathers by presenting characters who equally struggle with being accepted into a relationship or even into society. Their characters are haunted by the ghosts of their past, and even the intertextually referenced personae share the same tragic destiny as the actual protagonists: abandonment, alienation, emotional crises and, in some cases, death.

4.1. THE FICTION OF AUSTERity: A NEW ERA

While it remains clear that Paul Auster's fiction can be classified as postmodern writing, there is much debate among literary theorists and critics as to what this means and in how far Auster adheres to or deconstructs typical postmodern features. As its name suggests, postmodernism has moved past the transcendental ideas of modernism, its predecessor, which suggested, according to Brian McHale, "the multiplication and juxtaposition of perspectives, the focalization of all the evidence through a single 'center of consciousness' [and] virtuoso variants on interior monologue", all combined in what he calls "epistemological difficulties" (qtd. in Nicol 283). While during the late 19th and early 20th centuries modernism was concerned with raising questions regarding the existence and importance of knowledge in the world, postmodernism develops these thoughts to a point where the world itself is being called into question, so that "[i]ntractable epistemological uncertainty [...] becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability" (qtd. in Nicol 284). What follows from this is that postmodernism is a concept almost too complex to define because of its subjection to the ever-changing present-day³². Often referred to as 'anti-modernism', postmodernism thus evolved through the documented influence of theorists like Ihab Hassan (1971), Jean-François Lyotard (1979), Jean Baudrillard (1981), Andreas Huyssen (1984) and Frederic Jameson (1991), among others, whose views have not only in their native countries, but globally been recognized as classical explanations of the concept.

Linda Hutcheon, a contemporary Canadian critic and literary theorist, has further had a great impact on the development of the understanding of postmodernism, especially with her two most prominent works, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) and *The Politics of Postmodernism* (2001). Her approach towards the concept is so fundamental to this analysis because, according to her,

³² cf. Nicol 2. In this context, Nicol further states that "[r]eality is no longer something we can take for granted. [...] The changed experience of 'the real' is also a feature of more ambitious theoretical accounts of postmodernism, which seek to portray it as evidence of a paradigm shift in society as a whole, not just in terms of cultural style" (5).

[p]ostmodernism's distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale 'nudging' commitment to doubleness, or duplicity. In many ways it is an even-handed process postmodernism ultimately manages to install and enforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to say that the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' [...] are in fact 'cultural'; made by us, not given to us. (Hutcheon, *Politics* 1-2)

With her reference to "doubleness" Hutcheon thus addresses one of the most fundamental aspects of Paul Auster's postmodern writing: his characters are as much subjects to binary forms of identity as his fiction is to the duality of postmodernism. Most prominently, Auster presents plots that clearly feature postmodern structures and themes, such as chance, existential crises, the importance of writing/the writer, and (personal) failure. Simultaneously, however, Stefano Tani detects that Auster's tendency toward postmodernism is diluted because

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. (qtd. in Barone 77)

Therefore the fiction falls under what he calls "deconstructive anti-detective" (Tani qtd. in Barone 77) fiction, a type of narrative that moves away from the detective novel as it is classically known. Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, two of the most well-known fictional detectives, follow the scheme of private investigators trying to solve (murder) cases by the use of their astute intellects and logical reasoning. In the end, the detective always seems to rise to the omniscient position of the author, for he is the one who has solved the mystery and, thus, knows more than anyone else about the story. As has been shown in connection with "The Purloined Letter", Dupin is always one step ahead and identifies clues way before the reader can ever know them.

By contrast, Auster's postmodern (anti-)detective narrative "denies this satisfaction and instead portrays the detective's frustrated pursuit of authorial knowledge" (Sorapure 72). Despite the fact that his private investigators do intend to solve the crime at hand, it remains clear from the beginning of every one of his stories that they

have a much more profound issue to treat: detecting their own role and meaning in the construct that is the world. In this way, the detective moves to the center of the narrative and it is his mystery with himself that must be solved. The ‘anti’ in anti-detective fiction concerns both the investigator’s failure to attain “the position and knowledge of the author, toward which [he] and the reader strive” (Sorapure 72) but also the structure of the novel as a “paradigmatic archetype of the postmodern literary imagination” which has as its core issue the desire “to evoke the impulse to ‘detect’ [...] in order to violently frustrate it by refusing to solve the crime” (Spanos qtd. in Barone 72). While Auster applies the theme of chance as if it were pure coincidence that dominates the characters’ lives, the fact that his protagonists are incapable of achieving their actual ultimate goal runs thus far deeper. In *The New York Trilogy*, the novel under investigation in this analysis, Quinn (in *City of Glass*), Blue (in *Ghosts*) and an unnamed narrator (in *The Locked Room*) all serve as prototypes of this ‘archetype’ that is a postmodern detective. What this further introduces is the issue of self-reflection and self-evaluation that is central to postmodern writing and, as has often been claimed, stems from an increase in “cultural self-consciousness” and “reflects a greater awareness within contemporary culture of the function of language in constructing and maintaining our sense of everyday ‘reality’” (Waugh 3). In this sense, postmodern novels such as Auster’s reflect on the writing within themselves, and the literary and social construct that surrounds them, just as the characters within contemplate how they fit into this scheme. This is what creates postmodern metafiction, which, in turn demonstrates the uncertainty with which Auster, or any author within the same thought structures, attempts to describe the world he believes he and/or his characters live in. According to Patricia Waugh, fiction is then ‘meta’ when a story thus makes references to itself as it cannot represent or truly describe the actual world; the story expects the reader to read between the lines:

The metafictional novel thus situates its resistance within the form of the novel itself. [...] Ostentatiously ‘literary’ language and conventions are paraded, are set against the fragments of various cultural codes, not because there is nothing left to talk about, but because the formal structures of these literary conventions provide a statement about the dissociation between, on the one hand, the genuinely felt sense of crisis, alienation and oppression in contemporary society and, on the other, the continuance of traditional literary forms like realism which are no longer adequate vehicles for the mediation of this experience. Metafiction thus converts what it sees as the negative values of outworn literary conventions into the basis of a potentially constructive social criticism. (Waugh 12)

What remains to be determined is what exactly it is that is ‘metafictional’ about Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*. Taking into account that metafictional narratives try to establish a connection between fiction and reality, and in this way Auster’s protagonists attempt to identify what is real and what is imaginary in their own lives. In *City of Glass*, Quinn “was able to feel that he was nowhere” (Auster, 4), which suggests that while he is physically in New York, he questions whether what he sees actually exists. Equally, in *Ghosts*, “Blue can only surmise what the case is not. To say what it is, however, is completely beyond him” (Auster, 175). It is impossible for the investigator to distinguish between what actually concerns him about the mystery he is trying to solve, and what it is that goes past his understanding. He blurs the boundaries between certainty and uncertainty, and cannot say for sure what is actually happening or important. Lastly, in *The Locked Room*, the unknown storyteller can “see things that happened, I encounter images of myself in various places, but only at a distance, as though I were watching someone else” (Auster, 345). He feels as if he were stepping out of his own body to watch a more truthful version of himself in an environment that is just as instable as his own identity.

The three protagonists struggle with the same dilemma in the same city; the striking similarities between the three situations make it seem as if at times the (pseudo)-detectives were unsure of what story they are currently investigating. In the third short novel, Fanshawe, the narrator’s investigatory target, disguises himself as a man named Henry Dark, who, in *City of Glass*, is one of Quinn’s secret identities as he searches for his own mystery man, Peter Stillman. Similarly, the unnamed narrator in *The Locked Room* enjoys making up names that involve colors, as if he were pretending to exist within the world of *Ghosts*. The private investigator temporarily searching for Fanshawe in the third story goes by the name of Quinn, as if the protagonist had stepped out of the first story to serve his purpose in another. It turns out, as will be discussed later in further detail, that the characters of *The New York Trilogy* are not only interchangeable within the respective stories, but can serve as versions of each other across the novel as well³³. Their quest for uniqueness within a world that constantly presents them with doubles and an unsure reality makes for Auster’s

³³ This directly relates to the three Poe stories discussed in section 2.2.

metafiction in the novel. However, this thought can be developed even further. In another one of her elaborations, Linda Hutcheon states that postmodernism and metafiction are inextricably linked through “self-reflexivity and parodic intertextuality” (“Metafiction” 3). It is these two elements which reoccur in postmodernist writing that bring her to the conclusion that history must be considered in a thorough analysis of metafictional narration.

The term postmodernism, when used in fiction, should, by analogy, best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past. In order to distinguish this paradoxical beast from traditional historical fiction, I would like to label it ‘historiographic metafiction’. (Hutcheon, “Metafiction” 3)

What Hutcheon implies here is that the intertextual references Auster includes in all of his novels make for the ‘historiographic’ element in his (meta)fiction. To make sense of this, one needs to understand the importance and meaning of intertextuality, which, according to Julia Kristeva, is that “the text [is] a dynamic site, an ‘intersection of textual surfaces’ acquiring meaning only in its relation to other texts; in other words, signification [is] not an inherent quality in texts, but [is] produced in the interaction between texts” (qtd. in Varvogli 14). As she coined the term ‘intertextuality’, she derived her theory from French theorist Ferdinand de Saussure’s idea of the signifier and signified, which implies that

a sign is not a word’s reference to some object in the world but the combination, conveniently sanctioned, between a signifier and a signified. In the English language we employ the word ‘tree’ not because it literally points to certain tree-like objects in the world but because the signifier ‘tree’ is associated with a certain concept. [...] When humans write or speak they may believe they are being referential, but in fact they are producing specific acts of linguistic communication (*parole*) out of the available synchronic system of language (*langue*). The reference of the sign is to the system, not directly to the world. (Graham 8-9)

Therefore, when authors write, what they refer to in their works is not the actual world either, but the literary system that supports all writing. They do not benefit from the linguistic system alone, but can choose from an enormous number of literary elements, all of which stem from other authors who have done this before. Hutcheon’s ‘historiographic metafiction’ derives its sense of history from exactly this point: as authors write their stories, it is literature’s past in the form of (past) authors and their

ideas that influence those writers who succeed them, and thus enrich their texts with elements that have existed for a long time. In this sense, Auster was a reader before he was a writer, and every word he writes must naturally refer to something he had seen, heard or read before³⁴.

To prove her point concerning intertextuality, Kristeva also refers to the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, whose *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* mentions that “the object of intentions [in a literary work] is precisely the *passing of a theme through many and various voices*, its rigorous and, so to speak, irrevocable multi-voicedness and vari-voicedness” (279). Bakhtin relates this to the many voices of the characters speaking in a novel but also to the voices of authors that are referenced or mentioned within that novel. It is this web of voices that completes a narrative; Julia Kristeva even goes as far as saying that “[a]ny text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (37).

In *The New York Trilogy*, Paul Auster obviously presents elements of all of these concepts to his readers. As will be illustrated in the analyses of the individual parts of the composite novel, he was influenced by and therefore mentions and incorporates his literary heroes, such as Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne or Henry David Thoreau in his novel. He develops and uses some of their major ideas, such as Poe's ratiocination, but also their characters, such as Poe's William Wilson or Hawthorne's Fanshawe, to prove his points. He even references his own life in a very direct way: he incorporates characters that represent or stand for himself, his wife and his son, and thus develops an entirely new identity for them. Auster even justifies his use of intertextuality; through Quinn, he lets the reader know that “[w]hat interested him about the stories he wrote was not their relation to the world but their relation to other stories” (Auster, *Glass* 8), and in this sense he establishes his novel as an entirely postmodernist, metafictional and intertextual work.

³⁴ cf. Graham 9-10.

4.2. ANALYSIS

4.2.1. CITY OF GLASS

What dominates Paul Auster's tripartite novel *The New York Trilogy* above all else is "the theme of complex identity, and the novels can be read as an exploration of identity problems in the postmodern age, where the idea of the autonomous subject has given way to an understanding of subject and identity characterized by instability" (Berge 101). So it appears that the protagonists – Quinn in *City of Glass*, Blue in *Ghosts* and the unnamed narrator in *The Locked Room* – all question their own identity and the meaning of their actions and lives at some point throughout the stories. The beginnings of these stories all introduce the reader to the bizarre notion that the protagonists are fully aware of the events and endings of the respective stories, but that neither of them is certain about the causes or eventual consequences of the individual actions or problems.

City of Glass begins with an uncertain end – "Much later, when he was able to think about the things that happened to him, he would conclude that nothing was real except chance. [...] Who he was, where he came from, and what he did are of no great importance" (Auster, 1) – and, thus, Auster presents on the very first page of his novel the issue of the volatility and ambiguity of the protagonist Daniel Quinn's identity.

Quinn is a writer of mystery novels who, similarly to Auster, experienced loss when both his wife and son died. The reader finds out that he lives in New York, a city he enjoys for its endless possibilities with regard to walking and finding new hidden spots. At the same time, however, New York

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. (Auster, *Glass* 4)

It becomes clear in the very beginning that Quinn's struggle with the meaning of life may well stem from the trauma he experienced when losing his family. He feels restless and in constant need of motion; he feels that he can never stay still, or else he would feel the wounds in his heart. Thus, he refuses to remain static in order to avoid his inner pain and conscience. It is with this fact that Quinn's problems begin: he who does not reflect about (what happens to) himself can never truly know himself. Therefore, Quinn's identity is lost somewhere in the big city he loves to circulate in. Auster manifests this in the form of his protagonist's pseudonyms. Quinn never publishes books in his own name, but uses William Wilson as his secret author identity. Of course, Wilson "was an invention", but "even though he had been born within Quinn himself, he now led an independent life" (Auster, *Glass* 5). With this characterization of Quinn's pseudonym, Auster pays tribute to Edgar Allan Poe and the protagonist of one of his short stories carrying the same name. Poe's main character, too, deals with this issue of believing that "[c]haracters [...] can even exchange roles in life" (Keane 51), and thus both protagonists believe that there is this 'other' Wilson who is living their lives to a certain extent. While Auster's Quinn is still aware of the fact that Wilson is not actually a person separate from himself, Poe's protagonist seems to be on the verge of crossing the line between reality and fiction.

As for Quinn, he feels the emptiness his wife and son left within him and tries to fill the void by pretending to be William Wilson and, thereby, leading a different life. Furthermore, he has begun to identify more and more with the fictional detective of his novels, Max Work, who "was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise" while "Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist" and "Quinn himself was the dummy" in this "triad of selves [he] had become" (Auster, *Glass* 6). It is striking that the protagonist takes on the form of three individuals, for he also mentions a different form of 'triad':

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. For five years now, Quinn had been living in the grip of this pun. (Auster, *Glass* 9-10)

These three aspects of the ‘private eye’ Quinn mentions constitute the split self that he is. By living like an imaginary detective, the writer is able to escape his own sad life that has lost all meaning after the loss of his family. Without any purpose, his true ‘I’ is fading while he sees the world through the ‘eyes’ of a different character. So ‘the man who looks out from himself’ is an alternate version of Quinn, waiting for an exciting life to unfold before him. Instead, as he continuously substitutes his own self for one of his inventions, it so happens that he loses more and more of himself. This fact is brought to a climax when the real action of the story begins: Quinn’s nocturnal wanderings are interrupted by a phone call, on the other end of which someone is asking for a man – a private investigator – named Paul Auster. Not only does the proper author of the story make a strong reference to himself, but Quinn begins to take on this mystery man’s identity, making for his third pseudo-character in yet another triad of meaning in his life. In this way, “several characters [in *City of Glass*] are simultaneously authors and detectives, or more precisely, [...] authors who choose to play the role of detective” and who, through this, have to “radically revise their understanding of both authorship and detection” (Sorapure 72-3). For Auster, the author, this means that he not only incorporates himself as a writer (mistaken for a detective) in his own fiction, but reinvents himself as a persona who takes an active part in this invented world. Thereby, he is a lively onlooker of the events and can simultaneously actively enter the minds of his characters. The story’s narrator speaks for him through Quinn when he says “Because he did not consider himself to be the author of what he wrote, he did not feel responsible for it and therefore was not compelled to defend it in his heart” (Auster, *Glass* 5). Auster can thus discard his own identity as author and pass on all liability to his narrator and protagonist: in this way,

the [author-] detective is indeed a kind of exemplary reader, correctly interpreting ambiguous or misleading signs. [...] And yet, the emphasis on the correctness of the detective’s interpretations clearly indicates that it is the author who functions in the detective fiction as the exemplary figure, the true master. (Sorapure 71)

Similarly, Quinn disregards his own true self just as much by pretending to be someone else. As he decides to take on the role of Auster to follow his caller’s request, his self-splitting becomes clearer when he absentmindedly gets ready to leave the house. He

does not realize what he is doing until he is already out the door, as if he were acting under a spell that cast him out of ‘reality’³⁵ and into a real-life investigation job: Peter Stillman and his wife Virginia hire the ‘Paul Auster-Quinn’ to protect them from Peter Stillman Sr., the husband’s father, who had just served two decades in prison after experimenting on his own son by keeping him locked up and sheltered from any communication. Quinn seems overwhelmed with the idea of an actual criminal case and decides that he needs to leave his old life behind³⁶ and play the role of Auster from head to toe.

He was Paul Auster now, and with each step he took he tried to fit more comfortably into the strictures of that transformation. Auster was no more than a name to him, a husk without content. To be Auster meant being a man with no interior, a man with no thoughts. And if there were no thoughts available to him, if his own inner life had been made inaccessible, then there was no place for him to retreat to. As Auster he could not summon up any memories or fears, any dreams of joys, for all these things, as they pertained to Auster, were a blank to him. He consequently had to remain solely on his own surface, looking outward for sustenance. To keep his eyes fixed on Stillman, therefore, was not merely a distraction from the train of thoughts, it was the only thought he allowed himself to have. (Auster, *Glass* 75)

The fact that Quinn wants to remain on the surface of the case and the people operating in it without getting involved emotionally speaks of a truly objective detective; however, at the same time he refers to a man named Dupin, whose method is “[a]n identification of the reasoner’s intellect with that of his opponent’ [which] here [...] would apply to Stillmann senior” (Auster, *Glass* 48). Auster’s second reference to Poe, thus, this time occurs via the famous detective, and reminds Quinn of the fact that he cannot escape relating to the ‘criminal’ at hand on a more intimate level than originally planned. The superficial method of observation and intuition he had prepared to adopt from his own Max Work fails him when he sees Stillman for the first time at the train station: he spots two very dissimilar men who could both be his targets and, “while it seems that there can be a correct choice, there can be no choice based on the logical or rational procedures typical of the detective” (Sorapure 79). Quinn follows the first Stillman, but then turns to the second one “out of spite” (Auster, *Glass* 68); yet again, he faces the dilemma of not knowing who is the ‘real’ one and who is not.

³⁵ cf. Auster, *Glass* 15.

³⁶ cf. Auster, *Glass* 39.

As Quinn continues to follow Stillman Sr. through the city of New York, the reader realizes that the protagonist has found yet another man he can identify with on several levels. Like himself, Stillman likes to wander through the town but “never seemed to be going anywhere in particular, nor did he know where he was” (Auster, *Glass* 71). He seems to be looking for something in particular, but due to his odd behavior, Quinn cannot figure out the man’s plan. This is when he becomes even more like Poe’s Dupin: “It was all a question of method [and the] object was to understand Stillman, to get to know him well enough to be able to anticipate what he would do next. [Quinn] had lived Stillman’s life, walked at his pace [and] seen what he had seen” (Auster, *Glass* 80), only to realize that it was impossible to outfox Stillman’s mind. Quinn fails with Stillman as much as he fails with himself and starts to feel “the old man slip away from him, even as he remained before his eyes” (Auster, *Glass* 80). Quinn’s despair for being incapable of solving the case makes him return to Poe once again; this time his mind wanders to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*: Auster subtextually refers to Pym “and to the discovery of the strange hieroglyphs on the inner wall of the chasm – letters inscribed into the earth itself, a though they were trying to say something that could no longer be understood” (Auster, *Glass* 85) as Quinn realizes that Stillman’s walking scheme equally leave him with letters to be deciphered. It appears that Quinn starts to doubt himself as well as the case he is trying to follow so carefully. He is unsure whether what he does makes sense, whether he can still consider what Stillman is doing or what he himself is seeing is real. During his first coincidental meeting with Stillman Sr. the old man mentions that Quinn’s name builds a rhyme with twin³⁷, thereby unknowingly indicating the ‘detective’s’ split personality. When on the next pursuit through New York Stillman takes a walking break somewhere on 84th street, it is Poe again with whom Quinn seems to connect Stillman and himself, thereby forming yet another triad of identity in his mind: “On this same spot, in the summers of 1843 and 1844, Edgar Allan Poe had spent many long hours gazing out at the Hudson. Quinn knew this because he had made it his business to know such things. As it turned out, he had often sat there himself” (Auster, *Glass* 100). The protagonist appears to become more and more obsessed with seeing himself in other people; the fact that he, Stillman and Poe are all writers who have

³⁷ cf. Auster, *Glass* 89.

occupied the same space in the same city accounts for another moment that “[o]ne minute we’re one thing, and then another” (Auster, *Glass* 101), as Stillman points out so correctly to his follower. As their conversation deepens and Quinn pretends to be Stillman’s son, the old man does not seem surprised by seeing ‘his’ Peter. Quinn realizes how confused and withdrawn Stillman Sr. must be, and while he starts to feel at ease during their father and son time, it is with the next morning that Stillman disappears and Quinn subsequently feels “as though he had lost half of himself. For two weeks he had been tied by an invisible thread to the old man. Whatever Stillman had done, he had done; wherever Stillman had gone, he had gone. His body was not accustomed to this new freedom. [...] The spell was over, and yet his body did not know it” (Auster, *Glass* 110). Quinn thereby loses yet another facet of himself and is temporarily caught off guard by having to return to his old ‘self’.

In his desperation, Quinn decides to call the ‘real’ Paul Auster to release the Stillman case to him, the professional. He discovers, however, that there never was a ‘Paul Auster – the detective’, but that the man he finds is simply a writer, like himself, who is working on analyses of Don Quixote. As the two get to talking, Auster recounts the tale of the mad pseudo-knight and concludes that “[i]n fact, he [Don Quixote] orchestrated the whole thing himself”, and when Quinn wonders “why a man like Don Quixote would disrupt his tranquil life to engage in such an elaborate hoax”, Auster explains that he might have been “conducting an experiment” (Auster, *Glass* 119). With this revelation the reader realizes that Quinn and Stillman had both done nothing else. The protagonist has taken on several other men’s personalities to escape his own tragic fate and solitude to test whether the world would accept and believe this lie he was in fact living, just as Stillman had set up a linguistic experiment with his son to similarly test his own as well his son’s and the world’s capabilities and their exposure to something bizarre. Before the story then comes to its equally bizarre close, Quinn meets Auster’s wife and son who clearly make him return to memories of his own lost family. When they find out they share their name, “[t]he boy burst out laughing and said, ‘Everybody’s Daniel!’ ‘That’s right,’ said Quinn. ‘I’m you, and you’re me’” (Auster, *Glass* 122). With this realization Quinn starts to disappear even more from the

surface of the earth³⁸. With the abrupt vanishing of Stillman Sr. Quinn has no more concrete tasks to fulfill during his day, but because the end of the case would leave him with less than nothing while he was already losing his head in the nothingness before him, he keeps on searching for the old man with the knowledge that “perhaps he was not really searching for anything definite” (Auster, *Glass* 133). As the narrator steps in again to remind the reader of the fact that the “story is based entirely on facts, [and that he] feels it is his duty not to overstep the bounds of the verifiable, to resist at all costs the perils of invention” (Auster, *Glass* 135) while making it clear again that he is no way responsible for the story, as it would have turned out differently had it been up to him³⁹. As it is not, however, Quinn loses his hold onto reality more and more and begins to feel “as though he had melted into the walls of the city” (Auster, *Glass* 139). When he finds out that Stillman killed himself and that his last two months of trying to follow in the old man’s invisible footsteps had been in vain, not only his own writing but his entire being seems to come to an abrupt halt. “He had nothing to fall back on anymore but himself” (Auster, *Glass* 139), while at the same time he cannot figure out what this ‘himself’ really constitutes. He has changed and is now living an even more meaningless life than before, for not even his writing makes sense to him anymore. When he detects that his apartment has been given away for rent due to his staying away, Quinn realizes that “[i]t was gone, he was gone, everything was gone [and] the darkness had begun to win out over the light” (Auster, *Glass* 150-5). And just as Quinn resigns himself to the rest of an empty life, *City of Glass* becomes just as empty. The narrator suddenly takes over recounting the story in the first person and admits that Quinn has entirely disappeared from the surface of the earth, and not even he knows where he might be located.

The city was entirely white now, and the snow kept falling, as though it would never end. As for Quinn, it is impossible for me to say where he is now. [...] As for me, my thoughts remain with Quinn. He will be with me always. And wherever he may have disappeared to, I wish him luck. (Auster, *Glass* 158)

In the end, Quinn becomes a ghost to the story and the city this obscure story ‘transgressed’ in, a city that from the beginning has been nothing but a glassy ghost

³⁸ cf. Auster, *Glass* 124.

³⁹ cf. Auster, *Glass* 135.

town. New York, the turbulent 'city of glass', has swallowed the characters of this narrative and has made their efforts to find themselves and their place in life irrelevant. "The progression of the novel becomes possible because of Quinn's character attributes of insecure identity", and as the narrating 'I' at the end "[tries] to reconstruct Quinn's life and the Stillman case" (Berge 106-7), the snow covers the city and wipes away any footsteps Quinn might have left as his last sign of life. The city has made Quinn and his mirror images as invisible as it has been referred to as being itself.

4.2.2. GHOSTS

Ghosts, Auster's second short novel in *The New York Trilogy*, ties in where *City of Glass* leaves off, and from the very beginning it seems to the reader that, were it not for a change in characters, the author might well just be continuing or re-writing his first story when the new narrator introduces the beginning of this one:

That is how it begins. The place is New York, the time is the present, and neither one will ever change. Blue goes to his office every day and sits at his desk, and then a man named White walks through the door, and that is how it begins. The case seems simple enough. White wants Blue to follow a man named Black and to keep an eye on him for as long as necessary. [...] That is how it begins, then. The young Blue and a man named White, who is obviously not the man he appears to be. (Auster, *Ghosts* 161-2)

When the day the case begins is then revealed as the 3rd of February 1947, Paul Auster's real birth date, and that "the present is no less dark than the past, and its mystery is equal to anything the future might hold" (Auster, *Ghosts* 162), the reader can doubtlessly assume that this story is no less about doubles and identities being lost and found in the past, present and future than *City of Glass*. Even though the story's protagonist, Blue, is still uninformed about what his future holds in store for him, the narrator foreshadows at the very beginning that "knowledge comes slowly, and when it comes, it is often at great personal expense" (Auster, *Ghosts* 163), thereby indicating that, in whatever form, Blue will have to deal as much with the outcome and consequences of his fate and actions as Quinn had to.

As Blue is offered an apartment by White from where he can comfortably spy on his target, Black, he leaves his fiancée at home alone for an unknown period of time to fully focus on his work. The narrator presumes Brooklyn Heights to be the 'crime' scene, but the irrelevance he assigns to this location suggests the notion that nothing in this scenario is real, not even the characters, for their namelessness indicates the uncertainty of the events and the insignificance of their existence. The characters are "named for colours, suggesting that their names and identities are simple and unimportant, as superficial as a colour, in a world where Black may indeed turn out to be White" (Holmes 2011). Blue first observes Black when the latter is writing at his desk in his apartment; as Blue was instructed by White to document Black's every move, he records in his notebook that Black is writing. The issue of identity and

doubling therefore sets out at the very beginning of the story: Auster writes about Blue who serves as a writer who writes about a writer, which suggests the interchangeability of the personae in *Ghosts*. As Blue secretly starts to follow Black through the city just as Quinn did with Stillman, Blue's behavior indicates how alike they are and how much "Black appears to be no more than a shadow" (Auster, *Ghosts* 168) of himself. As Blue keeps drawing parallels between the two, the reader is led to believe that they might ultimately be the same person, i.e. that Blue's imagination is playing a trick on him by conjuring up his mirror image⁴⁰, Black. Apart from the fact that "Blue estimates Black's age to be the same as his" (Auster, *Ghosts* 165), the most salient support for this claim is Blue's imitation of Black's behavior. When Black is hungry, "Blue realizes that he is hungry" (165); when he leaves his apartment to go shopping, Blue "goes into the store himself to do the same" (168). When "Black pays for his books, Blue pays for his books" (181), and when Black "finally calls for the check [at a restaurant], Blue does the same" (184). Eventually it turns out that Blue copies these actions "[f]or the sake of symmetry" (Auster, *Ghosts* 213) which suggests that they do not actually happen successively, but simultaneously, and thus, only once. The more Blue gets involved with the case, the more his old life slips into oblivion. After a while, he stops calling his fiancée in order to not get distracted and decides that he "has never given much thought to the world inside him [anyway], and though he always knew it was there, it has remained an known quantity, unexplored and therefore dark, even to himself" (Auster, *Ghosts* 171). Auster thus presents another side of Blue that is very similar to Quinn in *City of Glass*: the one loses his family unexpectedly while the other leaves it behind, but in the both drift away from what has once seemed like reality. Blue tries to identify Black's bigger agenda, which, like Quinn, leads him to methods Auster borrowed from Poe's Dupin: "The only way for Blue to have a sense of what is happening is to be inside Black's mind, to see what he is thinking, and that of course is impossible" (Auster, *Ghosts* 166). His plan, however, appears to be working better than he originally thought, for Blue is as much in Black's mind as Black is in his. Despite the fact that Blue continuously tries to convince himself of the

⁴⁰ cf. section 2.2.1 on "William Wilson"

fact that he is not the same person as Blue⁴¹, the two become more and more identical up to a point where Blue

feels so completely in harmony with Black, so naturally at one with the other man, that to anticipate what Black is going to do, to know when he will stay in his room and when he will go out, he need merely look into himself. [...] How he knows this remains something of a mystery to him, but the fact is that he is never wrong, and when the feeling comes over him, he is beyond all doubt and hesitation. On the other hand, not all moments are like these. There are times when he feels totally removed from Black, cut off from him in a way that is so stark and absolute that he begins to lose the sense of who he is. [...] It puzzles him that he should switch so rapidly from one state to another, and for a long time he goes back and forth between extremes, now knowing which one is true and which one false. (Auster, *Ghosts* 186)

In moments when he feels detached from Black it seems to him that everything in the world is unique, every object and event can occur only once, and Black is simply a ghost in a city full of invisible beings that Blue should not think about so much. At the same time, however, it remains clear that the less Blue has to think about what Black's next move will be, the more he is transforming into Black himself. Their minds melt into each other, and so their relationship becomes more and more one that Blue originally intended: a Dupin-like meeting of the minds. When Blue one day decides it is time to see who his secret employer, White, really is, and waits for him to collect the weekly report Blue is writing about Black, the connection between the characters becomes even more apparent and bizarre: "[A] man with a mask on his face walks through the door [...] and Blue senses in this first moment that the man behind the mask is White. [...] At the same time, Blue also feels that the man is not really there, that even though he knows he is seeing him, it is more likely that he is the only one who can" (Auster, *Ghosts* 198). The reader realizes just as much what this might mean: White might just be Black in a mask, one and the same person playing a trick on Blue to outsmart and imprison or even murder him for whatever reason. "In that case, it is Black who occupies the position Blue has assumed all along to be his, and Blue who takes the role of Black" (Auster, *Ghosts* 201), as the roles of observer and the observed are being switched. In this way, "the borders of Blue's identity begin to decay, as he loses contact with precisely who he is and what makes him somehow different from those other figures (selves, identities) that surround him" (Berlatsky 116). He begins to

⁴¹ "I'm supposed to be writing about him, not myself" (Auster, *Ghosts* 175).

doubt his own existence, and goes as far as to say that “[t]here is no story, no plot, no action” (Auster, *Ghosts* 202) to be gained from the job he has been doing all this time. His work seems obsolete and as “[m]onths go by, [...] at least he says to himself out loud: I can’t breathe anymore. This is the end. I’m dying” (Auster, *Ghosts* 203) before throwing on a new disguise to sneak up on Black and talk to him without being recognized. As Blue “casts about for a new identity” (Auster, *Ghosts* 203) in this way, he undergoes a type of rebirth and comes out as a man resembling Walt Whitman, according to Black. This does not seem at all odd to Blue, however, since “[e]very man has his double somewhere. I don’t see why mine can’t be a dead man” (Auster, *Ghosts* 205), thereby again foreshadowing an uncomfortable ending that might even involve a death of some sort. The fact that Auster would let Blue look like a copy of Whitman, as well as keep Blue and Black’s conversation centering around other authors like Charles Dickens, Henry David Thoreau, Bronson Alcott, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, again casts a light on the importance of writing in his stories: “Writing [...] takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he’s there, he’s not really there. Another ghost” (Auster, *Ghosts* 209). From this follows Black’s suggestion that “[w]e always talk about trying to get inside a writer to understand his work better. But when you get right down to it, there’s not much to find in there – at least not much that’s different from what you’d find in anyone else” (Auster, *Ghosts* 208). Auster thus treats the issue of identity (crises) in part through the process of writing: his characters are all writers and are all presented as different versions of the same man, maybe even of himself. They are inspired either by a famous writer, as Black mentions in his conversation with Blue, or by other writer-characters of the story they appear in. At one point Blue even calls Black “the so-called writer of this book” (Auster, *Ghosts* 202), thereby indicating that Black is really writing about him, while he is writing about Black at the same time. Their positions as characters get blurred so much that it becomes impossible to see how they can be different when, “if it hadn’t been for [Blue, Black] couldn’t have done” (Auster, *Ghosts* 230) the job. They are so inextricably linked that Black needs Blue to “remind [him] of what [he] was supposed to be doing” (Auster, *Ghosts* 230) with his life. He is talking to Blue as his own conscience, a personified concept that bears the burden of all the protagonist’s attributes and skills, but also fears and bad habits. He needs Black, an idealized and thoroughly educated version of himself, to ultimately “prove he’s alive” (Auster, *Ghosts* 216). When they

have their final interaction Blue's realization that he has to be his own man brings him to the point where he "can no longer accept Black's existence" (Auster, *Ghosts* 226) and, therefore, has to end it in order to be able to find himself again. When Blue sends White his report after his first conversation with Black, he avoids any mention of this talk; when White responds by asking "Why do you lie?" (Auster, *Ghosts* 212), Blue realizes that Black and White must in fact be partners in crime, while to the reader the idea that the two personae are in fact one and the same man makes more sense from then on. When they meet again, Blue has taken on yet another identity to secretly confront Black about his agenda, and as Black describes his job to Blue, their interchangeability becomes patently obvious:

I'm a private detective. [...] Take the case I'm working on now. I've been at it for more than a year already, and nothing could be more boring. I'm so bored that sometimes I think I'm losing my mind. [...] My job is to watch someone, no one in particular as far as I can tell, and send in a report about him every week. Just that. Watch this guy and write about it. Not one damned thing more. [...] He doesn't do anything, that's what. He just sits in his room all day and writes. It's enough to drive you crazy. [...] I don't even have to bother anymore. I've been watching him for so long now that I know him better than I know myself. All I have to do is think about him, and I know what he's doing, I know where he is, I know everything. It's come to the point that I can watch him with my eyes closed. [...] I think he's writing about himself. The story of his life. (Auster, *Ghosts* 213-15)

These lines raise several questions, not only for Blue, but also for the reader. Is Black telling the truth? Is he playing a trick on Blue because he knows he is being watched? Who is the actual writer of this story? Does Blue imagine these conversations, and is he having them inside himself, with his own conscience? When due to all these doubts the protagonist then contemplates abandoning the case, he realizes that he could still never escape his connection with Black because "he feels that Black is there, too, hiding behind some tree, stalking invisibly through some thicket, waiting for Blue to lie down and close his eyes before sneaking up on him and slitting his throat. [...] If he doesn't take care of Black now, there will never be any end to it" (Auster, *Ghosts* 222). Out of despair, Blue then breaks into Black's room to gain ultimate knowledge about his scheme, only to find reports that are identical to his own. The depth of their likeness horrifies Blue to such an extent that he can only realize that "enter[ing] Black, then, was the equivalent of entering himself, and once inside himself, he can no longer conceive of being anywhere else" (Auster, *Ghosts* 226). He has no other choice but to put an end to the case whatever the cost, or else he will reach the point of no

return and lose himself forever. When he enters Black's room again, his opponent is present, sitting in his space as if he had been waiting for Blue all this time, waiting to cut his losses with Blue, as if this scenario was the prescribed end to the case. His holding of a gun only accentuates this point and indicates that the only way out of the terrifying predicament the two characters are stuck in is by killing one of them, or both, for Blue and Black are too similar to co-exist.

I always knew you were the right one for me. A man after my own heart. [...] You got me into this, and now you're stuck with me. [...] If anything, I'm in my mind, too much in my mind. It's used me up, and now there's nothing left. But you know that, Blue, you know that better than anyone. [...] It's going to be the two of us together, just like always. [...] Isn't that how it's supposed to end? You tell me the story, and then we say good-bye. You know it already, Blue. Don't you understand that? You know the story by heart. [...] And now there's nothing left. You've written your suicide note, and that's the end of it. (Auster, *Ghosts* 229-30)

His antagonist's words penetrate Blue's mind and make him angrier by the second at the nonchalance with which Black is trying to assign failure to Blue's entire existence and at the overall superiority Black is ascribing to himself. In a moment of absolute fury, "all crazy with the passion of his anger, [and] as though turned into someone else" (Auster, *Ghosts* 231), Blue starts beating Black with all the physical strength he can find within himself until the latter lies motionlessly before him. Unsure of whether "he's alive now, Blue thinks, it won't be for long. And if he's dead, then so be it" (Auster, *Ghosts* 231). The reader can only assume that Blue's double is gone from this moment on, for the protagonist seems to have rid himself of his ultimate conscience that has inhabited him for all this time. All the frustration leaves Blue's body as he returns to his own apartment to read through Black's reports, and by that, a chronicle that was ultimately written about himself.

This violent end that was foreshadowed at several points throughout the story ends as it began: "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" (Auster, *Ghosts* 232). The narrator appears and informs the reader of his own lack of knowledge regarding Blue's whereabouts, but insinuates that he might have left the country to flee from the consequences of his actions. Blue has discarded an identity that has both educated him but also turned him into a missing person, only to just step out of the picture and become a ghost to his life and the story. He might be leaving behind an

unknowing narrator “waiting for something to happen. For a long time nothing does, and then a man named White walks through the door, and that is how it begins” (Auster, *Ghosts* 161) again. Like with *City of Glass*, Auster presents another circular narrative: the beginning is the end, and the end is the beginning, and so the reader might, yet again, return to the opening of the story or even of the entire novel, only to find himself repeatedly going back.

The fact that White has to walk in for the story get under way further insinuates that Blue needs to invent someone to bring action into his life in the first place. White is responsible for the introduction of Black as well as the issue of (report) writing that so busies Blue throughout the story⁴², but never gives away his whereabouts, as if he were in fact inexistent. During the bank scene, when Blue first spies on his employer to find out who he is, “Blue [...] feels that the man is not really there, that even though he knows he is seeing him, it is more than likely that he is the only one who can” (Auster, *Ghosts* 198), which pushes the improbability of White’s existence even further. Blue seems to be acting out himself in his own mind, “groping about in the darkness, feeling blindly for the light switch, a prisoner of the case itself” (Auster, *Ghosts* 201).

As Blue is caught in this spiral of (re)losing and (re)finding new identities the reader struggles with the paradox of White putting the story into operation and his simultaneous constant absence from the surface: the reader’s own investigations concerning the existence of characters (or lack thereof) are constantly challenged, and it is only when Blue himself realizes that White and Black are in fact the same person that Auster’s color mind games begin to make sense. “You were never really there, were you? There never was such a man as White” (Auster, *Ghosts* 217), and thus this version of Blue’s identity vanishes from the surface of the story entirely. He becomes a ghost, as erased and blank as his name indicates, and as white is not considered a color in the first place, the reader understands that the man was never actually an individual present issue. With White’s subsequent complete disappearance Blue seems to rid himself of a part of himself, the determined and bossy one, who wanted to challenge

⁴² “White is the one who set the case in motion – thrusting Blue into an empty room, as it were, and then turning off the light and locking the door” (Auster, *Ghosts* 201).

himself into being a good detective and writer, the one who had certain expectations in him and his performance that he wanted to hold up to. With this departure of White, one of Blue's superior alter egos that split his personality and made his quest for meaning in life so difficult vanishes to leave behind a version of Blue that starts to emerge as the 'real' Blue.

Similarly, a seemingly offside anecdote Blue reads, which revolves around an article found in his favorite magazine, *True Detective*, helps him to get more insight into his own soul and ultimately gain knowledge about who he really is. The story tells of a coroner named Gold, who, 25 years ago, stumbled upon the case of a dead boy whose murder was just as impossible to explain as his assassin was to find. After a long period of unsuccessfully searching for clues, witnesses and suspects, Blue would expect the investigator to drop the case and simply declare it a mystery; he is, however, fascinated with Gold's passion and patience with researching the case, as much as the reader is astounded when Blue does not discard White's request for information about Black after years of no solution. Blue subconsciously draws a parallel between himself and Gold, as neither of the two investigators is capable of letting go of the case: Gold cannot "accept a world in which the murderer of a child can go unpunished" (Auster, *Ghosts* 170), just as Blue "hopes the journey will not end before he's had a chance to work out the kinks" (Auster, *Ghosts* 177). As much as Gold is afraid of dying without having taken revenge on the boy's murderer, and Blue indicates that he does not want to die before having resolved his case either, the reader understands that the real reason for Blue's persistence in the Black-mystery is his intrinsic urge to discover himself before he dies. This goes hand in hand with the fact that Blue does not only resemble Gold, but also the little boy in the coroner's case. Both take on the role of a person gone missing, if in different ways; Blue seems to become incapable of going back to a somewhat normal life before discovering Black's life plan, or rather his own, just as Gold cannot rest before knowing "[w]ho he [the boy] was, where he had come from, why he was there" (Auster, *Ghosts* 169). Thus, Gold's search for the boy is a search for Blue, who, without having taken on the Black-case "would have been forgotten altogether" (Auster, *Ghosts* 169). The boy is dead, and so Gold is ultimately searching for a ghost. Just as much, Blue is in search of himself, a person who would fade more and more into nothingness if he did not take the case of his life into his own hands.

In the same way that reading the aforementioned newspaper article about Gold changes the way in which Blue sees his role in the world, so modifies a screening of the 1947 movie *Out of the Past* how the protagonist relates to himself. Blue is fascinated by the main character, played by Robert Mitchum, “an ex-private eye who is trying to build a new life for himself in a small town under an assumed name” (Auster, *Ghosts* 191). This draws the primary parallel between Blue and Mitchum: not only do they share the same profession, but they are also equally attempting to reinvent themselves in the context of a new environment. While first they both do not realize what the future holds for them, both their pasts catch up with them quickly: Mitchum is being blackmailed by his old girlfriend, who is trying to turn him in for a crime she committed herself; Blue feels that Black and White might be framing him for a crime they committed while he is simultaneously forced to deal with his emotional life, a territory he has never before set foot in. Even though Blue plans to only temporarily leave his fiancée for his job, he becomes so obsessed and entangled with a case that is ultimately about himself that the distance and disruption in his relationship with the future Mrs. Blue were bound to occur from the start. As he realizes that he loses his grasp on life up to a point where he cannot differentiate between himself and Black, between fiction and reality anymore, he actually “picks up the phone and dials her [Mrs. Blue’s] number” (Auster, *Ghosts* 188). The detachment he feels from his old life only grows stronger when she does not answer, and instead, “[o]nce again, Blue falls into step with Black, perhaps even more harmoniously than before” (Auster, *Ghosts* 188). He tries to hold on to Black for dear life to regain some sort of purpose in his seemingly meaningless existence. Similarly, Mitchum “[a]t one point [...] returns to the small town where he lives. [...] But it’s really too late” for him to right the wrongs from his past, “and Mitchum knows it” (Auster, *Ghosts* 191). Both he and Blue must realize that they have been absent from their old lives for too long; unfortunately, however, both their troubles climax at a point where it becomes just as frustrating and seemingly impossible to build a new life as maintaining or returning to the old one. In the movie, Mitchum is killed and “will remain an outsider, even in death. His ambition was simple enough: to become a normal citizen in a normal American town, to marry the girl next door, to live a quiet life” (Auster, *Ghosts* 192). His objective fails as much as Blue’s, who has to equally linger in his situation as the missing person, even after he assumedly kills Black, for his old life with the future Mrs. Blue has forgotten him.

He has been marked by the past, and once that happens, nothing can be done about it. Something happens, Blue thinks, and then it goes on happening forever. It can never be changed, can never be otherwise. Blue begins to be haunted by this thought, for he sees it as a kind of warning, a message delivered up from within himself, and try as he does to push it away, the darkness of the this thought does not leave him. (Auster, *Ghosts* 193)

The idea that he can in fact change his fate comes with Blue's violent outburst at the end of *Ghosts*, which makes it possible for him to discard his personified conscience Black entirely. An old version of himself is killed as he steps out of the cycle of crisis he has been caught in for so long, and, even though his separation from Black seems to result in complete loneliness, Blue then has yet another chance to compensate for the fact that he was losing himself.

The idea that Blue is so desperate for action in his life that he needs to evoke it himself is repeated at a different point in *Ghosts*, namely in the already mentioned first conversation between the protagonist and his alter ego. When Black turns the attention to the importance of great writers, Nathaniel Hawthorne and his short story "Wakefield" stand out because of the parallels that can be drawn with Blue's situation. Wakefield, the narrative's protagonist of the same name, is, like Blue, a man struggling to uphold his identity. He pretends to go on a business trip and leaves behind his wife, only to move into a new place right next to his own house "without the shadow of a reason for such self-banishment" (Hawthorne 185). From there, he spies on his wife as she goes about her regular business and dismisses going back home every so often, so that his stay extends to months and then years. With the narrator's indication that there is an aspect in Wakefield's life that would ever urge him to do such a foolish thing, the reader can only assume that the protagonist is so consumed by the routine of his life that, like Blue, he has to conjure up any sort of action in order for his existence to have meaning again. As Blue and Wakefield depart from their loved ones, they both start to fulfill the function of an observer trying not to be seen and this, in turn, triggers their transformations into societal recluses who lose the sense of what it was like to live a normal life before. Both protagonists observe their targets in a ghostly manner as they vanish from the surface of their former lives; at some point, however, both try to make contact with their old world, as has been mentioned before regarding Blue when he unsuccessfully calls the future Mrs. Blue to examine her situation. Similarly,

Wakefield secretly comes back “to know the progress of matters at home – how his exemplary wife will endure her widowhood, of a week; and, briefly, how the little sphere of circumstances, in which he was a central object, will be affected by his removal” (Hawthorne 190). Both personae realize that the new life they subjected themselves to is not as comfortable and easily lived as they had expected, but “a retrograde movement to the old would be almost as difficult as the step that placed [them] in [their] unparalleled situation” (Hawthorne, 192). In this way, both struggle to accept their new surroundings and thereby transform into ghosts, invisible personae in the large anonymous cities they reside in. Their seclusion also makes for drastic alterations in their personalities; “I’m changing, he [Blue] says to himself. Little by little, I’m no longer the same” (Auster, *Ghosts* 173-4), just as Wakefield “is another man” (Hawthorne 192) in the new routines they have created for themselves. As much as the two sometimes miss their beloved companions, little do they realize that their long absences and failure to express their feelings create voids in their misses’ lives and simultaneously isolate them more and more from them as well as from the rest of the world. They both attempt to reinvent their notions of self by disguising themselves in public, a maneuver of distraction that does, however, not bring about any solution. When the ex-future Mrs. Blue runs into a masked Blue one day in the street, she confronts and consequently excludes him from her life forever out of sheer hurt and disappointment with his leave⁴³. And Wakefield, “changed as he was, he would seldom be conscious of it, but deem himself the same man as ever; glimpses of the truth, indeed, would come, but only for the moment; and still he would keep saying – ‘I shall soon go back!’ – nor reflect, that he had been saying so for twenty years” (Hawthorne 196). When the two protagonists have finished fighting their struggles with themselves, Auster and Hawthorne present two very different endings to their stories that can, nevertheless, be traced back to a common ground. After verbally and physically assaulting his opponent Black, Blue “stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door” of the metaphorical room that is the narrative which “will be the end of it” (Auster, *Ghosts* 232), while Wakefield “enter[s] the door one evening, quietly, as from a day’s absence, and bec[omes] a loving spouse till death” (Hawthorne 186). Comparing these two endings, the reader finds a striking similarity between

⁴³ cf. Auster, *Ghosts* 195-6.

Ghosts and *City of Glass*. Despite the fact that Auster's and Hawthorne's narrators refuse to "follow our friend[s] across the threshold" (Hawthorne, 198) into their new lives, "[a]nd from this moment on, we know nothing" (Auster, *Ghosts* 232), the resemblances between the authors' protagonists suggest that the door Blue walks through at the end of *Ghosts* might lead him into Wakefield's house, just as Auster might be spinning Quinn's character further to create Blue.

In this way, *Ghosts* proves once again the absolute interchangeability of all the characters within it: all of them appear as doubles of one another, dealing with the fact that, for whatever reason, their personalities have been split. They are now in search of the missing piece of the puzzle that is their life, so that they can reconstruct themselves as a whole and accept their identity without having to conjure up a superior alter ego.

4.2.3. THE LOCKED ROOM

The Locked Room, Paul Auster's third and final text making up *The New York Trilogy*, ties in with the previous two in terms of characters who find themselves in different forms of identity crises, and yet distances itself slightly from them in terms of its narrator. For the first time Auster presents a first-person fictional I, which is still unnamed and unknown, and similarly lost as his predecessors, but dares to recount his story from a much more personal level than Quinn or Blue ever could.

Yet again, the reader encounters a writer-narrator who is equally dumbfounded by the turn his life takes during the course of the story as Quinn is in *City of Glass*. While for Quinn bizarre action begins with a phone call, the narrator in *The Locked Room* is pulled into a mystery by a letter from an old friend's wife, Sophie Fanshawe. From the start, the story ties in with *Ghosts*, for Fanshawe, the actual protagonist of the Trilogy's last part, gets his name from Nathaniel Hawthorne's first ever published work (1828) of the same name. Even more of a ghostly figure than Hawthorne's Wakefield before him, Fanshawe remains physically absent for most of the story, but hovers over the characters like a disembodied soul watching their every move. Despite his absence, the entire narrative revolves about him, and the relationship he used to have with the narrator; it is made clear in the first line that their emotional and mental bond resembles that of Blue and Black, but that they are kept as individual entities physically.

It seems to me now that Fanshawe was always there⁴⁴. He is the place where everything begins for me, and without him I would hardly know who I am. We met before we could talk, babies crawling through the grass in diapers, and by the time we were seven we had pricked our fingers with pins and made ourselves blood brothers for life. Whenever I think of my childhood now, I see Fanshawe. He was the one who was with me, the one who shared my thoughts, the one I saw whenever I looked up from myself. (Auster, *Room* 235).

Fanshawe and the narrator appear to be a lot like Quinn and Stillman, Sr., and even like Dupin and the Minister: the fictional I in *The Locked Room* starts to hunt (and

⁴⁴ cf. Auster's *Ghosts*: "Every time I looked up, you were there, watching me, following me, always in sight, boring into me with your eyes" (230).

haunt) a lost figure who, like Wakefield, deserted his wife for no apparent reason, a figure he calls “a ghost I carried around inside me, a prehistoric figment, a thing that was no longer real” (Auster, *Room* 236). What presumes even more resemblance to *City of Glass* is that when Sophie Fanshawe arranges for a detective to search for her lost husband, it is a man named Quinn who takes on the case. This foreshadows, yet again, that the story will come to a close that can seamlessly tie in with the novel’s first part; Auster presents another Quinn, who tries to fulfill what he already intended in the opening story, and in this way *The New York Trilogy* can only come to its ultimate circular finale, where the three stories fluidly segue into each other only to repeat themselves in an endless narrative cycle.

When Sophie Fanshawe contacts the narrator concerning her husband, she informs him of the fact that Fanshawe had always wanted him to be “the guardian of his work” (Auster, *Room* 243) should anything ever happen to him. Fanshawe never published his work himself, and when the narrator adheres to his plea and does it for him, he can start to live off the publications’ expenses. One day, he receives a letter from Fanshawe, who, up to this point, was believed dead; in this, he urges his old friend to take over his life completely.

I knew that you were the person to ask, but things have turned out even better than I thought they would. You have gone beyond the possible, and I am in your debt. Sophie and the child will be taken care of, and because of that I can live with a clear conscience. [...] In spite of this letter, I want you to go on thinking of me as dead. Nothing is more important than that, and you must not tell anyone that you’ve heard from me. [...] Make her [Sophie] divorce me, and then marry her as soon as you can. I trust you to do that – and I give you my blessings. The child needs a father, and you’re the only one I can count on. (Poe, *Room* 280-1)

From this the narrator concludes that Fanshawe had quit his life to live somewhere else under a pretense identity. Despite the fact that the most sensible thing to do would be quit investigating the case, it seems that the narrator cannot let his friend go. After years of separation, the blurred inexplicable image of Fanshawe had entered his life again, and because of their connection the narrator cannot accept this mystery. Like Quinn and Blue before him, he feels so in union with his companion that a search for him ultimately becomes another search for himself. Similar to *Ghosts*, the appearance of the disappeared Fanshawe puts the narrator in a position where “nothing would ever

be the same [...] again” (Auster, *Room* 283). Fanshawe opens a door for the narrator to step into, the one that will eventually grant him access into the locked room of secrecy. The narrator follows his friend’s wishes, marries Sophie and even adopts their son, Ben, and from this it follows that he takes over Fanshawe’s place – the two are entirely interchanged. Still, the narrator “was haunted, perhaps, [...] even possessed – but there were no signs of it, no clues to tell [him] what was happening” (Auster, *Room* 286). In his pursuit of his ghost-like friend, the narrator begins to experience the same dilemma as his co-writer-detectives of the novel: while in search for a man who is so much like himself, he starts to transform into a ghost and loses a part of who he is. The narrator plays this game up to a point where even his wife becomes more and more agitated with his behavior.

‘You don’t understand anything, do you?’, she said. [...] ‘I can’t get through to you anymore. You just don’t hear what I’m saying. [...] You go alone. At least then, if you come back, it will be because you want to. [...] If things go on like this, I’m going to lose you. [...] You’re so close to being gone already. I sometimes think I can see you vanishing before my eyes. [...] We’re coming to the end, my darling, and you don’t even know it. You’re going to vanish, and I’ll never see you again.’ (Auster, *Room* 335-7)

Despite the narrator’s persistent dismissal of Sophie’s fears, it appears that during his quest for Fanshawe in Paris his own psychological isolation and self-splitting seems to dawn on him.

For if I could convince myself that I was looking for him, then it necessarily followed that he was somewhere else – somewhere beyond me, beyond the limits of my life. But I had been wrong. Fanshawe was exactly where I was, and he had been there since the beginning. From the moment his letter arrived, I had been struggling to imagine him, to see him as he might have been – but my mind had always conjured a blank. At best, there was one impoverished image: the door of a locked room. That was the extent of it: Fanshawe alone in that room, condemned to a mythical solitude – living perhaps, breathing perhaps, dreaming God know what. This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull. (Auster, *Room* 344-5)

For the second time now, the narrator foreshadows that, despite what he might think at this point of the story, it is most likely that Fanshawe has been living in a secret locked room never wanting to be found. The narrator is obsessed with detecting his friend and the mystery of his agenda, nevertheless, and in the process of his quest becomes even more obsessed, up to a point where he imagines Fanshawe everywhere. He even goes as far as repeatedly calling a random man by the name of his friend; his opposite soon

becomes irritated because his real name is Peter Stillman. Auster doubles the Stillman from *City of Glass*; he reincarnates a dead man and thereby reoffers the opportunity for the reader to keep reading *The New York Trilogy* even after *The Locked Room* will have ended – the endless cycle has not been forgotten at last. The narrator manically runs after the Fanshawe alias, and it seems like he temporarily impersonates Quinn, who, in *City of Glass*, was never able to bring the Stillman case to a conclusion due to his target's death. He seems to step out of his body, lost in his desperate obsession to find his friend.

Long before I reached him, long before I even knew I was going to reach him, I felt as though I was no longer inside myself. [...] I couldn't feel myself anymore. The sensation of life had dribbled out of me, and in its place there was miraculous euphoria, a sweet poison rushing through my blood, the undeniable odor of nothingness. (Auster, *Room* 352).

This temporary Quinn the narrator has become seemingly intends to take revenge on Stillman for never having let Quinn find him in *City of Glass*. Stillman's view in this, however, rather resembles the final interaction between Blue and Black in *Ghosts*: Stillman beats the narrator to unconsciousness, and when he has finally regained his senses, he decides to return home to his old life.

At a certain point, lying there on the bed and looking at the slats of the closed shutters, I understood that I had lived through it. It felt strange to be alive, almost incomprehensible. [...] I was alive, and the more I thought about it, the less I understood. It did not seem possible that I had been spared. (Auster, *Room* 352-3)

The narrator seems to have benefited from Stillman's physical attack in that now he is finally free of the Fanshawe he was so desperately searching and even conjured up in this situation. Like Blue, he is released from his inner torments and agonies and can finally go about life without a double hovering over his head. Despite the fact that he separates from Sophie for a year after his return from France, they ultimately find a way to be together. This suggests that the narrator in *The Locked Room* "is not unlike Quinn or Blue, but he is a more mature version of these two" (Varvogli 51). Like no other before him in the novel he finds a way back to his life, despite always knowing that he will never be the same and that the case might never be entirely over in his mind. He is aware of this even more so when years after his return to New York Fanshawe suddenly in a letter requests to see him. The foreshadowed end to the story

presents itself, and the narrator finds his old friend in a locked room within a mansion. He tries to make sense of Fanshawe's decision to leave his life behind for another man, but understands that he can never know anything for sure. Fanshawe never exits the room, and at one point threatens to shoot the narrator should he try to enter the locked room; this again refers back to Blue and Black's final conversation in *Ghosts*, during which the latter also intends to kill the former with a gun, but is, like Fanshawe, left behind to die in his room. The narrator takes Fanshawe's notebook with him, and follows his friend's order to read it in order to understand his motives, but

[i]f 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. [...] It is as if Fanshawe knew his final work had to subvert every expectation I had for it. (Auster, *Room* 370)

As Fanshawe's words cancel each other out, and thereby erase the entire story, Fanshawe fades into blankness himself. The narrator destroys the notebook as his ultimate act of letting go of his friend, whose existence has become as impossible as his writing. Alike Varvogli refers to the end of Hawthorne's 'Wakefield' to explain Fanshawe's position in society:

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 for ever. Like Wakefield, he may become, as it were, the Outcast of the Universe. (62)

The Locked Room, thus, presents the ultimate "stepping aside" of Auster's *New York Trilogy*: after Quinn and Blue, Fanshawe and the unnamed narrator both discard their routinely track, the former to escape from a society he cannot accept and blend into, and the latter to follow and understand the secretive road his friend has taken. The two seem almost identical throughout the course of the story, so much that the narrator is even mistaken for Fanshawe at one point⁴⁵, but distance each other as the narrative comes closer to the end. The narrator had been in search of his friend for so long, while

⁴⁵ "What I will mention, however, is that her initial double take was caused by the fact that she mistook me for Fanshawe. Just the briefest flicker, as she put it, and then it was gone. The resemblance had been noticed before, of course, but never so viscerally, with such immediate impact" (Auster, *Room* 341).

Fanshawe had always known where he was, had always been inside his head, and had even spied on him and his former wife Sophie. The two men's identities are clearly "in a state of flux" and thus their doubling demonstrates "Auster's fluid sense of human identity" (Keane 51). The narrator seems to be forced to not give up on Fanshawe because this would mean giving up on himself to a certain extent. As has been mentioned before, the narrator in *The Locked Room* is Auster's one part of a twin pair that can ultimately start a new life after freeing himself of his double. However, with all the unanswered questions Fanshawe leaves behind "everything remained open, unfinished, to be started again" (Auster, *Room* 370), which makes *The New York Trilogy* come full circle; the narrative can start again with *City of Glass* and repeat itself endlessly with the characters and narrators lingering hopelessly in their cycle of psychological self-splitting.

5. POE & AUSTER: TWO OF A KIND

5.1. THE ABSENT FATHER

Through the evaluation of all of the aforementioned factors, it has been shown in this analysis that Poe, Auster and all of their protagonists can be reduced to different versions of the same individual. The two authors are frighteningly close to each other in their biographies: they were deserted by their fathers and could therefore never look up to a male role model. As a result, both David Poe and Samuel Auster are represented in the discussed fictions through the essential theme of the ‘absent father’ as a “block of impenetrable space in the form of a man” (Auster, *Invention* 7). William Wilson’s erratic drinking and gambling mirrors the behavior of Poe’s father who, like Wilson’s, has disappointed his son by not offering him any attention. The old man in “The Man of the Crowd” has been classified as an older or future version of the narrator, and thus portrays Poe’s father running from him and leaving him both ignorant and unattended. Similarly, Paul Auster’s Quinn is in search of a father, if not his own: Stillman Sr. is a lost father who has committed a crime, and therefore Auster mirrors in him his father’s wrong-doing of being “an invisible man. Invisible to others, and most likely invisible to himself as well” (Auster, *Invention* 7). In *Ghosts*, the author presents two possible father-figures. The reader is informed that “before the beginning there is Brown. Brown broke him [Blue] in, Brown taught him the ropes, and when Brown grew old, Blue took over” (Auster, *Ghosts* 161). Naturally, Brown might just as well represent Blue’s detective instructor, but the fact that Blue has learned everything vital from him suggests a far more personal, maybe even kindred bond. Furthermore, the fact that Blue remains fixated on the hopeless case assigned to him by White indicates a possible father-son relationship between the two. This is made more probable through the fact that Blue hunts Black, and as White and Black eventually turn out to be the same character, Auster may have intended to send Blue in search of his father. *The Locked Room* makes no use of specific father figures, but the fact that in the end Fanshawe locks himself in a room within a mansion alludes to Auster’s feelings towards his absent role model anyway: the room separates the narrator from his friend and thereby Auster from his father; it is impossible for him to

see or touch Fanshawe, and the discontent the protagonist feels with regard to this situation becomes obvious as he tries to persuade his opposite to let him in – not only into the room, but into his life. Furthermore, at the end of the story, the self-jailed Fanshawe resents his name and instead calls himself Stillman, a name that alludes to the father figure in *City of Glass*. The partially violent and bizarre representations of Poe and Auster's missing role models become "a way of escaping from [...] [the] authority of oppressive fathers" (Tysh qtd. in Nikolic).

5.2. WRITING AS A SOLITARY BUSINESS

With regard to Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, Dragana Nikolic has observed that "even the most insignificant detail cannot be overlooked" (*Deconstructing*). Thereby, Nikolic discusses Quinn in *City of Glass* as he states that "[i]n the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant" (Auster, 9). What Quinn alludes to here is the extraordinary significance of the act of writing in his stories. Leaving aside the question of which of his characters is a detective and to what extent, it can be stated with great certainty that all protagonists in the novel under investigation are writers. "The world of the book comes to life" (Auster, *Glass* 9), which means that all the character-writers, as well as the proper author-Auster, eventually experience what they write about, and vice versa. What they further have in common is the medium through which their writing communicates: a red notebook. As this obviously alludes to Auster's actual collection of stories with the same title, the doubling of the notebook from one story to the next is another factor connecting all of the characters in their intertextual journeys towards the ultimate meaning in their lives.

At the beginning of *City of Glass*, Quinn decides that

[n]ow that he had embarked on the Stillman case, he felt that a new notebook was in order. [...] For reasons that were never made clear to him, he suddenly felt an irresistible urge for a particular red notebook at the bottom. [...] But something about it seemed to call out to him – as if its unique destiny in the world was to hold the words that came from his pen. (Auster, *Glass* 46)

His obsession with the notebook has just begun, and the fact that he finds this particular pad so 'unique' suggests that it will aid Quinn in the detection of his own uniqueness. When it turns out that his opponent, Stillman Sr. "also had a red notebook, as if this formed a secret link between them" (Auster, *Glass* 73), the reader realizes that this sharing of the notebook simultaneously undermines Quinn's distinctiveness, and thus points out the characters' affinity even through the process of writing. As both Quinn and Stillman Sr. use their manuscripts to document the details of their individual stories and seem to write their lives as they live them, the question arises "What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?" (Auster, *Glass* 157). When

at the end of the story Quinn reads Stillman's notebook cover to cover, it is with the last sentence that not only the writing and reading process is terminated, but also the story itself. However, Auster does not conclude the usage of the red notebook, but instead passes it on to the protagonist of his next story. Despite the fact that the color of the notebook Blue and Black use in *Ghosts* is never mentioned, it still seems as if Quinn had simply slipped it into the story. As it has already been discussed that the three parts of *The New York Trilogy* can be melted down to three versions of one and the same tale, Auster makes it seem as if Quinn had done this to provide clues for Blue to use in his case. The same theory applies to *The Locked Room*, in which the narrator finds all of Fanshawe's literary effusions compiled in an innumerable series of red notebooks. Yet again, it seems that the red notebook is still the same as in Auster's first tale, handed down from Quinn to Blue to Fanshawe, and eventually the unnamed narrator. Auster mirrors the red notebook in all of his stories, just as he parallels his characters and thus makes it possible for an endless reading of *The New York Trilogy*: the characters move freely from one story to the next, and so does the notebook, which, even though it *does* have a last page, can be reopened and reread as much as the novel itself. In this way, Auster's protagonists do not "return home at the end of the novel" but rather fade "into the atextual, non-spatial void of having completed the red notebook" (Alford 623), which, in the end, "remained open, unfinished, to be started again" (Auster, *Room* 370).

Despite the fact that the reader is informed about the surface content of the red notebook(s) at least at several points throughout *The New York Trilogy*, the essential mysterious details that lead to Quinn's insane obsession with filling it are never revealed. The narrator in Auster's last story leaves the reader equally in the dark about the substance of Fanshawe's ultimate red notebook. In comparison to Poe's stories under investigation it is clear that the purloined letter in the detective story of the same title is to Poe what the red notebook is to Auster, namely "a key text or a prize text: it is a key text that Dupin must recover in order to get his reward (or his revenge), but it can also be viewed as the ultimate object of Dupin's quest, and in this sense would be a prize text" (Black 79). It can be argued that the significance of the letter changes from key to prize text and back several times throughout Poe's tale, while its content is never revealed – neither to the characters in the story, nor to the reader.

What has been called ‘metaphysical detective fiction’ addresses this issue of value [of the letter], and reveals the worth of the prize text to be contingent on a proper assessment of the key text. Before the detective and the reader can make an accurate interpretation of signs and events that will lead them to the prize, they must have the necessary information provided by the key text, which itself becomes the desired object. (Black 80)

Dupin knows what the stolen letter contains, not because he has read it, but because he can infer it from the circumstances of the case. Clearly, the Minister D– is blackmailing the Queen because of the delicate content of her note with regard to the King.

With the stealing and hiding of the letter the action of the story begins, and so Poe’s tale establishes meaning only through the emergence of a text within the text. Similarly, Auster’s cases cannot begin without the red notebook by the protagonist’s side, as this would otherwise undermine the writer’s ability to put pen to paper. The difference that exists in the significance of the key documents in Poe and Auster’s stories is that while the red notebook is actively being (re)written and (re)read innumerable times as the story progresses, the purloined letter remains unread by the characters and simultaneously unreadable.

In the end it is Auster’s red notebook that establishes his novel as an endless cycle yet again: the author (Auster) writes stories about writers (Quinn, Blue/Black, Fanshawe) who write stories about other writers (Stillman Sr., Black/Blue). At the same time, the reader reads stories in which writers read stories by other writers, written in different versions of the red notebook. Thus, the reader enters Auster’s fiction as well as the mind of his characters through texts within the text, establishing *The New York Trilogy* yet again as a metafictional work.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has offered a comparative analysis of selected fiction by American writers Edgar Allan Poe and Paul Auster under the premise that the “persistent imagery of splitting, of decapitation, [...] functions to ironically subvert the false dichotomy between body and head. It has also another role: to question the very notion of identity” (Shiloh 23). Both authors’ fictions depend to a great extent on the treatment of the complex issue of the distinctiveness of one’s existence and the meaning of both the real and the fictional worlds. The examination of the short stories chosen has revealed the significance of Poe and Auster’s personal lives for their works and has, in the case at hand, proven that a constructed universe can never be satisfactorily interpreted out of the context of the real.

In the short stories presented, all of Poe and Auster’s protagonists struggle with the fact that their identities are undermined by a paradoxically identical antagonist who must be eliminated in order for them not to self-destruct. Most of these opponents emerge from within the main characters and challenge them to such an extreme that psychological self-splitting is the only logical consequence. All of them either *are* or *become* detectives whose quest for the solution of the respective cases inevitably leads them to themselves and thereby they establish self-searching processes as well as the narratives they appear in as circular.

Quinn, Blue and the unnamed narrator of the three short novels in *The New York Trilogy* are all in active pursuit of a pseudo-villain. While Blue is an actual private investigator hired to shadow Black, Quinn and the narrator are forced into the position of the detective by their own curiosities regarding the cases. All three establish the urban crowd of New York as their premises and trace their doppelgangers in a seemingly endless cycle. Similarly, the secretive narrator in “The Man of the Crowd” chases his second self through the streets of London in order to find some unique meaning within himself. These four men are all frustrated at some point during their particular missions because they cannot realize that the answers they are looking for are hidden within themselves. Auster’s protagonists intend to reinvent themselves by taking on new identities in the hope that these will bring them closer to a solution.

Quinn not only assumes pseudonyms to act as someone else in his writing, he also takes on the role of the fictional Paul Auster, another writer mistaken for a detective. In this way, the author Paul Auster can actively intrude on his own story and comment on the ambiguousness of his fictional world. Much like Quinn, the narrator-protagonist in *The Locked Room* assumes the part of a detective in search of his friend; in both cases, this occurs without any transparent reason, for either character's starting situation is entirely unrelated to the cases at hand. The same is true for Poe's narrator in "The Man of the Crowd": there is no active impulse for him to pursue his unknown opponent, and yet he is incapable of letting go of the issue because of the instability of his own self.

By contrast, William Wilson and C. Auguste Dupin passively wait for the solution to their problems to reach them. It appears that Wilson's fear of his rival leads him to desert his unnamed location when an active confrontation would possibly bring about peace of mind. Dupin, on the other hand, is convinced that the mere acts of thought and identification will solve the crime in "The Purloined Letter" and thus remains unalarmed in his apartment in Paris. Both protagonists acknowledge the features they share with their opponents, but are just as unable or unwilling to conclude that the actual 'other' they are dealing with resides within themselves as the main characters in *The New York Trilogy*. Neither Wilson nor Dupin are actual detectives, and so their methods of dealing with their cases appear extraordinary to the reader.

What this study has further shown is that both Poe and Auster's quests for identity in their literary texts can be traced back to their disappointments with their absent fathers. As their characters are haunted by and equally chase different representations of missing male role models, "[s]ubmission to authority", as in the case of Stillman Jr. in *City of Glass*, "causes the self to lose its voice" (Nikolic). Stillman Jr. has long lived under the oppression of his father, Stillman Sr., just as much as Poe was dominated by an aggressive John Allan, and Auster by the overwhelming disinterest of Samuel Auster. Stillman Jr.'s inability to speak clearly, caused by the insanity of his father, represents the impossibility of communication between Auster and his father. Auster could never establish his voice while his father was still alive and thus speaks to him through his characters. Similarly, Poe reflects on his bad relationship with David Poe and John Allan in "William Wilson", suggesting that the protagonist's parents had failed him miserably and negatively connoting that Wilson "fully inherited the family character" (Poe,

„Wilson“ 217). So, as Poe and Auster discuss problems of authority with regard to their father figures it can be inferred from their texts that the absence of David Poe (as well as of John Allan) and Samuel Auster has contributed to a great extent to the authors' questioning of their own identities and their subsequent treatment of the issue of inexistent fatherly love in their fiction.

As one of its last points, this thesis considered the significance of the process of writing in the given tales. As Auster yet again offers a reflection of himself in *The New York Trilogy* through the presentation of protagonists who are all writers, he establishes a very deep level of 'fiction within fiction' that is further strengthened by the symbolic value of the red notebook. In *Ghosts*, Black claims that "Writing [...] takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he's there, he's not really there" (Auster, 2009). In this way, Black alludes to two things: firstly, that it is in the nature of the writer to dive so deep into his fictional world that he disappears from the real world, and secondly, that it is the central issue of the writers in *The New York Trilogy* that, despite their physical presence, they are invisible because of their lack of self-understanding. They bring to paper their experiences with their doppelgangers in their notebooks, thereby misunderstanding that, while "[w]riting is a solitary business" (Auster, *Ghosts* 209), this documentation eternalizes their other halves and simultaneously blurs what is real and what is fictional.

The central issue of this analysis was to highlight that Edgar Allan Poe and Paul Auster are as much mirror images of each other as the stories and characters they present are. While their protagonists adhere to an ideology that does not permit any mystery to remain unsolved, it is the mystery of their inner lives that suffers from their lack of self-understanding and self-reflection. Both authors' main characters meet their antagonist-doppelgangers and confront them in one way or another in order to be able to deal with and counteract their psychologically split self. Poe's "William Wilson", "The Man of the Crowd", and "The Purloined Letter" as well as Auster's *The New York Trilogy* are presented as stories 'in flux' because of the ease with which the characters can be interchanged within as well as across the texts. From this follows that the main characters are so instable that they fade into nothingness because if they cannot be unique, they cannot be at all.

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8. APPENDIX

8.1. ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

This thesis is concerned with the relations between and the literary representations of Edgar Allan Poe and Paul Auster. It analyzes selected texts (“William Wilson”, “The Man of the Crowd”, and “The Purloined Letter”, as well as The New York Trilogy (*City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room*) respectively) which all feature (pseudo-) detectives in quest of their true unique selves. The appearance of their antagonist-doppelgangers challenges them up to a point where their self-searching processes lead to psychological self-splitting and instability in the (fictional) world.

This analysis focuses on the fact that the stories’ protagonists are all versions of similar individuals, who can ultimately be seen as mirror images of the authors themselves. This can be traced back to the similarities found in the biographies of Poe and Auster, and the aspects that the latter author has transferred and developed from the former. Both deal with the theme of absent fathers who have given themselves as well as their main characters reason to doubt their existence and eventually self-destruct because of the fragility of their identities. Furthermore, Poe references his contemporary Nathaniel Hawthorne, just as Auster alludes to Poe, establishing both their fictions as intertextual and metafictional.

This proposal thus analyzes in how far Poe and Auster treat their respective identity crises through their protagonists, and what significance their texts have for each other as well as for the eras in which they produced them.

8.2. ABSTRACT (DEUTSCH)

Eine der wohl besorgniserregendsten Fragen der Menschheit bezieht sich seit jeher auf den Sinn ihrer Existenz und jenen des menschlichen Lebens im Allgemeinen. Wer sind wir? Warum leben wir auf dieser Erde, und welche Bedeutung steckt hinter unserem Dasein? Mit diesen Problemen beschäftigt sich jeder Mensch regelmäßig im Laufe seines Lebens, in der Angst, niemals eine zufriedenstellende Antwort auf auch nur eine davon zu finden. Edgar Allan Poe und Paul Auster, zwei amerikanische Schriftsteller aus dem jeweils 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, behandeln in ihren literarischen Werken jenes komplexe Thema der Identität und versuchen ihre Charaktere und damit auch sich selbst immer wieder neu zu definieren. Der zentrale Belang ihrer Erzählungen liegt dabei auf dem inneren Kampf, den jeder Mensch insgeheim in seinem eigenen komplexen Universum mit sich selbst führt.

Das Ziel dieser Arbeit liegt darin, Edgar Allan Poe und Paul Auster anhand ausgewählter Erzählungen („William Wilson“, „The Man of the Crowd“ und „The Purloined Letter“, sowie *The New York Trilogy*) in ihren jeweiligen Epochen zu kontextualisieren und dadurch zu beweisen, dass sich ihre jeweiligen Überlegungen bezüglich konstruierter und realer Identitäten trotz des zeitlichen Abstandes zwischen ihren Werken ähneln und auch noch heute anwendbar sind. In diesem Sinne soll sich daraus erschließen, dass Paul Auster Edgar Allan Poes Konzepte und Anregungen zum Teil übernommen und ebenso weiterentwickelt hat.

In den Erzählungen beider Autoren versuchen die Protagonisten ihrer wahren Identität auf den Grund zu gehen. Sie scheitern allerdings an dem Erscheinen eines Antagonisten, welcher sich in allen Fällen als ihr paradox-identischer Doppelgänger herausstellt und sie scheinbar dazu herausfordern will, sich mehr mit ihrem Innenleben und ihrem damit gekoppelten wahren ‚Ich‘ zu beschäftigen. Sowohl Poe als auch Auster erschaffen ihre Hauptcharaktere als (Schein-)Detektive, deren Suche nach der Lösung ihrer aktuellen Fälle sie immer zu sich selbst führt. Damit landen nicht nur die literarischen Figuren, sondern auch die Geschichten der beiden Autoren immer wieder an ihrem Ausgangspunkt. Dies lässt den Prozess der Selbstfindung zyklisch wirken, was dazu führt, dass die hier behandelten Erzählungen immer wieder von vorne gelesen werden und die Protagonisten ihr ‚Ich‘ auf ewig weiter erforschen können.

Diese Arbeit behandelt somit den Bezug zwischen Edgar Allan Poe und Paul Austers Charakteren und stellt fest, dass sowohl sie, als auch die Autoren selbst untereinander austauschbar sind („interchangeability“) und somit das Konzept der „fluid identity“ bestätigen. Die Gemeinsamkeiten (und Unterschiede) zwischen den Werken der beiden Autoren können dadurch leicht festgestellt und unter anderem auf ihre Lebensgeschichten zurückgeführt werden. Einer der letzten Teile dieser Analyse bezeugt Beispiele für die fiktionale Verarbeitung von fehlenden Vaterfiguren und männlichen Vorbildern in beider Autoren Leben: ihre Hauptakteure (vor allem William Wilson, der unbekannte Erzähler in „The Man of the Crowd“ und Quinn in *City of Glass*) verfolgen Doppelgänger ihrer selbst und ihrer abgängigen Väter und somit verarbeiten Poe und Auster die Konflikte mit ihren eigenen verlorenen Vorbildcharakteren. Dies führt weiters zu Überlegungen bezüglich Intertextualität, welche anhand ausgewählter wissenschaftlicher Forschungsanalysen (Mikhail Bakhtin, Linda Hutcheon) erklärt wird. Auster kreiert mittels Übernahme von Themen und Konzepten Poes den metafictionalen und intertextuellen postmodernen Detektivroman des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts, für welchen die Signifikanz von Literatur und der Tätigkeit des Schreibens innerhalb des Werks einen zentralen Punkt darstellt. Austers Protagonisten werden alle als Schriftsteller der einen oder anderen Art präsentiert, die sich durch das literarische Verwirklichen ihrer Ideen selbst zu finden versuchen. Weiters ist für Poes „The Purloined Letter“ der darin verschwundene Brief ein „key“ und auch „prize text“, was bedeutet, dass es ohne ihn keine Handlung gäbe. Durch dieses Vorkommen von Literatur innerhalb der Literatur erschließt sich der metafictionale und intertextuelle Aspekt im Werk beider Autoren.

Die abschließende Erkenntnis dieser Arbeit ist die Tatsache, dass Edgar Allan Poe und Paul Auster ebenso wie ihre Protagonisten Doppelgänger voneinander darstellen. Sie zwingen ihre literarischen Erschaffungen dazu, über sich selbst zu reflektieren und bekommen dabei die Chance, ihre eigenen Gedanken und Probleme aufzurollen. Dadurch rufen sie die direkte Konfrontation mit den jeweiligen personifizierten Spiegelbildern hervor, was zum Versuch der Rekonstruktion des einzig wahren ‚Ichs‘ der Hauptcharaktere führt. Durch ihre Austauschbarkeit unterziehen sie sich allerdings wiederum der Instabilität des Universums und verblassen dabei in der endlosen Nichtigkeit der (fiktionalen und realen) Welt.

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9. INDEX

“

“The Fall of the House of Usher” 11, 12, 16
 “The Imp of the Perverse” 16
 “The Man of the Crowd” ...2, 5, 15, 18, 19, 28, 29, 30,
 31, 34, 37, 38, 42, 43, 80, 85, 87
 “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” 13, 34, 35
 “The Philosophy of Composition” 14, 91
 “The Purloined Letter” 2, 5, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 35, 38,
 39, 40, 42, 49, 86, 87
 “The Raven” 14
 “William Wilson” ..2, 5, 11, 15, 18, 19, 21, 27, 29, 30,
 37, 43, 63, 86, 87

A

absent father 46
 action . 17, 19, 22, 35, 37, 38, 44, 56, 65, 68, 71, 74, 84
 alcohol 6, 16, 27
 Allan, Frances 7, 8, 9
 Allan, John ... 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 19, 21, 22, 42, 86, 87, 89,
 90, 91
 American Romantic Movement 16
 analytic 3, 34, 42
 antagonist 3, 38
 anti-detective 3, 43, 49, 50
 appearance 18, 19, 22, 23, 75
 archetype 16, 50
 army 9
 Auster 2, 3, 4, 18, 19, 22, 23, 29, 31, 32, 39, 42, 43, 44,
 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58,
 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 74,
 75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89,
 90, 91, 92
 author 14, 17, 21, 22, 33, 34, 35, 39, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50,
 52, 55, 56, 62, 80, 82, 84, 86
 autobiographical 47

B

Bakhtin, Mikhail 3, 53
 Baltimore 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 90, 91
 Barone, Dennis 3, 91
 behavior 8, 9, 15, 18, 24, 31, 40, 58, 63, 76, 80
 binaries 4, 14, 27, 36
 binary 4, 18, 19, 32, 49
 bipolar 12, 90
 Black 12, 16, 23, 39, 62, 64, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 74,
 77, 78, 80, 83, 84, 85, 87
 Blue ..23, 39, 50, 51, 54, 62, 64, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71,
 74, 75, 77, 78, 80, 83, 84, 85

C

certainty 51, 82
 circularity 4
City of Glass 2, 5, 22, 47, 50, 51, 54, 56, 60, 62, 63,
 68, 73, 74, 75, 77, 79, 81, 82, 86, 88
 Clemm, Maria 9, 10, 11, 91
 Clemm, Virginia 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 57

conscience 18, 21, 23, 24, 26, 28, 29, 33, 55, 65, 66,
 67, 71, 75
 constructed 2, 4, 27, 53, 85
 counterpart 18, 23, 24, 25
 crime... 4, 13, 17, 19, 21, 28, 30, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 42,
 43, 49, 62, 66, 70, 80, 86
 criminal 17, 18, 31, 37, 39, 40, 57
 crowd 13, 18, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 37, 38, 39, 47, 85
 cycle 24, 28, 71, 75, 77, 79, 84, 85

D

Dark Romanticism 3, 6, 16
 darkness 25, 26, 37, 60, 68, 71
 David Poe 6, 22, 80, 86
 death . 4, 6, 7, 12, 14, 15, 19, 26, 27, 34, 44, 45, 47, 65,
 70, 72, 77
 depth 30, 36, 39, 66
 destiny 19, 23, 47, 82
 detachment 29, 70
 detect 17, 36, 37, 43, 50
 detective 3, 4, 13, 17, 18, 19, 23, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34,
 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 49, 55, 56, 57, 58,
 59, 66, 69, 75, 80, 82, 83, 84, 85, 92
 detective story 3, 13, 17, 34, 35, 42, 83
 doppelganger .. 3, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 26, 30, 32, 37,
 38, 41, 43, 85, 87
 double 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 31, 32, 33, 38, 40, 65,
 67, 77, 78, 79
 doubleness 49
 doubling 19, 40, 63, 79, 82
 drinking 8, 10, 23, 80
 dual 24, 40
 Dupin 13, 14, 17, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38,
 39, 40, 42, 43, 49, 57, 58, 63, 64, 74, 83, 84, 86

E

ego 18, 23, 24, 26, 71, 73
 emotion 4, 17
 England 7, 22
 epistemological 48
 escape 14, 24, 25, 26, 30, 31, 54, 56, 57, 59, 66, 78
 evil 4, 16, 17, 21, 23, 25, 26
 existence 2, 3, 19, 24, 27, 48, 62, 65, 67, 68, 70, 71,
 78, 85
 extremes 12, 17, 24, 64

F

failure 6, 21, 22, 49, 50, 67, 72
 Fanshawe 51, 53, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 83, 84
 father .. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 17, 21, 39, 43, 44, 45, 46, 57, 59,
 75, 86
 fathers 3, 9, 21, 47, 81, 86
 fictional world 2, 85, 86, 87
 fighting 9, 72
 first-person 28, 60, 74
 flânerie 29, 32
 foreshadowing 65
 Foster parents 7

G

gambling..... 8, 9, 21, 23, 80
 genre..... 3, 6, 13, 17, 19, 34, 42
 ghost..... 26, 60, 64, 67, 68, 69, 75, 76
Ghosts...2, 5, 18, 23, 29, 39, 50, 51, 54, 62, 63, 64, 66,
 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 77, 78, 80, 83,
 87, 88
 Gold..... 69, 70

H

Hawthorne, Nathaniel ... 11, 53, 65, 71, 72, 73, 74, 78,
 88
 historiographic 52
 history..... 8, 10, 52
 Hutcheon, Linda..... 4, 48, 52

I

identification 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 57, 86
 identity..2, 4, 15, 19, 25, 27, 30, 32, 38, 39, 40, 43, 46,
 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 61, 62, 64, 67, 68, 71,
 73, 74, 75, 79, 85, 86
 illness..... 8, 12, 15, 16, 28, 90
 illusion..... 25
 imaginary..... 51, 56
 imitation 23, 40, 63
 imp..... 16, 17, 26
 ingenuity..... 38, 39
 instability..... 48, 54, 86
 interchangeability 30, 32, 63, 66, 73
 intertextuality 22, 52, 53
 investigation..... 17, 34, 36, 37, 38, 40, 50, 57, 82, 83
 investigator..... 3, 17, 28, 29, 34, 35, 36, 40, 42, 43, 49,
 51, 55, 56, 69, 85

K

knowledge 9, 18, 29, 34, 36, 42, 48, 49, 60, 62, 66, 67,
 69
 Kristeva, Julia 4, 52, 53

L

language 50, 52
 letter..... 9, 13, 35, 36, 37, 40, 55, 74, 75, 76, 77, 83, 84
 light..... 7, 25, 37, 43, 60, 65, 68
 literature 3, 8, 10, 12, 15, 44, 52
 locked room..... 76, 78
 London 13, 28, 31, 32, 33, 38, 85, 91, 92
 loneliness..... 14, 47, 71

M

madness 12, 18, 19, 26
 male role models..... 86
 Max Work 55, 57
 meaning 2, 4, 28, 32, 50, 52, 54, 55, 56, 69, 71, 82, 84,
 85
 mental 12, 16, 17, 18, 37, 38, 39, 40, 74
 metafiction 50, 52
 metaphor..... 16, 25
 metaphysical 3, 34, 42, 84
 mind..12, 13, 14, 17, 28, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37, 39, 40, 45,
 49, 58, 63, 66, 67, 68, 76, 77, 84, 86

Minister 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 74, 84
 mirror..... 7, 14, 18, 23, 24, 25, 37, 38, 42, 61, 63, 87
 Mitchum 70
 Mrs. Blue 70, 72
 murderer 14, 49, 69
 mystery ...32, 36, 38, 43, 49, 50, 51, 54, 56, 62, 64, 69,
 74, 75, 76, 82, 87, 89

N

name7, 9, 18, 22, 23, 24, 47, 48, 51, 55, 57, 58, 59, 68,
 70, 71, 74, 76, 81
 narrative....4, 11, 21, 33, 42, 43, 49, 53, 61, 71, 74, 75,
 78, 92
 narrator ...16, 18, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38,
 40, 50, 51, 54, 56, 60, 62, 67, 71, 74, 75, 76, 77,
 78, 80, 83, 85
 nature 6, 18, 24, 28, 42, 87
 notebook 62, 78, 82, 83, 84, 87

O

obsession 8, 18, 31, 43, 77, 82, 83
 omniscient 49
 ontological..... 48

P

personality 13, 15, 21, 24, 29, 41, 58, 69
 physical 3, 7, 12, 14, 16, 17, 23, 25, 30, 37, 46, 55, 67,
 77, 87
 Poe 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18,
 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32,
 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47,
 49, 51, 53, 55, 57, 58, 63, 80, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87,
 88, 89, 90, 91, 92
 postmodern..... 3, 48, 49, 54
 postmodernism 2, 34, 48, 49, 52
 Prefect..... 31, 35, 36, 38
 private eye..... 29, 34, 56, 70
 protagonist..3, 4, 13, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30,
 31, 37, 38, 43, 45, 46, 47, 50, 51, 54, 55, 56, 58,
 59, 62, 65, 66, 67, 70, 71, 72, 74, 80, 82, 83, 84,
 85, 86, 87
 pseudo.3, 13, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, 35, 39, 43, 51, 56, 59,
 85
 psychology 16
 publication..... 10
 purpose 37, 51, 55, 56, 70, 78

Q

Quinn ..9, 11, 27, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60,
 62, 63, 73, 74, 75, 77, 78, 80, 82, 83, 84, 85
 Quinn, Arthur Hobson 3, 91

R

ratiocination 17, 19, 42, 53
 reader ..4, 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 30, 31, 33, 35, 39, 43,
 47, 49, 50, 53, 54, 56, 58, 59, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67,
 68, 69, 71, 74, 77, 80, 82, 83, 84, 86
 real world 2, 87
 reality..... 2, 42, 47, 49, 50, 51, 55, 57, 60, 63, 70
 reason 4, 6, 12, 14, 28, 64, 69, 71, 73, 75, 86
 relativity 3

romanticism 2

S

Samuel Auster 45, 80, 86
self 2, 4, 7, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 31,
32, 34, 36, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50,
52, 55, 56, 59, 71, 76, 79, 85, 86, 87
self-destruct 4, 40, 85
self-reflection 39, 43, 50, 87
self-reflexivity 4, 42, 52
separation 18, 24, 46, 71, 75
short fiction 3, 4
solitude 46, 47, 59, 76
son ... 6, 8, 10, 24, 44, 45, 46, 53, 54, 55, 57, 59, 76, 80
split 15, 18, 29, 41, 56, 58, 69, 73, 87
Stillman .. 32, 51, 57, 58, 59, 61, 63, 74, 77, 80, 82, 84,
86
struggle .. 2, 3, 15, 17, 19, 24, 26, 28, 36, 41, 45, 47, 51,
55, 72, 85
suicide 12, 26, 67
surface 31, 36, 57, 60, 68, 71, 83

T

Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque 11, 12, 16
terror 6, 16, 24, 34
The Locked Room .. 2, 5, 50, 51, 54, 74, 77, 78, 80, 83,
86, 88, 90
The New York Trilogy .. 2, 3, 32, 43, 46, 47, 50, 51, 53,
54, 62, 74, 75, 77, 79, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 92
theme 2, 14, 18, 29, 32, 38, 50, 53, 54
thought .. 3, 12, 29, 35, 37, 38, 39, 45, 46, 50, 52, 57, 63,
71, 75, 77, 86
trauma 9, 12, 46, 55
triad 40, 42, 55, 56, 58

truth 23, 66, 72
Twice Told Tales 11

U

uncertainty 47, 48, 50, 51, 62
unconsciousness 13, 77
unique 31, 38, 64, 82, 85, 87
uniqueness 3, 23, 31, 38, 51, 82
United States 7, 10, 44
Unity 14
unnamed .. 18, 22, 28, 30, 33, 34, 35, 37, 40, 50, 51, 54,
74, 78, 83, 85, 86

V

version 19, 22, 33, 39, 51, 56, 65, 68, 71, 77, 80
victim 12, 31, 35, 42
villain 17, 35, 42, 85

W

Wakefield 71, 74, 75, 78
White 23, 62, 64, 68, 69, 70, 80
wife .. 6, 9, 12, 15, 25, 53, 54, 55, 57, 59, 71, 74, 75, 76,
79
William Henry Leonard 6
William Wilson .. 2, 5, 11, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26,
27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 37, 39, 43, 53, 55, 63, 80,
86, 87, 88
writer 4, 6, 13, 19, 49, 53, 54, 55, 56, 59, 63, 65, 66,
69, 74, 76, 84, 86, 87
writing .. 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 21, 35, 43, 45,
46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 78, 82,
86, 87