

(Mis)guiding the Reader in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*

5

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This paper examines the way Paul Auster spoils the conventions that govern narratives. The story plays with the rules of narratives by disrupting them. *City of Glass* is a metafictional novel in the sense that it wrecks havoc on the regulations a novel should obey to. This story is a fragmented account of events connected by mere chance, acted out by agents who are not the ones they seem to be in a setting that is nothing more than a translucent cage for the hollow individuals inhabiting it.

City of Glass uses the form of detective fiction to tell the story of the disintegration of the protagonist's identity. Daniel Quinn the detective fiction writer is accidentally hired by the Stillman family to solve a strange case. As the story goes on, the circumstances of the case get more and more confusing. The whole story is practically falling apart, including the characters themselves. The ending leaves open all the questions that have been raised through the story, giving the reader the accurate feeling that there is more to this short novel than it may look at first sight. Though it has all the formal characteristics of a conventional detective story, *City of Glass* is more like a fiction on the nature of fiction itself. Examining and spoiling the conventions of storytelling and narrative structuring, Paul Auster keeps the reader from seeing this work for what it is. But at the end the reader realizes the trick played on him and looking at the story in a way that is free from interpretation it is easy to see the real point of the story.

The paper explores the question of how long the reader can be misled by ambiguous elements of the story before realizing that he was misled. The method of my research will be to analyze *City of Glass* 'respectably,' i.e. according to the elements that make up a story and point out the ambiguities. I am to underline the conventions that make the reader misinterpret the story, then I show the purpose of these elements that is different from the role they would have if this short novel would be a conventional piece of narrative.

In the first main section I will give a brief account of the evolution the detective fiction genre from its early stages to the present showing the changes that occurred in the form and in the concerns of the genre. Also, I am to look into what similarities can be found between the technique used to solve the enigma of the novel and the reader's approach for instance to *City of Glass*.

In the second main section I will give a comparative analysis of the story itself in terms of plot and narration. On the one hand, I survey what general conventions govern the structure of narratives and how these conventions influence the readers. On the other hand, I show how the storyline is constructed in *City of Glass* and how it plays with the conventions.

The third main section will deal with the characterization methods used conventionally as opposed to the disintegration of identity that takes place in this case.

1. The Evolution of the Detective Fiction Genre

To summarize the evolution of the detective novel: it has undergone major changes from the British classic formula that gives an account of the conservative intellectual game of the elite solving a puzzle and restoring status quo without the intention of challenging it, the detective being completely remote from the case, solving it with pure positivistic logic. In the American hard-boiled type the protagonist has doubts about the order he/she is about to restore. He solves the puzzle handed to him with reflecting the enigma through his own identity. By doing this, he also challenges the idea of the hermeneutical method of solving the crime. The metaphysical/metatextual model of the detective story is the one where these doubts are applied even to the literary medium, in this case the text, itself. The text leaves the reader with no solution or reward of closure, just a set of open questions and the aesthetic joy caused by the virtuosity this loss was presented by

This discussion of the detective genre in itself was important because these stages are all present in *City of Glass*. The novel itself is a metafictional detective novel, so it uses the conventional detective novel as a model for an experiment on the possible variations of form. The enigma solving formula of both previous types are connected to the novel. For example when Quinn makes the map of Peter Stillman Sr.'s walks that is a great example for the hermeneutical way of solving enigmas. While the way that he is *telling* the old man is the method used usually in the *hard-boiled* model. There are similarities between the reader's approach and the way detectives want to solve the

enigma in the American type model, for the reader is involved in the case. It is not enough to see how Quinn solves the case, the reader wants to solve it for himself, even before Quinn does.

City of Glass uses both previous models to make up the new model it uses to experiment with the reader and to a certain extent with the genre

Itself, too. I think it is vital to know the customs and the limits of the genre its „highly organized structure and recognized conventions“ (P. D. James 2009.), to be able to understand why this genre was used in the first place.

The reasons for the fallibility of the reader

It is hard not to see the analogy between the outcome of the readers' attempts to construct a solution for the story and the failure of the protagonist of the *City of Glass*, Daniel Quinn to solve the Stillman case. Both make the mistake of not seeing the gaps in the story as gaps but rather looking at them like opportunities to apply expectations based on previously gained knowledge. According to Cohan and Shires this is explained by the readers' expectations:

the fact that we always interpret literary works to some extent in the light of our own concerns – indeed that is one sense of our own concerns we are incapable of doing anything else (23)

The same thing happened in both cases: the reader of a text took certain things for granted due to bad choices of interpretation and the obsession to find the explanation that fits in the story. In turn, the explanation that only exists in one's mind makes the interpreter overlook obvious clues simply because of being on the wrong track. The objective of the writer is to uphold the illusion of the reader that everything goes as the reader *planned* up until the very end when the misled reader is left with not the expected solution but the realization of having been tricked all along.

Certain elements of the story are ambiguous and can be interpreted, if combined with the reader's expectations to suggest that *City of Glass* is a conventional detective novel. Eventually however, *City of Glass* turns out to be much more than a piece of conventional detective fiction. It becomes clear that what the reader has just finished was a metafictional detective novel, for the reader has been deceived by the author all along. Paying attention to the plot and the characters' roles in the plot, the true genre of the book remained hidden, nothing in the story was what it seemed to be. Here all these elements only got a different significance when they were mixed with and improved by the reader's possible explanations. The major effect of the book is outside the story, located in the readers' mind. The impact takes place after finishing

the book, when the reader realizes having been victimized by the writer. After realizing what he has to look for, the clues about the metafictional nature of the text start to crystallize. All the clues that the reader took for granted to show the solution will be there at the end, to gain a new meaning. In fact, something is revealed to the reader at the very end but it is not the solution of the Stillman case. It is the mere fact that the reader was tricked and was even given hints about being tricked but still did not realize what was happening.

2. Disrupting the conventions of storytelling

All narratives share some basically similar structural features. The set of these features are called narrative poetics which, according to Cohan and Shires, are “the set of identifiable conventions that make a given text recognizable as a narrated story” (53). Being aware of these rules is vital for the reader to understand the story. These conventions are learned through experience and the reader is being reassured of their existence by the narratives themselves. For example in the detective fiction genre the reader expects a twist in the story at the end and because in most of the cases the writer of the story puts a twist there, this twist will reassure the reader that he was right and the expectations of his were true. So next time when he reads a narrative of the same genre he will expect the twist again. The story is the sequencing of certain events in the linear order characteristic of narrative fiction. An event is a sort of physical or mental activity, an occurrence in time. As opposed to this, a sequence as Cohan and Shires states “contains at least two events, one to establish the narrative situation, and the other to alter the initial situation” (54). For example in *City of Glass* Quinn reading at home at the beginning is the event that established the situation and the phone call he received altered the situation setting the story in motion.

Syntagmatic structure orders the events that take place in the story along a timeline and by the logical relationship of the events to one another. The events can be categorized into two groups: kernels and satellites. The kernel events raise possibilities, alter the story, introduce something new that may influence the outcome, while satellite events amplify or fill in the outline of the sequence practically filling the gaps between the kernel events by keeping the story in motion but not altering it in any way. For example, when Daniel Quinn visits the Stillmans’ residence in the role of being Paul Auster the private detective is a kernel event for it changes the course of the story because he acquires information about the case he will work on. In fact that

is the scene where he commits himself to his employers and accepts the case. But the scene where he goes to the diner to have dinner is a satellite event for it has no particular effect on the story, it only fills in the gaps between the next significant event (kernel event) taking place next morning, when he goes to Columbia Library and reads Peter Stillman Sr.'s book and gains new information from it.

Another feature that distinguishes kernel events from satellite events is that while kernel events cannot be removed or replaced without altering the sequence, satellite events can be reordered or replaced. It would make no difference regarding the story whether Quinn would have gone to have dinner that night or to see a baseball game. But if for instance he would have read Peter Stillman Sr.'s book first and would then listen to Peter Stillman Jr.'s monologue, that would certainly make a difference.

The story has a different order in time and in logic. There is a difference between the relation of the events when only their place on the timeline is considered (temporal relations) or when their logical relations are considered. The temporal ordering is always present in the narrative: that is called the story. But the logical relationship between the events is not mandatory. This ordering based on the logical cause and effect relation of the events is called the plot. Because most of the narratives have a plot, the readers expect every single piece of narrative fiction to have a plot. Being reassured of the above conventions, readers tend to discover the causal relationship of events even when it is not present at all. The absence of causal relation of the events or illogical ordering of the events is not mandatory for a sequence. Temporal ordering, however, is essential.

An enigma is often used by the writer to keep the story moving, the main goal of the story itself is to answer this initial question and all the events of the story gain meaning only in relation to this question. Of course, this tool of the writer is much more significant in detective fiction than in any other type of narrative. For in detective fiction the sole purpose of the story is to get the answer for the question raised at the beginning.

An ordinary story is based on the logical-causal relationship of the events. Something happens and it brings up consequences that bring up further consequences. In the plot of the *City of Glass* as it is even stated on the very first page of the book: "nothing was real except chance." (Auster 1990:3) There is no clear causality between the events at any point; the events are more like separate units floating. It is like a gigantic set of accidental coincidences put after one another. Neither Quinn nor the reader can be sure that he is on the right track at any point.

It is not the writer who creates the plot of the events but the expectations of the reader. The whole story is started by an accidental phone call; Quinn

was not destined to get involved with the case, he is not even sure why he accepted it. The whole story gets disrupted at the train station scene where all Quinn has is a photo taken twenty years ago of a man with no real distinctive features. It is even stated in the text that considering just the photo, anyone on that train could have been Peter Stillman Sr. There were actually two versions of him getting off the train: an old bum and another in decent clothes.

From this point on the story can be interpreted by saying that Quinn is on the wrong track all along and every clue he finds every lead he follows is a false one, only seeming true, for he wants them to be true. The same goes for the reader too, who is equally aware of the possibility of Quinn's bad choice at the train station but wants to believe (assumes) that Quinn made the right choice after all. In the light of this, the events that take place later on may seem correct, but assuming that Quinn followed the wrong Stillman from the beginning can be equally likely and true. The only thing that makes the reader assume that Quinn's decision was correct is the belief that *City of Glass* follows the conventions of narrative and therefore even if the plot seems a bit complicated or unclear it is existent after all.

But this story *mocks* conventions. The best example for this mockery that can be found in the book is the scene where Quinn visits Paul Auster and there they talk about the essay Auster is working on. The essay about Don Quixote, which is considered to be a hoax for the story it tells, is made up and there is confusion about the authorship of the book also. The research question of Auster's essay is very interesting (Auster 1990:120) "... In other words, to what extent would people tolerate blasphemies if they gave them amusement? The answer is obvious isn't it? To any extent." The presence of the version of the author of the book itself suggests that he will provide the solution to the enigma and this is exactly what he does. He clearly states that no matter how obvious a hoax is the writer can get away with it easily as long as it is presented in an amusing manner.

The irony of this is that he even gets away with the trick after telling the audience about it. Because so many odd events happen in the story that by this point the reader had to keep so many useless little pieces of information in mind and has his head full of possible endings that his brain is just not capable of seeing this statement for what it is: the solution to the text. Not the story, for the story has no solution, but the text. This little intermezzo seems like an interesting thing to think about like a detour but still, the reader just cannot wait to be back on the case itself. This event, if the reader keeps the conventions of the previous narratives in mind, seems to be a satellite event. It is a background scene with the purpose of adding color to the story, without changing the course of the events. But in fact this event is a kernel event: it holds the solution to the enigma presented by the story. The reader falls prey

to clinging to the standards of structure that he is used to, namely that the solution of the story is revealed only at the very end. And besides, the reader and Quinn are looking for the solution of the Stillman case, not that of the book the reader is reading, which is *City of Glass*. That is why one can easily fail to see this scene as a kernel event. The idea that the writer can fool the reader any way he wants, as long as it is presented in an amusing manner, has nothing to do with the Stillman case. But in fact the short novel itself has little connection with the case, too. The case is only a tool of the detective fiction genre, the genre only used as a model for this narrative about narratives.

These were only the main examples underlining the absence of the structured plot and how the author can hide this from the reader. Not to mention the fact that the reader is even teased to find the truth out but is kept in a trance like state by the technique Auster uses that leaves the reader blind to what is going on even when it is clearly shown to him.

Another good example for this phenomenon, the will to see meaning that fits into readers' expectations in things that have nothing to do with them, is the part when Quinn draws a map of the assumed Peter Stillman Sr.'s walks. The drawings are actually in the book for the reader to see with his/her own eyes. To a certain extent they do look like letters but only after one is told what to look for, as they may as well look like the map of some of the states of America or the birth-marks on the right leg of someone's long dead grandmother.

The reference to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a clear hint to the reader that the story does not have a plot. When Quinn talks to Peter Stillman Sr. for the second time, the old man says he chose the name of Henry Dark as his imaginary character to support his made up thesis because the initials H. D. referred to the initials of Humpty Dumpty, one of the characters from Lewis Carroll's other work *Through the Looking Glass*. This coincidence can be interpreted as a reference to the works of Lewis Carroll and to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. When Quinn wants to find out what the reason of Peter Stillman Sr.'s walks is and that why he is gathering pieces of broken items, he gets a concealed answer: nothing in connection with the plot, for there is no plot in this story just like there is no plot and therefore no logical relation between the events of Alice's story in Wonderland.

Most narratives follow certain conventions that make them easier to understand for the reader and easier to write for the writer. In the case of the story this convention is that the events that take place along the storyline are structured syntagmatically. This structure orders the events both temporally and logically in most of the cases. However, in *City of Glass* the logical ordering is only created by the reader, influenced by the expectation that the story will follow the conventions of narrative fiction. The reader is creating a

plot where there is nothing more than events in chronological order, without any causal relationship. It is not essential for a story to have a plot, for there were numerous plotless stories even before *City of Glass* for example *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, to which a clear reference is made, like giving a hint to the reader to give up making up the plot for himself and just look at the story as it is. As Brian MacHale puts it "metanarrative is conditioned by the situation of its telling the identity and interests of its teller" (6). The narration is in third person singular all through the story. When the narrator reveals his identity he is claiming himself to be a friend of Auster's (the one in the book). His only sources are Auster and Quinn's red notebook. Auster met Quinn in person only once and talked to him on the phone another time. His information on Quinn is vague, for it is impossible to form a clear opinion about anyone under so little time. The red notebook is incomplete too, for there are straight references in the story about Quinn being unable to put everything down even if that was his primary intention.

There are descriptions of complete days missing from the notebook and there are many parts where the writing is undecipherable. For instance when Quinn was *tailing* the old Stillman he wrote complete lines on one another. And he was not even writing into the book every single moment, as he summarized the events of the certain days at the end of the given day. It is sure that there are lots of things that are missing from the notebook. Another symbolic hint on the corrupted nature of the narration is that Quinn used the pen he bought from a deaf and mute man at the train station. How could anyone *tell* a story that has been written with a deaf and mute man's pen? This suggests that even the information actually included in the red notebook is only a feeble attempt to give an account to something that even the writer of the record could not understand. The list of the happenings cannot be complete or correct because Quinn did not have the tools to write a correct or complete memoir. He had little understanding of the events, it was impossible to put down everything, and all he had was the symbolically (for this purpose of storytelling at least) useless tool: the pen he bought from a deaf and mute man.

To summarize the nature of the narration I think it is fair to say that it is a fragmented account of the events. The events themselves took place mostly accidentally, without causal relations among them, and were carried out by agents who were not the people one may think they were. I used the phrase *Coup de Grace* to underline that the narration that is supposed to help the reader to understand the events and the reasons for them and to provide an explanation for how the characters' actions push the reader further into confusion and uncertainty instead.

3. Breaking the rules of characterization

Characters are the agents in the story who carry out the actions that serve as the events of the story. The characters are in relation to the sequence of events according to Conan and Shire: "that set of relations identifies the functions which the characters perform as actors" (69). These functions are similar in nature to the functions of words in a sentence. The story has a subject and an object. The subject carries out the actions that keep the story in motion. Like Quinn in *City of Glass*: his investigation is at the centre of the story and the story is kept in motion through him performing new actions, doing different things that influence the possible outcome of the story. And there is the object representing the goal of the story in most of the cases. In *City of Glass* the object is Peter Stillman Sr. straightforwardly enough, as he is in fact the object of Quinn's surveillance. So his function is hinted by the writer in a concealed manner. The function of subject or object is in a direct relation to the events of the story. But an indirect relation to the events is possible, too. These relations bring forth four additional classes of functions for actors.

The sender (initiating or enabling the event), the receiver (benefiting from, or registering effects of the event), the opponent (retarding or impeding the event by opposing the subject or competing with the subject for the object), and the helper (advancing or furthering the event by supporting or assisting the subject) (Cohan and Shire 1993:69).

These four additional functions for actors are present in most of the narratives, too. They are not limited to be filled by characters, for objects or abstractions can have the function of these classes as well. For example, in the event of Quinn trying to solve the Stillman case: if Quinn is the subject, Peter Stillman is the object, then the sender can be Mrs. Saavedra, the nurse who takes care of Peter Stillman Jr., for she gave the phone number of Auster/Quinn to Peter and Virginia Stillman, believing that it was the number of Paul Auster the detective. Thus Quinn got connected to the case. The receiver is Peter Stillman Jr., because he would benefit from Quinn stopping his father, Peter Stillman Sr., in his plan to kill his son. The helper is the character version of Paul Auster, promising to cash in the check for Quinn, so helping him financially.

As the example above shows, it is fairly easy to find the class of function for the characters in most of the stories. Another thing that must be mentioned though is that the classification of the actors can change depending on the event that is in the scope of our examination. Thus the certain actors can change their classes as the story goes on. The traits of a given actor possesses

are based on culture's assumptions and certain qualities that are recognizable as human nature. This means that the meaning of the trait should always be interpreted in the light of the cultural background of the historical era in which the story was written, as certain qualities have changed their meaning through time. For example, the ideal figure of women has changed a lot even in the last century. From the stout, almost chubby ideal to the slim, almost boyish figure of today's celebrities. The change a character's personality goes through can be signified by the fact that the traits change, disappear or get replaced by other traits.

The traits the actor possesses can be signified by the name of the character as the most direct approach (Henry Dark – a sinister figure from the past, Peter Stillman – the man who does not change because he practically never grew up or Max Work – the symbol of Quinn's obsession for work). The number of traits a character has defines the complexity of the character. This distinguishes so called round (detailed) characters from flat, uniform type like characters. The standard is that usually the characters in direct relation with the sequence of events are round characters, while the actors in indirect relation are flat characters. For instance in *City of Glass* there is very little we know about Virginia Stillman or Peter Stillman Jr., as opposed to Daniel Quinn, the main character of *City of Glass*. On the following pages I will analyze the personality of the protagonist of the story based on the examination of the changes his character goes through.

In the *City of Glass* there are eventually no stable characters. The best example for this is the protagonist himself, Daniel Quinn. He is a reclusive author called Daniel Quinn, a detective fiction writer who uses the pseudonym William Wilson (the name of a doppelgaenger from Poe) to hide his own identity. The hero of Quinn's works is Max Work; this name obviously acts as a symbol of Quinn only finding joy in total devotion to his work. What the reader sees at the very beginning is a cacophony of multiple confused identities compressed into one character. Quinn was an unstable character even at the very beginning. His wife had gone, he did not have any friends anymore, he publishes his works under his pseudonym (giving up his name)"and although in many ways Quinn continued to exist, he no longer existed for anyone but himself." (Auster 1990:5). His only anchor to stability is the apartment he rents. But the fact that he does not own the flat expresses the temporal nature of this anchor, too. He is unstable even to himself. Quinn has habits that underline his will to become nonexistent. For example, he feels it easier to identify himself with his fictional creation Max Work, than his pseudonym William Wilson.

His walks in the city served as his method to disappear and not just from other people but himself, too. Wandering aimlessly, clearing his head from all

thoughts: this is when he feels himself the best he can. Neither his everyday life, nor the writing of his works, nor anything else can make him feel the joy he feels when he can get away from himself and just act as an automatic walking device. It is easy to see how the traits the writer equips Quinn with set forth the fate of this character. His main reason for accepting the Stillman case is that it seemed like taking an escapist holiday. Being someone else, the detective Paul Auster, was a way for him to be like someone he always wanted to be: Max Work. Becoming people who do not exist was not new to Quinn before he took the role of Paul Auster the detective. After assuming Auster's identity, he also goes on taking roles. For example, during his three meetings with Peter Stillman Sr. every time they met Quinn used a different identity. Slowly but surely he is lost in an endless maze of names. First, he considers the character he is acting like an empty shell and this comforts him, for his walks were to give him the exact same feeling. When he is spending most of his time *tailgating* Peter Stillman Sr., he eventually identifies with him more and more, taking the same path his suspect does. So Quinn becomes the old man's shadow, an alternate version of his subject through the pursuit. Quinn is not even sure about whether or not the old Stillman is aware of his presence. It occurs to him that in fact the old man leads him by the nose and the pursuits only allow the old man to know exactly where Quinn is. By this thought the possibility of changing the function of the actors in direct relation to the story without focusing on another event (the conventional way actors can be classified into another function class) is introduced, suggesting that the roles of the characters are far from stable and the tables can be turned at any moment.

The deconstruction of Quinn's identity begins to speed up when he loses track of Peter Stillman Sr., so the first part of his life he loses is the target of the case he is working on (the subject of the event). After trying to get in touch with his employers and failing to do so (he lost the receivers of the event, too) he is actually the only character of the case who still exists. The other characters have dropped out of the story. The lost Quinn comes up with the idea that after failing as a private eye his only chance to solve the case is to put the Stillman residence under constant surveillance. He practically moves into an alley on the opposite side of the street and spends months there, watching the house. Quinn wants to get verification that his work was not useless, and he sacrifices everything just to get an answer. This sacrifice is a typical feature of the hard boiled detective novel according to Swope: "Thus, in order to protect the sanctity of the bourgeois home, the detective sacrificed his own position, or home, within that space" (Swope 2002:17.). When finally all his money is gone he comes out of the alley to go home and get some more money in order to be able to continue the surveillance of the

house. He sees himself in the window of a shop and realizes that his looks are reduced to the looks of a bum. This at that point does not mean much to him he has already lost his interest in his looks. But it is hard to overlook the fact that he got so identified with the target of his surveillance that the target actually turned upon him. The only thing he is obsessed with is the case. After talking to Auster on the phone he finds out that Peter and Victoria Stillman left the house before he even started his twenty-four-seven watch of it, because Peter Stillman's father committed suicide the same day he lost track of him. Now he actually lost the event itself, for without the object the goal cannot be archived, so the case becomes unsolvable. Quinn's character gained function in relation with the event itself (what is now gone) so the disintegration of his character speeds up. He tries to go home and return to his old life only to find that his apartment is now rented by a woman. His old life is impossible to return to, he has no money no home: he is actually a bum. His last and only anchor to reality is lost. All through the story the possibility to quit this game and return to his own life was taken for granted but when his home thus his only connection to reality is lost the game he was playing ends up with a dreadful result: Quinn has denied his own self for so long, impersonating nonexistent people, that it is impossible to return to his original identity for it no longer exists. Now he is stuck in the case more precisely the absence of the case because he lost the circumstances he possessed at the starting point of the story. With this possibility inaccessible to him he slowly fades away. He decides to go to the Stillman residence and stay there. He finds the house empty as if no-one had ever lived there. He settles in a room and spends his time writing. By this point he has lost interest in life so much that he does not even try to find out who is providing him with food everyday or to go to the light-switch to turn on the lights when it is dark. He destroys his other identities William Wilson and Max Work, so there is no one left but Daniel Quinn in „his descent into being a non-identity“ (Dawson). The only thing left to him is his red notebook he bought at the beginning of the Stillman case. He wanted to put everything down into it so he can keep track of what is happening. He is acquiescent to the situation. And when the red notebook's last page is full, Quinn too disappears without a trace, suggesting that the only thing that kept him alive was the flow the words he put down into his notebook. Being denied to write more by having no more space in his notebook he *ceases* to exist. Or as Swope puts it “Quinn himself seems to dissolve with the final words of his red notebook.” (Swope 2002)

As one can easily see, the character of Daniel Quinn was unstable from the very beginning. His tendency to feel all right when being nonexistent to himself either on one of his walks or to play the role of a nonexistent character showed his fate of disappearing without a trace. Later, losing his connection

to reality and his interest in everything but writing in the notebook suggested that when all his reasons to exist will be gone or become inaccessible Quinn himself will become nonexistent too.

Conclusion

Paul Auster's *City of Glass* is not a conventional detective novel. It is in fact a work examining and playing with the governing conventions of fiction itself using the formal requirements of detective stories as a model. It testifies that the writer can mislead the reader all along the story with ambiguous narrative elements, because the reader will fall prey to his own interpretation based on the ongoing conventions of narratives. There are hints all over the story that could make the reader realize this, let alone the clear statement made by the fictional representative of the writer. But all this is of no use; the reader will continue to cling to his expectations based of false interpretation. In the end, when the reader finally realizes the trick played on him is indulged by the sheer virtuosity of the writer who could get away with his deed to the end of the story.

In the first main section I examined the changes that occurred in the genre of detective fiction through time: the changes of detective fiction's form, and the shift from epistemological to ontological concerns. From the first occurrence of the genre: the classical British model where the detective solved the case from a remote position without doubts about the status quo, through the 'hard-boiled' type in which the protagonist has to get involved in the events, and had to reflect the enigma on his/her own identity and set of values thus questioning the status quo he/her is about to restore. In the most recent type called metaphysical detective fiction the doubts that appeared in the 'hard-boiled' type are applied to the literary medium itself. This part gave an insight to the model Auster was using to show how the reader can be misled about the nature of the story by narrative devices to the very end. That no matter how many elements of the story were disrupted readers still cling to the conventions used in regular narratives.

The second main section described the conventions that govern the structure of the story in narratives. It defined the most important notions like: the types of events, the sequence of events, syntagmatic structure, and the difference between story and plot. These conventions usually make the story easier to understand for the reader, but in this case they lead to a false interpretation of the story, i.e. to seeing plot where there is nothing just a string of events in chronological order.

The third main section dealt with the conventions of narratives regarding the functions and traits of characters. It described the method by which actors of the story can be functionally categorized and how their functions can change depending on which event is in focus. Characters can lose their traits or gain new ones through the sequence of events, but their function cannot change without changing the event in connection with what their relation is examined. In *City of Glass*, beside the constant disintegration of the protagonist's identity through losing his traits even his functional role is instable. This instability can suggest the reader that the conventional narrative rules that govern the actors of a story are disrupted here, too.

The reader can be misled to the very end no matter how obvious the signs on being misled are. The reader keeps on interpreting the elements of the story in order to fit them into his expectations. This is the answer to the initial question of this paper.

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