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**Game of Identities: A postmodernist  
reinterpretation of Poe's detective strategies  
in Paul Auster's *City of Glass***

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## ABSTRACT

Detective fiction is one of the most popular literary genres because mystery and suspense are attractive aspects for the reader. Since detective fiction has been a recurrent genre for several authors over the years, it has been adapted to different literary movements. The present paper is a study of the detective fiction from a postmodernist perspective based on metafiction and the idea of identity, breaking with the traditional rules. In order to carry out this project, two main novels have been studied: *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) by Edgar Allan Poe and *City of Glass* (1985) by the postmodernist writer Paul Auster. These novels belong to the detective fiction but it is of interest to highlight that they are very different from each other especially regarding the profile of both detectives, C. Auguste Dupin and Daniel Quinn respectively.

*Keywords:* Detective, Origin, Metafiction, Intertextuality, Identity, Postmodernism.

## RESUMEN

La novela de detectives es uno de los géneros literarios más populares ya que el misterio y el suspense son aspectos que atraen al lector. Puesto que la novela detectivesca ha sido un género recurrente para varios autores a lo largo del tiempo, ésta se ha adaptado a diferentes movimientos literarios. El presente Trabajo de Fin de Grado es un estudio de la novela de detectives desde una perspectiva posmodernista que se basa en la metaficción y la cuestión de identidad y desafía las normas tradicionales. Para llevar a cabo este proyecto se han estudiado dos novelas principales: *Los crímenes de la calle Morgue* (1841) de Edgar Allan Poe y *Ciudad de cristal* (1985) de Paul Auster. Estas obras pertenecen a la novela de detectives, pero es importante destacar que son muy diferentes entre sí, especialmente en relación al perfil de ambos detectives, C. Auguste Dupin y Daniel Quinn respectivamente.

*Palabras clave:* Detective, Origen, Metaficción, Intertextualidad, Identidad, Posmodernismo.



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## 1. Introduction

This project has been motivated by my personal interest in mystery and detective fiction that has grown over time thanks to the discovery of great contemporary novels such as *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) by Dan Brown. For this reason, I have decided to base my final project in detective fiction, which is different in each novel since each writer has the freedom to create their own investigation, character development and plot.

There is no doubt that detective fiction has always had a great impact on literature, leaving the reader with the wish to continue discovering clues about the crime along with the detective. Additionally, when it comes to detectives, it can almost be assured that the picture of a man with a hunting hat, a pipe and a magnifying glass comes to anyone's mind, which is the physical description of the famous Sherlock Holmes. Nonetheless, the origin of detective fiction and the first fictional detective are notions that elude the knowledge of many people although they are essential to understand how the great detective contemporary novels have been created. The first idea proposed for this research paper covered several detective novels to carry out an in-depth analysis in order to compare the different features that create a sense of mystery and the elements that characterize each detective, but it could be more accurate to focus on a single novel. Hence, the main novel of interest in this project is *City of Glass* (1985) by Paul Auster and the postmodernist reinterpretation of the genre, but not without first mentioning the starting point of the detective world with Poe.

Edgar Allan Poe is considered the father of detective fiction with the publication of the short story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* in 1841, resulting in the creation of a new literary genre. Nevertheless, according to some authors such as Julian Symons or Ian Ousby, *Caleb Williams* (1794) by William Godwin, Mary Shelley's father, would be the first detective novel or, at least, it "demonstrated for the first time that the detective could become the focus of serious literary interest" as Ousby argues in *Bloodhounds of Heaven: The Detective in English Fiction from Godwin to Doyle*. In spite of that, Poe's story is considered to be the prototype that has shaped great famous detective novels such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* (1887) and Agatha Christie's *Murder in the Orient Express* (1934). The protagonists of these novels, Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot respectively, are mere prototypes of one detective, not as

well-known as these two famous figures, because Poe's detective, whose name is Chevalier Auguste Dupin, started everything.

Nevertheless, there is a novel that completely breaks with the conventional detective fiction canon and the common features that had been established to characterize the figure of the detective, and instead offers a new conception of the genre. The novel in question is *City of Glass* and it presents a new perspective of this literary genre carried out by the postmodernist American writer, screenwriter, essayist and novelist Paul Auster.

Postmodernism starts in the 1960s after the Second World War and it was the result of the end of humanism and the arrival of the irrationality and incoherence to the world. The movement emphasizes on the existence of multiple truths and realities because from the postmodern perspective, there is not a single reality since it is impossible to separate the real from the fictional. The postmodern novel that will be analyzed is one of the best examples to represent the movement since it contains most of the features and techniques that can be found in postmodernist fiction, such as intertextuality, metafiction, self-reflexivity, linguistic constructs and multiple realities and identities.

The main aim of this paper is the analysis of Auster's novel as an original and non-traditional detective novel that the writer creates with resources of Postmodernism. In order to do that, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* has been read as the starting point of the detective fiction, the story that established the basic features of the detective that Poe created through the character of Dupin and then, a close reading of *City of Glass* was made to identify the postmodern perspective in specific fragments and moments of the novel. In short, the purpose is to show the changes that this genre and the figure of the detective have suffered with the arrival of postmodernism and the new ideas it brought to the literary world that oppose Poe's standards.

Some scholars have considered this postmodernist reinterpretation of the detective fiction so there are some research papers about this issue. According to William Spanos, *City of Glass* could be an instance of a postmodern anti-detective story and, moreover, a deconstruction of the detective novel through the use of parody (Odacıoğlu, Loi and Çoban, 484) which is a technique that characterizes postmodernist fiction. There are many postmodernist techniques in Auster's novel but this paper is focused on three of

them that give rise to the reinterpretation of the genre based on the deconstruction of itself. For this reason, *City of Glass* can be considered sabotage due to the destruction of the traditional detective elements and the qualities of the novel:

“City of Glass, then, is a deconstruction. Or a sabotage. It deconstructs the form of the novel, the canons of criticism, theory, and tradition, and it deconstructs itself, as it literally falls apart in its progression.” (Lavender, 220)

Lavender explores the abandonment of the theory and form of the novel in Auster’s narrative. However, it is a factor that does not affect the identification of *City of Glass* as a novel although some literary violations upon the substance of the novel are committed, such as the presentation of Stillman as a character who is expected to have a relevant presence in the novel but whenever he appears, he is a completely different character who lacks any memory of Quinn although they have three appointments in the novel. Not with standing, as Pablo Picasso said, “learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist”. Auster has mastered the rules of the novel to the point that he can create a new piece of writing using postmodernist techniques, so the destruction of traditional plot forms, as Spanos states, is not negative since it provides a new interpretation of the genre that fits better with the literary movement and concerns of the period.

To finish with the introduction, it may be of interest to briefly comment on the four parts in which this paper is divided. The first section is the introduction that contains the motivation of the project as well as a brief contextualization, the main aim, methodology and the state of the issue thereof. Next, the origin and the characteristics of detective fiction are explored taking as a reference *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* by Poe and his great influence on later writers. Subsequently, the third and most relevant section of the paper provides contextualization of Paul Auster’s literary career and his novel *City of Glass* is analyzed in terms of three postmodern aspects: language, metafiction and the question of identity with which Auster plays with the reader. Finally, a conclusion is provided through the analysis of the two different detective novels that have been mentioned in order to see the postmodernist evolution of the genre as well as similarities and differences between both narratives.



## 2. Detective fiction

### 2.1 The origin and characteristics of the detective fiction

As it has been mentioned before, the origin of detective fiction is controversial according to Julia Symons and Ian Ousby. These authors argue that the origin could be found in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* since according to Symons, the story "is about murder, its detection, and the unrelenting pursuit by the murderer of the person who has discovered the guilt". Nevertheless, they admit that although *Caleb Williams* is the precursor of the strains in detective story that gave rise to the contemporary detective fiction, the novel is different from Poe's stories in the sense that they have set up a series of features that are visible in later authors. Moreover, modern critics of the genre consider William's novel an antitype of the genre due to its tragic mode, its anarchism, and its condemnation of law and lawful punishment. On the other hand, it can be stated that *Caleb Williams* is an accurate anticipation of what is to come in mystery and detective fiction due to its inconsistencies and contradictions (Cohen, 204).

Nevertheless, most scholars argue that the origin of the detective fiction dates back to the year 1841 with the creation of the first detective story written by Edgar Allan Poe. Therefore, he is considered the father of the detective fiction and his story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* will be the influence and inspiration of many later famous writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle or Agatha Christie. In fact, Conan Doyle will recognize Poe as the model of all time and the detectives of both writers will share many features with C. Auguste Dupin due to his great influence on the genre. The French detective appears in two other short stories, *The Mystery of Mary Roget* (1842), based on a real crime which took place in New York in 1841, and *The Purloined Letter* (1844) that follows the same formula presented in his first story. That is, an unnamed narrator presents Dupin as a man with a spectacular intellect who is in charge to solve a crime since the police cannot find the solution.

According to Borges in his *An Introduction to American Literature*, Poe inaugurates "a new genre, the detective story, which has conquered the world" (Bennet, 264) which made him the mastermind behind detective fiction. Additionally, Borges explores Poe's magnificent contribution and influence on the literary world with the figure of Dupin:

“In 1840 Edgar Allan Poe enriched literature with a new genre. This genre is above all ingenious and artificial; real crimes are not commonly discovered by abstract reasoning but by chance, investigation, or confession. Poe invented the first detective in literature, M. Charles Auguste Dupin of Paris. He invented at the same time the convention, later classical, that the exploits of the hero should be told by an admiring and mediocre friend ... Poe has had many imitators; let it suffice to mention for the moment his contemporary, Dickens, and Stevenson and Chesterton.” (Bennet, 264)

Poe’s legacy to detective fiction can be found in some traditional elements of the detective story according to Encyclopedia Britannica: (1) the seemingly perfect crime; (2) the wrongly accused suspect at whom circumstantial evidence points; (3) the bungling of dim-witted police; (4) the greater powers of observation and superior mind of the detective; and (5) the startling and unexpected denouement in which the detective reveals the identity of the guilty. Hence, every detective novel is expected to share common aspects with most of the novels within this genre taking the reader to the original work. Nonetheless, as it will be explored later on, the postmodernist Paul Auster seems to avoid these elements since the novel does not present a crime and his performance as detective is a complete failure.

Even if Poe was the initiator of the detective story, the Scottish writer Conan Doyle popularized the genre with the creation of Sherlock Holmes, a successful detective who first appears in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and shares some particularities with Dupin. Nevertheless, there is a clear difference between both protagonists regarding their perception by themselves and the writer. In the case of Dupin, neither the narrator nor Poe refer to him as “detective” because the term had not been coined when Poe wrote the story, but he is simply depicted as a man with extreme deductive and observational skills that help him to solve crimes based upon the role of logical analysis. On the other hand, Sherlock Holmes is presented as a true detective because, at that time, the detective story was already set up and worldwide known thereby making possible that the figure of the detective receives name and even becomes a profession. Moreover, Conan Doyle establishes the prototype of the modern detective since Holmes is the most popular character of the detective story although Dupin created the first fictional detective.

Conan Doyle was inspired by his professor Dr. John Bell at the University of Edinburgh Medical School. Holmes's ability to analyze clues and gather evidences due to extraordinary skills of deductive reasoning and observation resemble Bell's technique of diagnosing diseases. Despite this, Dupin's influence in the character of Holmes is indisputable since the analytic power and "ratiocination", a term to be discussed later, are present in both figures. The storytelling of both stories is similar since they are narrated by a character that is not the detective but a close friend of him, Doctor Watson in the case of *A Study in Scarlet* and an anonymous friend in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, as Borges explores in his discussion of the form's history in American literature. In addition and anticipating what Auster will present in his novel, *City of Glass* is narrated from the third point of view as well, however, the narrator never got to meet Daniel Quinn.

As it has been stated previously, Poe's influence can be observed in the English detective novelist and playwright Agatha Christie. The meticulous detective known as Hercule Poirot first appears in her first novel *The Mysterious Affairs at Styles* (1920) whose impact will be achieved by the publication of two Christie's popular works, *Murder on the Orient Express* (1933) and *Death on the Nile* (1937). Poirot is a sophisticated gentleman with manners, who always dresses impeccably and wears the best moustache in England, a particularity that makes him recognizable. He is obsessed with crimes that challenge his intellect but because of the use of human nature and psychology he is able to solve them. Christie's detective is characterized by his eccentricity and egotism that he openly shows, for instance, in *Murders on the Orient Express* by saying: "My name is Hercule Poirot, and I am probably the greatest detective in the world". Christie wrote some of her detective novels based on the "whodunit", a term that comes from the contraction of the question "Who has done it?" and the popular novel form developed during the Golden Age of detective fiction that took place in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Hence, detective fiction has been suffered changes and innovations that are present in Agatha Christie's novels but a recognizable aspect that Poirot shares with Dupin is the origin since both are French detectives with an egocentric and narcissistic personality.

## 2.2 Edgar Allan Poe's detective fiction in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was an American writer best known for his influence in the gothic novel and horror short tales such as *The Raven* (1845) or *The Black Cat* (1843). Nonetheless, as it has been claimed, Poe's contribution to literature goes beyond the gothic fiction since he created the first conception of detective fiction.

*The Murders in the Rue Morgue* was published in 1841 in Graham's Magazine and introduces the basic features of detective fiction including the murder in a closed environment, in this case, a locked room, the guilty that turns out to be innocent and the unexpected solution of the crime. In contrast to other detective stories that have a more complex development and characters, Poe's story is short and simple but it provides the five traditional elements that have been mentioned in the introduction.

The story takes place in Paris and it is narrated by an anonymous Englishman, friend and housemate of the protagonist who admires Dupin's analytic ability. The detective investigation begins when they read in the newspaper about the extraordinary murders that took place in a house of the Rue Morgue where the bodies of two women, mother and daughter, were found in a horrible and inhuman state. After obtaining several witness testimonies, the police did not have the slightest clue to solve the case but a random man named Adolphe Le Bon was arrested although nothing appeared to criminate him. The Frenchman to learn that the mystery remained unresolved, decides to "enter into some examinations for ourselves, before we make up an opinion respecting them" (Poe, 46) since the inquiry will afford them amusement and entertaining. The fact that Dupin uses the term "amusement" to refer to that situation shows his motivation to solve the case that far from being a reason of heroism, it resides in the intellectual satisfaction because, as Poe says about the good analyst, "he derives pleasure from even the most trivial occupations bringing his talent into play. He is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, of his hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions of each a degree of acumen which appears to the ordinary apprehension preternatural." (Poe, 2).

For this reason, Borges points out that the detective story is "an anti-realist genre, a kind of intellectual fantasy" (Bennet, 64) since the results are obtained thanks to a brilliant and inhuman mental capacity. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Dupin

is not presented as a detective although he acts as one, a feature that can also be explored in Auster's false detective, but, in Dupin's case, he is just a great analyst.

Regarding Poe's possible motivation to write the story it is of interest to briefly comment on the role of Eugène-François Vidocq, the first world's real detective who is mentioned in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Vidocq was born in 1775 in the city of Arras in France, and he was raised in a humble environment together with his six brothers. However, when he was around fifteen years old, he committed his first theft and stole the money from his father's bakery strongbox to flee to America. Vidocq rejected the education that his father offered him and he decided to follow the path of crime. Paradoxically, Vidocq's cunning as a criminal made it possible to join the detective department and the future security brigade created by Vidocq himself, until he was dismissed in 1832 accused of committing a theft. Nevertheless, his involvement in the world of criminology and investigation went one step further and he created a private police agency being the first European private detective.

Undoubtedly, Poe had the famous figure of Vidocq in mind while writing what would become the first detective story. For this reason, there may be the possibility of considering Vidocq Poe's inspiration to create Dupin although they do not share many aspects as detectives. Dupin refers to Vidocq in the story as "a good guesser and persevering man" (Poe, 44) but due to the lack of education in his intelligence "he erred continually by the very intensity of his investigations" (Poe, 44). What Dupin criticizes of Vidocq's method is the vision, the perspective, since he "holds the object too close" (Poe, 44) meanwhile Dupin states that truth is superficial, meaning that the analytical observation of external factors is more effective than focusing in the problem or crime itself to solve the case. In addition, Vidocq's influence can be found in several French authors such as Victor Hugo that, like Poe, was inspired by him to create the two main characters of the novel *Les misérables*, Jean Valjean and Javert, but he is also present in Honoré de Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* in the role of the criminal Vautrin. This shows the importance of external influences when writing since every author has a previous inspiration based on experiences, ideas or relevant figures. Poe was firstly influenced by Vidocq so that Christie, Doyle and Auster were inspired by Dupin.

Dupin's role in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* is crucial because if he had not been interested in the murders, the crime would have never been solved since the police was

unable to find any solution related to the mysterious murder. It should be noted Vidocq's ability to catch the criminals, since he was one of them, which exceeds the capacity of the police at that time. For this reason, Dupin and Vidocq share more than the French origin, which is important as well since Agatha Christie also creates a French detective, but both rejects the police one way or another. In the case of Vidocq, it would be more correct to say that is the police who reject him but what matters is the final result, that is, the creation of the detective agency that does not work with the police.

Hence, the job of the detective cannot be compared with the one of the police since the police force does not have the intellectual means required to investigate some crimes such as the one presented in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Dupin is aware of this problem and he openly comments about it:

“The Parisian police, so much extolled for acumen, are cunning, but no more. There is no method in their proceedings, beyond the method of the moment. They make a vast parade of measures; but, not unfrequently, these are so ill adapted to the objects proposed, as to put us in mind of Monsieur Jourdain's calling for his *robe-de-chambre-pour mieux entendre la musique*. The results attained by them are not unfrequently surprising, but, for the most part, are brought about by simple diligence and activity. When these qualities are unavailing, their schemes fail.” (Poe, 43-44)

Dupin compares the Parisian police with Monsieur Jourdain, the main character of Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, a figure that represents ignorance and absurdity, because meanwhile the police has an inferior observational intelligence since their reasoning is limited, the detective challenges the rational and as Borges explores, the detective is “an outsider existing spiritually and intellectually beyond the conventions of ordinary humanity.” (Bennet, 264).

The most notable aspect regarding Poe's detective fiction is the “ratiocination”, which is the method that Dupin uses to solve crimes and it is described by the Cambridge Dictionary as the process of making judgments about something based on sensible thinking or logic. According to Terry J. Martin, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* celebrates Dupin's brilliant solving ability as the pinnacle of his ratiocinative powers and establishes the story's central riddle as a model for the contemporary detective

genre. On the other hand, as *City of Glass* explores, ratiocination is not needed to become a detective.

The internal structure of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* is divided in two parts that correspond to the theoretical anticipation of the narrative and the narrative itself that will show the detective in action with the aim to demonstrate and apply the previous theory (Martin, 31). First, the narrator provides the superfluous retelling of the tale in the introduction that explores the analytical mind and then he adds that “the narrative which follows will appear to the reader somewhat in the light of a commentary upon the propositions just advanced” (Poe, 10), that is, the story whose main character is Dupin in order to represent the attributes mentioned previously by the narrator.

There are many interesting concerns that might be commented about *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* but this paper only provides a general view of the origin of detective fiction, and in short, it should be highlighted Dupin’s method that resides in the close observation and the sifting and elimination of clues until arriving at the one best befitting the circumstances. The method is similar in other detective figures that follow Poe’s prototype but Paul Auster will present a completely terrible detective who even doubts about his own identity.

Finally, it can be stated that Poe’s influence on the genre provided the main elements and features to follow in the process of writing detective fiction. Auster gives a description of the detective in his novel based on the preconceived idea of Dupin and the power of observation and analytic intellect although he decides to create his own postmodern detective:

“He had always imagined that the key to good detective work was a close observation of details. The more accurate the scrutiny, the more successful the results. The implication was that human behavior could be understood, that beneath the infinite facade of gestures, tics, and silences, there was finally a coherence, an order, a source of motivation.” (Auster, 65)

### 3. Paul Auster's *City of Glass*

#### 3.1 Literary contextualization of Paul Auster

Paul Benjamin Auster was born in 1947 in New Jersey and he is dedicated to various literary fields since he is a novelist, essayist, translator, screenwriter and poet. Nonetheless, he mainly owes his fame to *The New York Trilogy* (1987) that contains a series of three detective novels which are *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986) and *The Locked Room* (1986). Auster's novels are complex and often concerned with ideas about identity and the self so some critics theorize about the possibility of some autobiographical elements in most of his novels, as can be observed in *City of Glass* in the main character as the following quotation shows: "In the past, Quinn had been more ambitious. As a young man he had published several books of poetry, had written plays, critical essays, and had worked on a number of long translations." (Auster, 4).

In order to understand Auster's literature, it is important to contextualize his novels in Postmodernism, a period that started at the end of the Second World War. Moreover, this literary movement was the period for experimental and innovative literature and some authors boarded the act of writing in their novels, such as Auster in *The Invention of Solitude* (1982) or Thomas Pynchon in *Entropy* (1960), which is a parody of the act of novel writing. According to the American cultural critic Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Postmodernism is a parody, a pastiche and the representation of the emptiness as result of the arrival of new ideologies and culture.

From the postmodernist view, the world is a chaos full of incoherence, a thought that put an end to the Humanistic movement in the early 1960's since man cannot control everything and not all the problems can be solved. Hence, postmodern artists react against that, with less frustration and anxiety than the modernists, because they accept the nonsense and brokenness of the world. Everything has changed, rationality and unicity no longer exist in the postmodern period since there is no a clear division between the real and the fictional. Therefore, there is no other course of action but to play with the fragments in a world that has been fragmented and decentered.

The fragmentation and change of the world is explored in *City of Glass* by Peter Stillman, the father, who states that "the brokenness is everywhere" (Auster, 77) and



introduces the necessity of a new language because, as he defends, some words do not correspond to their meaning in the new world. In this way, Stillman is the representation of the modernist writer who pretends to fix the world by bringing together the pieces: “You see, the world is in fragments, sir. And it’s my job to put it back together again.” (Auster, 75). However, the frustration that modernist artists suffered when they realized that is impossible to repair the world also takes over Stillman, or at least, that can be deduced since he commits suicide by jumping of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Furthermore, when it comes to Auster and Postmodernism, it is of interest to mention the presence of chance in his novels, an aspect that is present in *City of Glass* from the very beginning. Auster considers the importance of chance in the real world “in the presence of the unpredictable, the powers of contingency” (McCaffery, 5) that decides the course of the actions and decisions of everyone. Chance was a discussion topic he discussed in an interview in 1992 when he was asked about the title of his novel *The Music of Chance* (1990). The interviewer mentioned that the plots of his novels rely on chance and not in the causality found in most fiction novels and Auster said the following:

“Chance? Destiny? Or simple mathematics, an example of probability theory at work? It doesn't matter what you call it. Life is full of such events. As a writer of novels, I feel my job is to keep myself open to these collisions, to watch out for all these mysterious goings-on in the world.” (McCaffery, 6).

Therefore, it can be argued that chance plays an important role in *City of Glass* presented as the factor that determinates Quinn’s decisions as the following examples show:

“Much later, when he was able to think about the things that happened to him, he would conclude that nothing was real except chance.” (Auster, 3)

“Whatever choice he made—and he had to make a choice—would be arbitrary, a submission to chance.” (Auster, 56)

The first quotation refers to the moment in which Auster receives the phone call due to a confusion of names since the woman’s intention was to contact with the detective Paul

Auster but she calls the wrong number. Therefore, the novel starts by a chance event that will lead the protagonist to a slow decline that he won't be able to control.

Regarding the second quotation, it can be assumed that chance plays in Quinn's favour because when he needs to make a choice between the two Peter Stillmans, he finally decides to follow the first Stillman to appear at the train station, which ends up being the correct one. Quinn manages to solve the first problem in the first mission as a detective on a hunch, by pure chance, and that clearly opposes Dupin's method of close observation. Hence, whereas Quinn's decision-making is subject to chance, Dupin benefits from his analytical power and ratiocination and resolves the problems with the highest possible security and confidence.

As aforementioned in this paper, *City of Glass* can be considered as anti-detective fiction due to all the violations of traditional elements and the parody that Auster presents as the postmodernist reinterpretation. The truth is that Poe and Auster have a completely different vision of the genre since their detectives have little in common and they represent practically the opposite. Poe's story has a true detective whose analytical mind and power of observation allows him to perfectly solve the crime. However, Auster's novel provides two false detectives, first Quinn who decides to act as a detective and then, the supposed detective Paul Auster who turns out to be inexistent because the Paul Auster that appears in the novel is not a detective but a writer. Moreover, the reader expects to encounter a crime since traditionally the detective is contacted to solve a crime but Daniel Quinn, pretending to be Paul Auster, plays the role of a private investigator that must protect Peter Stillman from his father, also named Peter Stillman, and investigate the reason for his arrival to New York. Even if at the end of the story Stillman fathers' death is revealed, the job of the detective is not to solve a crime. Quinn first chases Stillman and the more he focuses on this case the more he moves away from his reality as Daniel Quinn resulting in the loss of his identity.

### 3.2 The importance of language

Language is a major issue in postmodern studies since it is stated by scholars that the ideas are merely linguistic constructions. Therefore, reality is a construct made of language and no one has access to the real anymore since there is not a real physical matter but just the linguistic construct. The 1960s was the period of linguistic

imperialism since it was the primary means of literature and communication, everything could be explained in terms of language and theorists claimed that there was no reality independent of language. The reality is a construct, man creates with words, hence, reality is made by language and language is a construction. Therefore, it must be considered the importance of language and words in literature, especially in mystery novels as the anonymous narrator states:

“In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so—which amounts to the same thing. The world of the book comes to life, seething with possibilities, with secrets and contradictions. Since everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked. Everything becomes essence; the center of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The center, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end.” (Auster 8)

The novel presents a character that is really aware of the fragmentation of the world and the problem between language and the contemporary world, since the evolution of society has a linguistic impact in the world and it is an issue that needs to be solved by someone deeply concerned by the problem, someone such as Peter Stillman’s father who claims the following: “You see, the world is in fragments, sir. Not only have we lost our sense of purpose, we have lost the language whereby we can speak of it.” (Auster, 75).

Stillman is in the process of inventing a new language that can be adapted to the new world, however, George Orwell already confirmed in his famous novel *1984* (1949) that the creation of a language, the Newspeak in his case, when the (forced) imposition is possible, causes a negative impact in society. Even if Stillman’s linguistic innovation does not have a political motivation because it is not designed to diminish the range of thought as in Orwell’s novel, he pretends to be a God and tries to change something completely rooted in society, the language, but he failed miserably. As Big Brother, Stillman is watching you:

“I have come to New York because it is the most forlorn of places, the most abject. The brokenness is everywhere, the disarray is universal. You have only to open your eyes to see it. The broken people, the broken things, the broken thoughts. The whole city is a junk heap. It suits my purpose admirably. I find the streets an endless source of material, an inexhaustible storehouse of shattered things. Each day I go out with my bag and collect objects that seem worthy of investigation.” (Auster, 77)

Stillman is, somehow, the language detective of the novel due to his close observation and he is really involved in his mission of creating a new language. Unfortunately, he mysteriously and unexpectedly passes away and the publication of his book with the renovated language is never revealed, suggesting that language is not an easy construction and even less easy to apply to the contemporary world. Stillman lived in his own world isolated from the rest and his son suffered the consequences of his obsession with language. The reality he found in New York was devastating since everything was wrong from his point of view and it is the attempt of changing it what drives him to madness and death.

In addition, Stillman’s concern about language relies on the non-functionality of the current vocabulary that is full of empty words that have lost their meaning. Hence, he provides a description of his new language:

“A language that will at last say what we have to say. For our words no longer correspond to the world. When things were whole, we felt confident that our words could express them. But little by little these things have broken apart, shattered, collapsed into chaos. And yet our words have remained the same. They have not adapted themselves to the new reality. Hence, every time we try to speak of what we see, we speak falsely, distorting the very thing we are trying to represent. It’s made a mess of everything. But words, as you yourself understand, are capable of change.” (Auster 76)

Stillman provides an example with the word “umbrella” and he argues that if the umbrella is broken and it cannot perform its function, the word remains the same so it becomes an imprecise and false term to refer to a broken umbrella. Language is capable of change, as he states, and that change is necessary to achieve a successful adaptation

to what he understands as the new reality. Therefore, reality becomes a linguistic construction and, what happens when language is not adapted to reality is the fragmentation and brokenness of the world that Stillman explores.

On the other hand, Stillman mentions a “philosopher of language” that is also concerned about language, Humpty Dumpty from *Through the Looking Glass*. In the famous Lewis Carroll’s novel, Alice and Humpty Dumpty belong to different universes and when they first met and present themselves, the egg starts a philosophical conversation about language and meaning of words in which the wise egg says the following:

“When I use a word, Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less. The question is, said Alice, whether you *can* make words mean so many different things. The question is, said Humpty Dumpty, which is to be master—that’s all.” (Auster, 80)

The presence of Humpty Dumpty is not just an instance of intertextuality in Auster’s novel but it provides support to the thought which defends that ideas and realities are linguistic constructions that depend on the master, so each individual can create their own reality which is language dependent.

### 3.3 Metafiction and intertextuality

The most attractive aspect that can be explored in *City of Glass* may be the metafictional and metaphysical effect of the novel. Auster plays not only with Quinn’s identity but with his own by creating a character named Paul Auster, who turns out to be a writer with a wife and son, an aspect that shares with the real Auster as an instance of the possible autobiographical approach.

Hence, it can be argued that metafiction is a crucial point in the novel. In addition, the protagonist, Daniel Quinn, is a writer of detective fiction who pretends to be the detective Paul Auster getting swept up in the excitement of owning a similar identity to that of his own fictional character Max Work. From that moment, he will be immersed in a new life, identity, and reality. Quinn, at a certain point in his literary career, decides to write under the pseudonym William Wilson that is, at the same time, the name of a character in a story by Edgar Allan Poe.

However, although the name of Paul Auster appears in the novel he is not the author, as the real Auster explained in an interview:

“Paul Auster appears as a character in *City of Glass*, but in the end the reader learns that he is not the author. It's someone else, an anonymous narrator who comes in on the last page and walks off with Quinn's red notebook. So the Auster on the cover and the Auster in the story are not the same person. They're the same and yet not the same.” (McCaffery, 17)

Auster also applies the game of identities with himself and the character of Paul Auster but, as he says, they are not the same even if paradoxically they are the same. The mindset of the author can be complex and meaningless but translated to Postmodernism, the Auster of the novel would be a fictional copy of the writer since individualism does not exist. Moreover, he also adds:

“I think it stemmed from a desire to implicate myself in the machinery of the book. I don't mean my autobiographical self, I mean my author self, that mysterious other who lives inside me and puts my name on the covers of books.”(McCaffery, 14)

Auster extends the idea of identity beyond fiction and plays with it in real life since he divides his in two different ones, the normal and ordinary self and the writer's identity being the last one a mere copy of the original since Auster supports and understands the fragmentation of identity in postmodernist fiction, resulting in the inexistence of individual selves.

In addition, according to Nealon, the detective novel is a metafictional and metaphysical genre without a doubt:

“The unravelling work of the detective within the story mirrors and assists the work of the reader, as both try to piece together the disparate signs that might eventually solve the mystery. The reader of the detective novel comes metafictionally to identify with the detective, as both the reader and the detective are bound up in the metaphysical or epistemological work of interpretation, the work of reading clues and writing a solution or end.” (Nealon, 92)

The narrator of the novel also takes into account the metafictional approach of the genre and agrees with Nealon in the sense that the reader turns into the detective while reading, feeling and experiencing the search of clues:

“The detective is the one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them. In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable. The reader sees the world through the detective’s eyes, experiencing the proliferation of its details as if for the first time” (Auster, 8)

The two quotations above suggest the undeniable relation between the reader and the writer in which the writer is more tied to the detective since both “embark on a journey that has no guaranteed destination” (Nealon, 93) meanwhile the reader will always find the end “regardless of whether it is solved” (Nealon, 93) because the writer wrote it at the same time that the detective solve it.

On the other hand, intertextuality can also be found through the presence of a large number of references to other texts and characters in the novel. This postmodernist technique allows Auster to shape his detective since everything Quinn knows about detectives is due to detective fiction:

“Whatever he knew about these things, he had learned from books, films, and newspapers. He did not, however, consider this to be a handicap. What interested him about the stories he wrote was not their relation to the world but their relation to other stories. Even before he became William Wilson, Quinn had been a devoted reader of mystery novels.” (Auster, 7)

The protagonist is a lover of mystery novels, a hobby he shares with Dupin, a writer of detective novels and, finally, he has the opportunity to carry out a detective mission in the real life. The Stillman family allows the imaginary person Max Work to leave the fictional world and reincarnate in the character of the detective Paul Auster that Quinn pretends to be.

There is a direct allusion to the original detective story when Quinn reflects about the role of the detective and says: “what is it that Dupin says in Poe? "An identification of

the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent. "" (Auster, 40). Even though Quinn is a controversial detective, Auster provides him some knowledge about Poe's great detective so he perfectly knows that he should follow Dupin's method of investigation:

“It was all a question of method. If 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 failed.” (Auster, 65)

For that reason, what Quinn does as a detective is following Stillman whatever he goes and recording it in the notebook. However, that does not seem enough to discover Stillman's intentions in the city since the only conclusion he can draw is that the route he did while walking forms letters corresponding to the words “Tower of Babel”, an episode about language in the Book of Genesis that Stillman deals with in his book. This superficial observation leads to nothing relevant in the investigation since it is briefly mentioned once and then Quinn forgets about it.

Besides, the real Paul Auster of the novel, who turns out not to be a detective but a writer, establishes a connection between Cervantes and Quinn in his study on the authorship of Don Quixote: “Cervantes, if you remember, goes to great lengths to convince the reader that he is not the author.” (Auster, 96). This statement about Cervantes can be applied to Quinn as well since he creates the identity of William Wilson to keep writing books. Besides, during a conversation about Don Quixote, Paul Auster mentions the following:

“The idea was to hold a mirror up to Don Quixote's madness, to record each of his absurd and ludicrous delusions, so that when he finally read the book himself, he would see the error of his ways.” (Auster, 98)

There are many explanations about the meaning of the title and one is related to Don Quixote whose initials coincide with Daniel Quinn's ones. The last thing the reader knows about Quinn is that, when he saw himself in the mirror of a shop, he does not recognize himself. Maybe, taking as a reference the previous quotation, the idea was to hold a mirror up to Daniel Quinn's madness, to record each of his absurd identity changes, so that when he finally read the book himself, he would see the error of his ways. In Quinn's case, reading the books is not necessary because he faces a more



direct way of noticing his madness, that is, to get in front of the glass and not be able to recognize who is reflected on it.

The narrator of the novel remains anonymous until he appears at the very end of the novel, when the narrative changes to a first point of view during the last two pages. From that moment, the reader meets the narrator that turns out to be Paul Auster's friend. Paul Auster had the necessity to share the story that tormented him since he felt guilty about Quinn's disappearance. They decided to investigate his whereabouts but the only trace they could find was the red notebook on the floor of the Stillman's apartment. The narrator read it and reveals the last sentence of the book that Quinn wrote before he completely fades away: "What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?" (Auster, 129). First, the red notebook was used to collect information in relation to the Stillman case but finally Quinn decided to record some moments and facts that he experienced when he was walking. The point was that the less he wrote in the notebook, the greater was his fading from the real world.

Hence, the red notebook was a new space for Quinn, a fictional world he creates by writing on paper, a space where he becomes trapped and removed from the reality to live (or not) a new fictional one as part of the red notebook book. The same happens with Stillman, the person who was the initial focus of the notebook at the beginning of the story. Quinn stops writing about him since he was missing and finally he is told that Stillman was died. Anyone who was present in the notebook disappears from the real world. Moreover, for the narrator, Stillman and Quinn are fictional characters that he never got to met face to face.

The fact that Quinn gives life to the fictional character of Max Work in the real world is an instance that demonstrates the absence of limits between reality and fiction and the notion that we create for ourselves in a world that reality becomes fictional and fiction becomes real. In other words, the novel plays with reality and fiction in the sense that a fictional character becomes real and a real character, Quinn, becomes fictional within the red notebook.

### 3.4 Game of identities

The first character to appear in the novel is Daniel Quinn depicted as a humble writer who lives in a small apartment in New York and whose main hobbies are reading,

walking and writing mystery novels. However, there is a before and after in Quinn's life probably due to the death of his wife and son in a car accident. This event creates him an irreversible trauma that causes a feeling of deep emptiness for Quinn, making him feeling lost and, as the narrator declares, a part of him died since then. For that reason, Quinn needs to get rid of that identity whose reality is full of sadness and loneliness and, in order to do it, he needs to create another identity in which he could hide that version of himself.

The invention of William Wilson allows him to keep writing under a totally different identity to divide his writer self and his autobiographical self. Wilson is another writer and has nothing to do with Quinn so he is not responsible of what Wilson writes. Moreover, Quinn plays with identity at least four times in the novel and every time Quinn met Stillman, he presented himself with a different identity each time, first as Daniel Quinn, then as Henry Dark and in the third and last meeting as Peter Stillman. In the second meeting, Quinn presents himself as Henry Dark with the intention of calling Stillman's attention since the name corresponds to a character in a book he wrote. Henry Dark, as Stillman declares, was an invention created by him with the purpose of expressing dangerous and controversial ideas pretending that Stillman was not the responsible of those ideas since they come from someone else, just as Quinn does with William Wilson.

Auster presents a character that hardly struggles with the concept of identity from the beginning until the end of the novel:

“Since finishing the latest William Wilson novel two weeks earlier, he had been languishing. His private-eye narrator, Max Work, had solved an elaborate series of crimes, had suffered through a number of beatings and narrow escapes, and Quinn was feeling somewhat exhausted by his efforts. Over the years, Work had become very close to Quinn. Whereas William Wilson remained an abstract figure for him, Work had increasingly come to life.” (Auster, 6)

Therefore, the game of identities can be found in “the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist, Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise. If Wilson was an illusion, he nevertheless justified the lives of the other two. If Wilson did not exist, he

nevertheless was the bridge that allowed Quinn to pass from himself into Work. And little by little, Work had become a presence in Quinn's life, his interior brother, his comrade in solitude." (Auster, 6). At first, Quinn's personality is mixed with two more and that resulted inoffensive and even beneficial for his mental health, but the identity that finally takes him to the limit is that of Paul Auster.

The duality explored by the Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) can be found in Auster's novel as another instance of the interest of the author in creating stories in relation to other stories, as occurs with Quinn. In Stevenson's gothic novella, Gabriel John Utterson plays the role of the detective in the investigation of the relationship between Henry Jekyll and the criminal Edward Hyde that concludes in the double identity of his old friend who obtains the capacity of transforming himself into Hyde, the evil side of Dr. Jekyll. This transformation is present in *City of Glass* in the characters of Daniel Quinn and Max Work since "Work had become a presence in Quinn's life, his interior brother, his comrade in solitude." (Auster, 6). Besides, the following quotation is of great importance to understand the relation between both identities:

"If Quinn had allowed himself to vanish, to withdraw into the confines of a strange and hermetic life, Work continued to live in the world of others, and the more Quinn seemed to vanish, the more persistent Work's presence in that world became. Whereas Quinn tended to feel out of place in his own skin, Work was aggressive, quick-tongued, at home in whatever spot he happened to find himself. The very things that caused problems for Quinn, Work took for granted, and he walked through the mayhem of his adventures with an ease and indifference that never failed to impress his creator. It was not precisely that Quinn wanted to be Work, or even to be like him, but it reassured him to pretend to be Work as he was writing his books, to know that he had it in him to be Work if he ever chose to be, even if only in his mind." (Auster, 9)

As it can be observed, the duality observed between them does not refer to the theme of good and evil of human nature as Stevenson explores, but instead, it presents a weak and fragile Quinn as a writer but also as a human, since he slowly fades away from the real world and the alter ego that he creates is becoming stronger to the point that Quinn would disappear from the real world. Quinn's identity becomes fragmented for the first

time under the pseudonym William Wilson as a writer and in turn, he creates another identity in the protagonist and detective Work.

In addition, in case Quinn's struggle with his identity crisis were not enough suffering, Virginia Stillman, the woman who phones Quinn asking for the detective Paul Auster, gives him the opportunity to own another identity similar to that of Max Work but this time as a real person. At first, the change of identity is harmless since it helps Quinn to escape from reality and feel more comfortable being Paul Auster than himself:

“By a simple trick of the intelligence, a deft little twist of naming, he felt incomparably lighter and freer. At the same time, he knew it was all an illusion. But there was a certain comfort in that. He had not really lost himself; he was merely pretending, and he could return to being Quinn whenever he wished. The fact that there was now a purpose to his being Paul Auster—a purpose that was becoming more and more important to him—served as a kind of moral justification for the charade and absolved him of having to defend his lie. For imagining himself as Auster had become synonymous in his mind with doing good in the world.” (Auster, 50-51)

Quinn thinks of himself as the negative and unsuccessful part of his human nature, being a weak representation of Dr. Jekyll, and Work would be the Mr. Hyde that, although he is not presented as a murderer, it may be said that he becomes one metaphorically, since Quinn's identity slowly disappears. The novel presents the mental and physical decadence of the character that begins as a simple game in which Quinn masquerade a detective but ends up in a complete dissociative identity disorder:

“He had no feeling about it at all, for the fact was that he did not recognize the person he saw there as himself. He thought that he had spotted a stranger in the mirror, and in that first moment he turned around sharply to see who it was. But there was no one near him.” (Auster, 117)

When Quinn thought that he found Stillman in the train station, he saw an exact double of him so he encounters the first mission as a detective. Hence, the only thing for Quinn to do was to closely observe their physical appearance and draw a conclusion to follow the right Stillman. Whatever decision Quinn made would be a submission to chance, as the narrator says, and at the end, Quinn wonder what would happened if he had

followed the second Stillman. Besides, duality also can be found in the red notebook since Stillman also possess a smaller one in which he write about his investigation of the new language. Hence, the detective's notebook also has an alter ego, the criminal's notebook that contains the answers of the case.

The moment in which the two Stillmans appear defies any logical reasoning and may be one of the main reasons why *City of Glass* and *The New York Trilogy* as a whole is considered anti-detective fiction since, according to Alison Russell, the novel deconstructs the traditional elements of the detective fiction such as the realistic fiction. Detective stories that follow Poe's instructions use to present real characters and crimes that could happen in real life and, what is more important, the detective always finds a resolution at the end of the story. Nevertheless, Quinn loses the case with the death of Stillman and the disappearance of Peter and Virginia Stillman but, most importantly, he loses himself in a city in which he becomes another person.

#### 4. Conclusion

The present dissertation has examined two different detective stories, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *City of Glass* with the aim of exploring differences and similarities between the detective strategies that Poe and Auster projected on them. Besides, this document provides the changes and innovations that detective genre has suffered over a century, taking as a starting point the year 1841 with the origin in Edgar Allan Poe, until its adaptation to the postmodernist movement in 1985 with Paul Auster.

Firstly, in a general view, similarities with the preconceived idea of the genre are practically nonexistent in Auster's novel, a statement that opposes other detective novels since their authors decided to follow the traditional elements established by Poe. Nonetheless, both stories are narrated from the third point of view and the detectives are the center of attention, the plot revolves around them and the story progresses due to their investigations and conclusions that together with the reader finally allow them to solve puzzle.

For that reason, as Nealon explores, detective fiction is a metafictional genre since the reader also plays the role of the detective in the story. In Poe's story, the detective provides the reader all the information about the case and details founded in the crime scene, and then draws conclusions. However, when Dupin discusses the case with his

friend, the narrator, he seems to be hiding important information since he does not want to share his deductions about the identity of the murderer. Dupin, on the contrary, tries to test his intellectual powers in order to see if he is able to draw the correct conclusions, just as he does with the reader. This leads the reader to identify himself not with the detective, but with the narrator, since both are being controlled by Dupin in the sense that he only reveals superficial information and keeps the resolution until the end of the story. Therefore, the detective investigates the case meanwhile the narrator and reader investigate the detective.

Regarding *City of Glass*, the reader also faces challenges in identifying himself with Quinn as a detective since he is a complex character and his investigations as detective does not lead to any conclusion. Nonetheless, Auster's aim by creating the main character is not to shape a good detective but quite the opposite, the existence of failure and chaos that leads the character to the loss of his identity; he is not neither a detective, nor Max Work, nor William Wilson, nor Daniel Quinn. For this reason, it is easier to identify the reader with the narrator, as happens in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, because both are outside the story and are unaware of what happens beyond the red notebook as he states at the end of the novel.

Secondly, as it has been studied, the methodology that each detective follows is completely different since Dupin is gifted with ratiocination and analytic power that turns him into the perfect detective meanwhile Quinn bases its decisions on chance, which is a quality that opposes the detailed observation of detective fiction. Moreover, although Quinn knows Dupin's methodology and the importance of the identification of reasoner's intellect with that of the opponent, as he literally quotes, Quinn is a mere amateur in the real detective field. Nonetheless, Auster's detective is adapted to represent the postmodern vision of the world where failure and incoherence is permitted and the concept of identity is called into question. Hence, Quinn shows how people's decisions are made by an external force since human beings cannot control everything, but chance and destiny control them.

Thirdly, it has to be pointed out that Auster uses postmodern techniques to write a detective story and create a parody of the genre. Therefore, Auster presents a parodical detective with very limited knowledge about the detective's job. Quinn is a common man, a kind of Monsieur Jourdain in the eyes of Dupin, who failed miserably in his

mission since the story presents an unresolved ending. Moreover, what Poe writes could be a real life case because everything is realistic and can be explained, as it is expected in all detective novels. On the other hand, Auster's novel is full of uncertainties and presents surreal situations, such as the presence of two Peter Stillmans, which makes the genre being fictional and parodical. Therefore, the main difference between both stories relies in the proper sense of the genre, since the main purpose of detective fiction is to present complex problems and situations that will be resolved at the end, as happens in Poe's story but not in *City of Glass* since unsolved mysteries are present since the beginning until the end of the novel.

Fourthly, which it has been called "game of identities" corresponds to the reason why *City of Glass* has a detective as protagonist and therefore it can be considered detective fiction. As it has been explored, Daniel Quinn masquerades the real detective Paul Auster, a character who does not appear at any time in the novel, which is a fact that leads the reader to think that he does not even exist. Auster plays with the fragmentation of the world in many ways and calls the individual identity into question by presenting a character with identity issues who is not able to recognize his own self at the end of the novel. Quinn is everybody and nobody at once. In addition, the one who starts this game is Auster by introducing his own name in the novel with a different identity.

In conclusion, it can be said that the deconstruction of the genre allows Auster to create a new version of detective fiction that contradicts the original form stated by Poe. By this way, the novel presents an anti-detective story with a character that is not a detective until he decides to play the role of Paul Auster. Hence, each identity corresponds to a specific reality, leading Quinn to face multiple realities and truths that finally causes him an identity crisis since he is not able to recognize himself when he sees himself reflected in a mirror. Hence, the postmodernist reinterpretation of detective fiction is a parody in order to make reference to the chaos that surrounds the postmodern world.

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