Radical Change in the Genre of the Detective Novel: Raymond Chandler and Paul Auster

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis will examine the careers of authors Raymond Chandler and Paul Auster. The paper will define and examine “hard-boiled” and postmodern literary genres in which Raymond Chandler and Paul Auster have written their crime novels. Topics of discussion in this thesis will include Chandler’s and Auster’s biographical backgrounds and the influences on their fiction, the literary genres of detective fiction and mystery fiction, and the narrative structures of Chandler’s and Auster’s novels. Raymond Chandler’s novel, The Big Sleep and Paul Auster’s novel, City of Glass will also be discussed.
Introduction: Raymond Chandler’s and Paul Auster’s Writing Careers

Raymond Chandler was born in Chicago on July 22 1888, but grew up in England, after the divorce of his parents. He attended public schools there and then studied writing at Dulwich College, London, and also in France and Germany. Chandler became a naturalized British citizen in 1907 in order to work in civil service, but resigned after six months and subsequently worked as a teacher at Dulwich and a journalist for the Daily Express and Western Gazette newspaper. Before returning to the United States in 1912, Chandler published twenty-seven poems and his first short story, “The Rose-Leaf Romance” (http://www.leninimports.com/raymond_chandler.html#ritahbiog).

Chandler began writing detective stories in 1933 with the support of his wife. “Blackmailers Don't Shoot,” which took five months to write, was published by Black Mask, the leading crime pulp fiction publisher of its time which also published Dashiell Hammett's stories. Writing proved to be a lucrative pursuit, and was something Chandler enjoyed, so he continued (http://www.leninimports.com/raymond_chandler.html#ritahbiog). His character Philip Marlowe, a 38-year-old private investigator, is a man of honor and a modern day knight with a college education. Marlowe first appeared in the story “Killer in the Rain,” which later formed part of Chandler's first novel, The Big Sleep (1939). Chandler later turned to screenwriting in 1943 (http://www.leninimports.com/raymond_chandler.html#ritahbiog). Chandler met with success writing for Hollywood. "And Now Tomorrow" (1944), "Double Indemnity" with Billy Wilder (1944), "The Unseen" (1945), and an original
script, "The Blue Dahlia" (1946), and "Strangers on a Train" for Hitchcock (1951) are some of his best work.

As representative and master of the hard-boiled school of crime fiction, Chandler criticized classical detective puzzle writers for their lack of realism in his much quoted essay “The Simple Art of Murder” (http://www.leninimports.com/raymond_chandler.html#ritahbiog). In this essay, Chandler explains that the detective carries forward the tradition of the democratic hero, the uncommon man, who remains true to his values.

Chandler was a slow writer. However, between 1933 and 1939 he produced a total of nineteen pulp stories, eleven in Black Mask, seven in Dime Detective, one in Detective Fiction Weekly, magazines that were avidly read during the 1920’s and 1930’s. Unlike most of his pulp-writing colleagues, Chandler tried to expand the limits of the pulp formula in a more ambitious and humane direction (http://www.leninimports.com/raymond_chandler.html#ritahbiog). His characters always narrate stories in a first person form.

Raymond Chandler died of pneumonia brought on by a particularly heavy drinking binge on March 23, 1959, at the age of 70, and shortly after his wife’s death. His unfinished novel Poodle Spring was completed by Robert B. Parker, who has also written a sequel to The Big Sleep, entitled Perchance to Dream (1990) (http://www.leninimports.com/raymond_chandler.html#ritahbiog).
Paul Auster is an American novelist, essayist, translator, and poet whose complex mystery novels are often concerned with the search for identity and personal meaning. Paul Auster was born on February 3, 1947 in Newark, New Jersey. Auster earned his B.A. and M.A. in English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, where he discovered French poets and started his writing career as a poet, translator, and essayist. However, he told Marcelle Thiebaux in Publishers Weekly, “My dream was always to write novels. Absolutely. From the beginning. Writing novels gives you the opportunity to explore all sides of yourself—more than anything else I can think of,” (http:www.booksfactory.com/writers/auster.htm). Auster’s *City of Glass* represents this creative goal. It is a novel narrated by a writer.

After graduating from Columbia University (M.A., 1970), Auster moved to France, where he began translating the works of French writers and publishing his own work in American journals. For years he labored in relative obscurity until the mid-1980s when he began to attract critical attention with his *New York Trilogy*, a trio of post-modern and experimental detective novels, all of which employ narrative about narratives. Completed in 1987, the trilogy marked him as a talent to watch (http:www.booksfactory.com/writers/auster.htm). The trilogy comprises *City of Glass* (1985), about a crime novelist who becomes entangled in a mystery that causes him to assume various identities; *Ghosts* (1986), about a private eye known as Blue who is investigating a man named Black for a client named White; and *The Locked Room* (1986), the story of an author who, while researching the life of a missing writer for a biography, gradually assumes the identity of that writer (http:www.booksfactory.com/writers/auster.htm). Auster has commented on the influence
of American writers like Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville is evident in Auster’s fiction, other influences range from Montaigne, and Pascal to Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty, and especially the Irish writer, Samuel Beckett (http:www.booksfactory.com/writers/auster.htm). In fact, Auster so admired Beckett that his anti-hero, Quinn, may be named after one of Beckett’s absurd characters. In each of these short novels, the effort of the protagonist to find the solution to the mystery is defeated.

Auster has written other books that feature protagonists who are obsessed with chronicling someone else’s life are the novels Moon Palace (1989) and Leviathan (1992). The Invention of Solitude (1982) is both a memoir about the death of his father and a meditation on the act of writing (http:www.booksfactory.com/writers/auster.htm). Auster’s other writings include the verse volumes Unearth (1974) and Wall Writing (1976), the essay collections White Spaces (1980) and The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews (1982), and the novels The Music of Chance (1990) and Mr. Vertigo (1994) (http:www.booksfactory.com/writers/auster.htm). He also wrote the screenplay for the critically acclaimed films Smoke and Blue in the Face (1995) and Lulú on the Bridge (1998). In 1999 Auster published Timbuktu. Paul Auster was also editor of the Random House Book of Twentieth-Century French Poets, and has translated works by Joan Miro, Jacques Dupin, Jean-Paul Sarte, Stephan Mallarme, and Jean Chesneux, among others (http:www.booksfactory.com/writers/auster.htm). Auster’s impressive list of novels, memoirs, and essays often deal with the construction of identity and the challenges to its stability.
The search for identity and personal meaning thus has permeated Auster’s body of work, many of which concentrate heavily on the role of coincidence and random events a
*(The Music of Chance)* and their narration, or increasingly, the relationships between
men, their peers, and the environment *(The Book of Illusions, Moon Palace)*. Auster’s
heroes often find themselves obliged to work as part of someone else’s undecipherable,
inscrutable, and larger-than-life schemes
(http://www.booksfactory.com/writers/auster.htm). In this respect Auster comments on
both American and continental novel traditions. Auster’s more recent works, *Oracle
Night* (2004), *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005), *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2008), and
*Invisible* (2009) have also met with critical acclaim from critics
(http://www.booksfactory.com/writers/auster.htm).
Literary Genre I: Detective Fiction

Detective fiction is defined as a branch of crime fiction that centers upon the investigation of a crime, usually murder, by a detective, either professional or amateur. According to Tzvetan Todorov, detective fiction contains two stories: the story of the crime, and the story of its investigator (Scaggs 2). Detective fiction is closely related to mystery fiction but contains more of a puzzle element that must be solved, often by a single protagonist, either male or female (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Detective_fiction). A common feature of the character of the detective is that of an investigator who is unmarried, with some source of income other than a regular job, and who generally has some pleasing qualities, eccentricities or striking characteristics. In nineteenth century crime fiction, he or she often has a less intelligent assistant, or foil, who is asked to make apparently irrelevant inquiries, and who acts as an audience surrogate for the explanation of the mystery at the end of the story (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Detective_fiction). Paul Auster’s character, Quinn, and Raymond Chandler’s character, Marlowe, both fit these criteria. Both of these characters operate on their own, with the occasional support from colleagues or associates. However, this is more so Marlowe than Quinn.

The traditional elements of detective fiction are: (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 how he or she has ascertained the identity of the culprit. Detective stories often
operate on the principle that superficially convincing evidence is ultimately irrelevant (http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/ps/dictionary.do).

The most widespread subgenre of the detective novel is the *whodunit*, where the author exercises great ingenuity in narrating the events of the crime and of the subsequent investigation in such a manner as to conceal the identity of the criminal from the reader until the end of the book, when the method of solving the crime and the culprit are revealed (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Detective_fiction). One of the first detective stories was *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* by Edgar Allan Poe, published in April 1842. As a result of this story’s success, the detective story soon expanded to novel length. The great fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, made his debut in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s novel, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) (http://go.galedgroup.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu.ps/dictionary.do). Poe’s detective stories have been described as ratiocinative tales. In stories such as these, the primary concern of the plot is to ascertain the truth which usually involves a complex and mysterious process that combines intuitive logic, astute observation, and keen conclusion (http://www.wordiq.com/defintion/Detective_fiction). Chandler’s and Auster’s detectives seem to fit this category. However, Auster’s protagonist, instead of using the police as foils and solving the crime through analytical reasoning becomes a victim of both chance and his own lack of skill. Chandler’s and Auster’s detectives seem to fit this category. However, Auster’s protagonist, instead of using the police as foils and solving the crime through analytical reasoning becomes a victim of both chance and his own lack of skill. In this form of the detective genre, the crime itself sometimes becomes secondary to the efforts taken to solve it. *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* is particularly interesting because it
is a barely fictionalized analysis of the circumstances surrounding the real-life discovery of the body of a young woman named Mary Rogers, in which Poe expounds his theory of what actually happened (http://www.wordiq.com/defintion/Detective_fiction). The style of the analysis gives a great deal of attention to forensic detail which makes it a precursor of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes (http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu.ps/dictionary.do). Chandler’s Marlowe, like Holmes, is a master of observation and gives a great deal of attention to details.

Some critics have suggested even earlier prototypes for the detective story, most notably the Old Testament story of Susanna and the Elders in Daniel 13 of the Protestant Bible (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Detective_fiction). According to Bruce Metzger, this biblical short story is about how two lecherous old men tried to compel a beautiful and pious young wife, Susanna, to go to bed with them, and when she refused they publicly accused her of adultery. Susanna is put on trial and the two men give false testimony and she is sentenced to death by the council of elders. But Daniel the prophet is inspired by God find out the truth and he finds a discrepancy in their testimonies at a second trial, after which they are put to death (http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0019_0_19381.html). The story of the dog and the horse found in the third chapter of Voltaire’s Zadig, 1747, may be another precursor of the detective novel. The popularity of this genre has only grown over time and has even found its way into the online community (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Detective_fiction).
The detective story soon expanded to novel length. The early years of the 20th century produce a number of distinguished detective novels, among them Mary Roberts Rinchart’s *The Circular Staircase* (1908) and G.K. Chesterton’s *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911). From 1920 on, the names of many fictional detectives became household words, including Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple (Agatha Christie’s creation), Lord Peter Wimsey (created by Dorothy L. Sayers), Philo Vance (created by S.S. Van Dine), and Ellery Queen (created by Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee) (http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu.ps/dictionary.do). The golden age of the detective novel was the 1930’s. This is particularly seen in Dashiell Hammett’s books. In Hammett’s work the character of the detective became as important as the “whodunit” aspect of ratiocination had been earlier. Some of the successors to Hammett are Raymond Chandler, Ross Macdonald, and Mickey Spillane (http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu.ps/dictionary.do).

The introduction of mass-production of paperback books in the late 1930’s made the detective story broaden the scope of public accessibility. Mass-production afforded writers such as Eric Stanley Gardner, Rex Stout, and Frances and Richard Lockridge the opportunity to capitalize on the new market (http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu.ps/dictionary.do). In France, George Simenon created Inspector Jules Maigret, one of the best-known detectives since Sherlock Holmes. Other detective story writers included Nicholas Blake (pseudonym of the poet C. Day-Lewis), Michael Innes, Ngaio Marsh, Josephine Tey, and John Dickson Carr (http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu.ps/dictionary.do). The 1980’s and ‘90’s saw a rise in the number of female writers whose works frequently featured
women sleuths. Most notable among those female writers who featured female sleuths are Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton. The Mystery Writers of America has not only been instrumental in elevating the standards of mystery writing, including the detective story but has also exerted an important influence through its annual Edgar Allan Poe Awards for excellence (http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu.ps/dictionary.do).

Modern fictional detectives usually fall within one of four domains: the amateur or dilettante detective (Marple, Jessica Fletcher), the private investigator (Holmes, Marlowe, Spade, Rockford), the police detective (Ironside, Kojak, Morse), and more recently, the medical examiner, crime psychologist, forensic evidence expert or other specialists (Scarpetta, Quincy, Cracker, CSI) (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Detective_fiction).

It is clear that Philip Marlowe acts like a private investigator. What is not so clear is Quinn’s role and Auster’s perspective. As a literary subgenre which stretches across cultural periods, detective fiction knows no metaphoric bounds, but texts of the classic period make use of common kinds of imagery. The images can vary, but they cluster around the opposition of hard versus soft, and smooth versus rough (http://www.detnovel.com/Imagery.html).

The terms "hard-boiled" and "soft-boiled" derive from American commonplaces about eggs. Now that they come in boxes from the store, eggs are less metaphorically central than they once were. Fifty years ago most Americans knew to the minute how long they wanted their breakfast eggs immersed in boiling water. A "two-minute egg" had a runny, liquefied yolk, while a "ten-minute egg" was solid throughout. The distinction between hard throughout and hard outside but soft inside was widely known (http://www.detnovel.com/Imagery.html).
This imagery complimented another about characterization in the detective novel. In the 19th century a people closer to nature, made sap syrup from maples, knew that "sap" was sticky matter dripping from trees, which also had hard exteriors. The noun "sap" grew up after the Civil War and appears in Mark Twain's work ("saphead") to refer to someone who is foolish, whose mental processes are not structured and contained (http://www.detnovel.com/Imagery.html). The verb "to sap" meant to hit someone over the head with a blackjack, causing the victim to become "soft." By the time it appeared in hard-boiled narrative, "sap" meant "sucker" or weak -- the opposite of "hard-boiled." Sap and soft-boiled correspond to sentiment, gratitude, and romantic love, which would weaken the hard-boiled detective (http://www.detnovel.com/Imagery.html).

John Scaggs comments that the meaning of “hard-boiled” came to mean “tough, or shrewd,” beginning with New York detective Nick Carter (55). John Daly’s Race Williams is described as “large, tough, and violent,” and is recognized as the model for Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe (55). Chandler refers to this type of detective in The Simple Act of Murder. The detective must be a hero, able to walk down mean streets and survive (56). Scaggs identifies three elements of “hard-boiled” fiction: 1) the California setting of most of the early “hard-boiled” novels; 2) the American vernacular, in which the detective speaks in the language of the crime-ridden, mean streets; 3) the characterization of crimes that were becoming part of the twentieth century America (57).

The contrast between the hard and the soft, with the added meaning of "modern" vs. "old-fashioned" parallels the distinction between romantic and realist, or country and city. During the classic hard-boiled period, the hard was urged upon consumers in
clothing ready-made clothes instead of home-spun in home appliances, gas and electric ovens, instead of coal stoves, and in transportation, the automobile, instead of the horse (http://www.detnovel.com/Imagery.html). Thus, protagonists of American hard-boiled fiction tend to be clean-shaven, dress in modern, if disheveled fabrics, drive cars, live in apartments (often efficiencies), and use modern products. William Marling argues in The American Roman Noir, that hardness and refusal to "play the sap" are usually synecdochal representations of the modern economy (http://www.detnovel.com/Imagery.html).

William Marling believes that Raymond Chandler stands out as the great creator of imagery in hard-boiled fiction and one of the greatest in American literature. Philip Marlowe's world explodes in comparisons, giving the detective the complexion of possibly a polymath. Chandler's metaphors are often similes as well. They frequently describe a character’s uniqueness on first appearance, thus saving the author effort when the character reappears, (http://www.detnovel.com/Imagery.html). An example of this is Chandler’s description of Carmen Sternwood in the first four pages of The Big Sleep, walks "as if she were floating," has teeth "as shiny as porcelain," lowers her eyelashes like "a theatre curtain," sucks her thumb "like a baby with a comforter," and "went up the stairs like a deer" (2-4). The reader understands that she is child-like, transparently cunning, and energetic (http://www.detnovel.com/Imagery.html). "Artificial" seems to be the concept Chandler had in mind; he returns to it later in the novel: Carmen acts "as if [she had] artificial lips and had to be manipulated by springs," (147) (http://www.detnovel.com/Imagery.html). A description such as the later reminds us of Victorian machinery – exposed and clumsy. Chandler suggests that the values the
modern: that which is seamless, functional, and rhythmic in opposition to more comfortable, traditional appearances. Chandler often uses similes in early descriptions of characters and then invokes them again later (http://www.detnovel.com/Imagery.html).

Chandler uses a variety of subjects for his metaphors, all of which can be seen contributing to his description of General Sternwood in *The Big Sleep*. Chandler's primary referents include time, mass, motion and inertia. The General "nodded, as if his neck were afraid of the weight of his head" (7) (http://www.detnovel.com/Imagery.html). In addition, Chandler also used California life and the daily culture of Los Angeles: The General's "few locks of white hair clung to his scalp, like wild flowers fighting for life on a bare rock" (6). Chandler was intensely conscious of death and disease: The General's orchids are "plants with nasty meaty fingers and stalks like the newly washed fingers of dead men" (5). Chandler spent his days at home writing, in a domestic, even kitchen-bound, existence: The General's greenhouse is like a "slow oven," where Marlowe feels "trussed like a turkey" (http://www.detnovel.com/Imagery.html).

If we argue that detective fiction as a genre can be characterized by terms, mystery and *whodunit*, we are close to defining the work of both Raymond Chandler and Paul Auster. Chandler’s Marlowe solves a variety of puzzles that are connected to the disappearance of mystery figure, while Auster’s Quinn, in a Poe-like fashion, tries to solve a mystery involving no crime, no murder. Marlowe succeeds; however, Quinn experiences failure, and consequently, loss of identity.
Literary Genre II: Mystery Fiction

A mystery can be defined as a work of fiction in which the evidence related to a crime or to a mysterious event is so presented that the reader has an opportunity to solve the problem, the author's solution being the final phase of the piece. Originally mystery was a religious term. A mystery was a rite into which only the initiated were admitted (http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/ps/dictionary.do). Like detective fiction, mystery fiction is another distinct subgenre of crime fiction that entails the occurrence of an unknown event which requires the protagonist to make known, or solve. Mystery fiction is similar to the *whodunit* in detective fiction that the clues may often be given to the reader by subtle means. Though often confused with detective fiction, it does not require a crime to have been committed or the involvement of law enforcement (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Mystery_fiction).

The mystery fiction genre has its beginnings in the riddles told in Ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome. Similar stories were told in the middles ages, but the genre did not really begin to develop until the detective stories of Edgar Allan Poe, such as *The Murders of the Rue Morgue*, and *The Purloined Letter* (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Mystery_fiction). The first true mystery novel is considered by many critics to be *The Woman in White* (1860) by Wilkie Collins. Collins wrote several more in this genre, including *The Moonstone* (1868) which is thought to be his masterpiece (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Mystery_fiction). The genre began to expand near the turn of the century with the development of dime novels and magazines. Pulp magazines were especially helpful to the genre with many authors writing in the
genre in the 1920’s. The importance of narrative structure, especially plot and
denouement, and of chance and causality distinguish this subgenre (Scaggs 34) An
important contribution to mystery fiction in the 1920’s was the development of the
juvenile mystery by Edward Stratemeyer. Stratemeyer originally developed and wrote the
Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew mysteries written under the Franklin W. Dixon and Carolyn
Keene pseudonyms, respectively (and later written by his daughter, Harriet S. Adams,
and other authors) (http://www.wordiq.com/definiton/Myster_fiction).

The 1920’s also gave rise to the most popular mystery author of all time, Agatha
Christie. Christie’s books are numerous, though her literary reputation has recently
suffered. The massive popularity of pulp magazines in the 1930’s and 1940’s only
increased the interest in mystery fiction. Pulp magazines decreased in popularity in the
1950’s with the rise of television, so much so that the numerous titles available then are
reduced to two today (and those are Alfred Hitchcock’s Mystery Magazine and Ellery
Queen’s Mystery Magazine) (http://www.wordiq.com/definiton/Myster_fiction). The
detective fiction author, Ellery Queen (pseudonym of authors Dannay and Manfred B.
Lee) is also credited with the continued interest in mystery fiction thanks to the namesake
magazine which began in 1941 (http://www.wordiq.com/definiton/Mysteryfiction).
Interest in mystery fiction continues to this day thanks to various television shows which
have used mystery themes over the years and the many juvenile and adult novels which
continue to be published and frequent the bestseller lists (http://www.wordiq.com/definiton/Myster_fiction). Also, there is some overlap with
“thriller” or “suspense” novels and authors in those genres may consider themselves
mystery novelists. An organization for the authors of mystery, detective, and crime
fiction was established in 1945, called the Mystery Writers of America. This popular genre has naturally made the leap into the online world, spawning countless websites devoted to every aspect of the genre, with even a few supposedly written by real detectives (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Mystery_fiction).

Mystery fiction is characterized by certain characteristics that make it unique from the detective genre. Most important is the notion of ‘fair play’ (Scaggs 36). This principle indicated that a mystery story should be solved by a careful reader. In addition, the mystery story contains the following elements: 1) the criminal must be someone mentioned early in the story; 2) supernatural agencies are not part of the plot; 3) not more than one secret room is allowable; 4) the detective himself must not commit the crime; 5) the detective must not discover any clues that are not deduced by the reader (Scaggs 37).

Although the historical tendency of mystery fiction is to exclude violence, the sense of punishment is imminent in the plot. The location of the mystery crime novel was set in a country estate during the Golden Age of the 1920’s (Scaggs 42).
Narrative Structure: Raymond Chandler and the Poetics of the Detective Novel Hero

All of Raymond Chandler’s novels are written in first-person narratives. *The Big Sleep* (1939), Chandler's first novel, introduces Philip Marlowe, the genre's most influential series detective. This is established in the first paragraph of *The Big Sleep*. Chandler’s hero, Marlowe says, “I was neat, clean, shaved and sober, and I didn’t care who knew it. I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars,” (Crane 1). Philip Marlowe is the sole narrator throughout the novel. Marlowe’s wise-cracking style and capacity to take punishment from his foes introduced a new kind of "performance" to hard-boiled fiction, in which victory was more often verbal than physical (http://www.twbooks.co.uk/crimescene/rchandlerme.html). Chandler's ironic tone and extraordinary metaphors focused readers on individual scenes, which he excelled at writing. Many of these scenes evoke Southern California in the late 1930s so vividly that the setting seems to become part of the plot. Most critics consider this book among the dozen greatest hard-boiled novels (http://www.twbooks.co.uk/crimescene/rchandlerme.html). *The Big Sleep* employs the classic elements of the “hard-boiled” detective genre and presents the reader with a democratic hero, lonely and poor, but as a man of honor.

*The Big Sleep* commences as a "wandering daughter job" and concludes as a prodigal son story. The story begins with Marlowe meeting General Sternwood in the orchid-filled greenhouse of his mansion and is hired to retrieve gambling IOU's and nude photos of his daughter Carmen, which are now in the hands of blackmailers. As he is
leaving, Marlowe meets Sternwood’s two daughters, Carmen, a nymphomaniac, and her older sister, Vivian, who is married to the now missing expatriate and I.R.A. veteran Rusty Regan. Marlowe tracks down the photos through Arthur Geiger's bookstore and breaks into his house when he hears shots fired. When Marlowe investigates, he finds both Carmen naked and Arthur Geiger dead. But, Geiger’s body and Carmen’s negatives disappear before Marlowe can get back from taking Carmen to her father. Marlowe tracks down anyone who might exploit the items, especially Carmen's former lovers, Owen Taylor and Joe Brody. Taylor turns up dead in his car which was driven off a pier. Brody admits to blackmailing Sternwood, but is killed by Geiger's boyfriend, whom Marlowe turns in. Marlowe eventually locates Geiger's body and turns the case over to police Detective Ohls.

A second plot in *The Big Sleep* unfolds on the novel's third morning, with Marlowe’s interview with the captain of Missing Persons regarding Rusty Regan. No one is willing to cooperate with Marlowe on his self-assigned mission, least of all Regan's wife Vivian. Marlowe discovers she has run up a gambling debt at gangster Eddie Mars' casino. Marlowe rescues her from thugs there, but Vivian is offended when he does not try to seduce her, but seeks information instead. Returning home, he has to throw Carmen out of his bed. It is Marlowe’s contention that Regan may be with Mona Mars, the gangster's wife. He gets a lead on Regan and Mars’ hide-out from the girlfriend of Harry Jones. Jones is killed by bad-guy Lash Canino which Marlowe hears in a celebrated scene. Mona is hiding out at a garage in the high desert east of L.A. Marlowe drives up there in the evening, but is knocked out by Canino and a mechanic. He wakes up at the feet of Mona, who is impressed with his swaggering talk and cuts him loose. Marlowe is
infatuated with Mona and pleads with her to come with him, but she in love with Eddie Mars. Marlowe goes to his car, get a gun, and with Mona's help shoots Canino when he returns. Lash Canino is the only man Marlowe ever kills.

It is on the fifth day that Marlowe and the police conclude their business and General Sternwood confirms Marlowe's assignment to find Regan. On his way out he meets Carmen. He takes her down to an abandoned oil well so she can hone her firearms skills. When Carmen fires the five blanks he loaded into her gun at him, Marlowe knows who killed Regan. He confronts Vivian, not the General, with the facts. Carmen killed Regan because he, like Marlowe, refused to sleep with her. Vivian called Eddie Mars to help her dispose of his body. Mars dumped Regan’s body in the oil well's sump, and then sent his wife to the desert to make it look like Regan had run off with her. Mars then set up Sternwood for blackmail to see if he knew about the murder. The novel concludes with Marlowe brooding over death or, "the big sleep" and Mona Mars the one person who helped him to avoid it.

The plot is not tightly-knit. According to one anecdote, when Director Howard Hawks filmed The Big Sleep, he sent a telegram to Chandler asking "Who killed Owen Taylor?" But this is probably apocryphal (http://www.detnovel.com/BigSleep.html.). The novel is built from four Black Mask stories, to which Chandler added repartee, bridges between stories, and many details. Chapters 24-29 especially show Chandler discovering his power, as he gives Marlowe a code and a consciousness capable of recounting repartee even-handedly. Evocative settings such as the Fulwider Building, where Harry
Jones is killed, and the oil well, are late additions that clinch the theme (http://www.detnovel.com/BigSleep.html).

The character of Philip Marlowe takes shape in a sketch of himself that he gives in his interview with General Sternwood, which is fleshed out during the novel. He is thirty-three, college-educated, and worked as an investigator for the District Attorney’s office until he was fired for insubordination. Unmarried, he drives a convertible, make unknown, in which he keeps a gun and a bottle of rye. He lives in an efficiency apartment at the Hobart Arms: "In it was everything that was mine, that had any association for me, any past, anything that took the place of a family. Not much; a few books, pictures, radio, chessmen, old letters, stuff like that" (http://www.detnovel.com/BigSleep.html). Waiting on the chessboard when he enters is a "knight's problem" to solve. This motif is carefully combined with Marlowe's first and last interviews with the General, whose mansion features a stained-glass window depicting a knight freeing a "naked damsel from [a] tree" (Crane 127). The knight is the historic antecedent of the hard-boiled detective, but Marlowe's irony suggests that the chivalric code is hopelessly out of date in the modern world.

The gap between the idealistic code he does hold and the tawdry reality he confronts permits Marlowe to utter his astounding metaphors. Carmen has "teeth … as shiny as porcelain" (Crane 4). Vivian has "ankles long and slim and with enough melodic line for a tone poem" (14). The General's "dry white hair clung to his scalp, like wild flowers fighting for life on a bare rock" (Crane 6). His butler has "a back as straight as an ironing board" (Crane 13) (http://www.detnovel.com/BigSleep.html). The prevailing
tendency of these metaphors is to compare people to things, positing a mechanistic, post-Einsteinian world of time, space, mass, motion, and inertia. Chandler has a second category of metaphor, which he took from California life: Marlowe's office cabinets are "full of California climate," the coastline has "a loud sea-smell which one night's rain hadn't even dented," and the General saves his strength "as carefully as an out-of-work showgirl uses her last good pair of stockings" (51, 41, 6). These figures of speech build an alternate view of the world, deflating the pretensions of the tough-talking thugs and making the detective's ideals seem wistful (http://www.detnovel.com/BigSleep.html).

The novel's theme rises from what Dennis Porter has called "the ironic form of an unnecessary journey." Marlowe searches for a man everyone says he resembles, and the search leads him through the scenes and loves of Rusty Regan's life; in the final scene he learns that he caught the culprit in the first scene, when Carmen fainted into his arms (http://www.detnovel.com/BigSleep.html). As for romance, all four of the female characters survive, but of the five men involved with them, only Marlowe remains, contemplating "the big sleep" to which his fellows have gone. Misogynist is too strong a word for this revealed plot, but "anti-romance" is not (http://www.detnovel.com/BigSleep.html).

Raymond Chandler once said in a letter to a magazine editor that, “the most durable thing in writing, is style,” (http://www.detnovel.com/BigSleep.html). The style that Chandler brought to the hard-boiled crime story is what made him one of the most admired American novelists, and along with Hemmingway, the most imitated.

Through Marlowe, Chandler was able to exploit to the full his gift for the
wisecrack. In *Farewell, My Lovely*, Moose Malloy is said to look 'about as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of an angel food', and when Marlowe is passed a photograph, he says it depicts a blonde, ‘a blonde to make a bishop kick a hole in a stained glass window' (http://www.detnovel.com/BigSleep.html).
Paul Auster and the Identities of the Mystery Detective Anti-Hero

The *City of Glass* seems to either lack, or simply undo, many of the “hard-boiled” detective mystery’s narrative elements. In the novel Auster uses the characters to explore the multiple facets of identity of both the characters and the anti-hero detective Quinn.

Paul Auster’s *City Of Glass* has many references to the 19th Century American authors who have had the most influence on him and his own literary identity (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). Quinn’s nom de plume in *City of Glass* is William Wilson, also the name of an Edgar Allan Poe’s short story about doppelgangers, or doubles (Dawson 1). In another story in *New York Trilogy*, “Locker Room,” the narrator is Herman Melville, and Fanshawe mimics the opening line of “Moby Dick” in his letter starting “Call me Redburn.” Thoreau’s “Walden” is a major part of “Ghosts,” with Thoreau mentioned in “City of Glass,” and one Dennis Walden in “The Locked Room” (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). Auster thus thrusts the reader into a whirlpool of multiple and confused identities from the beginning (Dawson 1). These illusions double the characters’ identities with the novel and create a simultaneous intertextual and literary doubling. *City of Glass*’ central character is Daniel Quinn, a reclusive writer of fiction, who hides behind the pseudonym of William Wilson (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). The books Quinn writes feature a detective named Max Work. Information given by the narrator almost perfectly matches Auster's, with age, occupation, and pastimes being identical (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). It is clear that Daniel Quinn is in fact Auster’s alter ego and that Auster is commenting on aspects of his own
fictionality. The only named book by Quinn or ‘William Wilson’ is “Suicide Squeeze” (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). My research revealed the Auster wrote a detective novel in 1982 called “Squeeze Play” under another name while the same age as Quinn (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). As critic Nicholas Dawson suggests, Peter Stillman is a Kasper Hauser-like character who has had no contact with other humans most of his life because his father, also named Peter Stillman, has locked him away in solitude in a room (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). Dawson says that the younger Stillman is, “literally a ‘still man’, someone who has lived a deathly existence.” In fact, Stillman can serve as a metaphor for the major characters and perhaps the reader of this novel. As Dawson sees it ‘still’ means constant or stationary, so Peter can be viewed as the boy who never grew up. The younger Peter is also very confused about language because of his limited contact with humans over the years (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). The validity of words and names are confusing to him. He says to Quinn, “My real name is Mr. Sad. What is your name, Mr. Auster? Perhaps you are the real Mr. Sad, and I am no one,” (Auster 28). Dawson claims that Stillman rejects his name which allows him to replace it with any name he wants to depending on how he feels (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). The young Stillman goes on to say, “I am Peter Stillman. That’s not my real name. My real name is Peter Rabbit,” (Auster 30). But then he says, “Perhaps I am Peter Stillman, and perhaps I am not. My real name is Peter Nobody, (Auster 33). Stillman says of his wife, “Her name is Virginia. That is not her real name. But that makes no difference. To me.” (Auster 34). From
Nicholas Dawson’s perspective names do not make a difference to the younger Stillman and by rejecting the name Peter Stillman he is rejecting the name his tyrannical father gave to him as well as his father’s name (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). He draws this conclusion from the younger Stillman’s statement, “We are both Peter Stillman. But Peter Stillman is not my real name. So perhaps I am not Peter Stillman, after all,” (Auster 31). According to Dawson, Peter Stillman’s identity is not dictated by his name, but by his random and irrational whims (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). Peter’s detachment from human contact mirrors the behavior of the other characters in the novel; including Quinn himself is the result of his father’s experiment. The elder Stillman wanted to find out how total isolation from other human beings would affect man’s development of language (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). But as Dawson suggests it also deprived him on constant and definitive identity. To make his point he quotes from the book, “I cannot say who I will be tomorrow. Each day is new, and each day I can be born again,” (36). Stillman’s irrational, random, and occasionally whimsical self-image creates a narrative pattern against which both Quinn and Stillman, Sr. can be evaluated.

Peter Stillman, Jr. is cut off from all human contact for most of his life by his father—also called Peter Stillman who Auster also uses also to explore the multiple facets of identity and the feeling of nothingness (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). When Peter, Jr. says, “Perhaps I am Peter Stillman, and perhaps I am not. My real name is Peter Nobody (Auster 33) he is not only rejecting the name that his tyrannical father gave to him as well as his father’s
name (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). In fact, Stillman, Sr.’s. detachment from human contact was part of his experiment on the effect of isolation on the development of his son’s language. Yet this isolation has deprived Peter, Jr. of constant and definitive identity (http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/dawson.html). As he says, “I cannot say who I will be tomorrow. Each day is new, and each day I can be born again” (Auster 36). This idea of eternal rebirth also becomes part of City of Glass’ narrative structure and suggests an unconscious or subconscious pattern in each character’s, and in the reader’s existence. This newness is double sided, however, as things come back, or return, within the novel, but are quickly lost again. Quinn will lose track of Peter Stillman, Sr. as he will also lose track of Stillman’s son.

I think Nicholas Dawson’s analysis of Peter Stillman’s character in the City of Glass illustrates how Paul Auster foregrounds the multiple and unstable facets of identity in the postmodern mystery, anti-hero detective novel. One who is reading or has read the book gains an understanding of Paul Auster’s attempt to destabilize the postmodern detective’s ability to solve a puzzle, if not a “true” crime (Scaggs 140). What is significant is Quinn’s and author Auster’s participation in this process.

In one critical review of Paul Auster’s work Little states that in his New York Trilogy nothing happens again and again (1). But to say that “nothing happens” in detective stories is not to say that they are plotless, but instead indicates that the plots and the detectives who try to solve each mystery are continually foiled (Little 1). The author argues that in the “City of Glass,” Auster uses two interrelated strategies to create a
“transcendent real immune to the vicissitudes of wills and desires” (Little 2). He says that by depicting an ascetic investigator who undertakes rituals of purgation and starvation, Auster writes a book in a “spare style” with an eye to demonstrating how the modern embrace of asceticism—as it appears in the minimalist prose of modernist writers and in the narratives of self-denial so prevalent in contemporary culture—expresses a “will and a desire” to purge differences from the text and from the varieties of self (Little 2). The author goes on to say that while minimalist abstraction attempts to produce an autonomous text cleansed of impurities inherent in act of representation, the individual who practices self-starvation attempts to produce an autonomous identity cleansed of impurities inherent in the act of living (Little 2). Auster, the detective writer and Auster the detective who writes are perceived as puritanical characters who undertake a religiously quest to uncover truth by eliminating waste from the body of the text and from the text of the body (Little, 2). According to Little, these writers are trying to yield an “unchangeable, decontextualized,” value-free form by reducing their figures to nothing. In “City of Glass,” Auster dramatizes these, despite their multiple, shifting identities and exorcisms in order point to a different kind of nothing, a nothing that makes a difference by refusing to be eliminated, thus keeping open other ways to read the clues, other leads on the case (Little 2). This is especially true of Stillman and Quinn, protagonist and anti-protagonist who actually willfully disappear from the novel. When read in a culture where the identification of “true” values by various self-appointed guardians of virtue and correctness result in the denial difference and “the foreclosure of values,” the novelist’s declaration of artistic intent, delivered precisely and clearly in a poem entitled “Credo” seems all the more urgent: “To say nothing. To say our lives depend on it,” (Little 2). We
might argue then that Auster has created essentially a new detective genre as well as a new detective. However, nothingness pervades core. Raymond Chandler in *The Simple Act of Murder*, comments that the private investigator represents a modern version of the modern knight.

Paul Auster’s *City of Glass* as does the other short stories in *The New York Trilogy* both deploys and subverts the conventions of detective fiction, especially the private investigator novel. These stories explore not only identity, but authorship and narrative as well (Priestman 258). The central figures in all three parts of the trilogy (*City of Glass, Ghosts, and The Locked Room*) the central figures are portrayed as detectives similar to the fiction of Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett: a phone call, a visit from a mysterious stranger, a letter. But from the beginning the interruptions fail to establish and secure the identity of the private investigator. Instead, who the private investigator is left not only unclear; it is even mistaken. The opening line of *City of Glass* demonstrates this: “It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not,” (Auster 1). Daniel Quinn received the call. Quinn also writes mystery novels under the pseudonym of William Wilson (the name of one of Poe’s characters) and his private investigator narrator is one Max Work: the voice on the other end of the phone asks to speak to Paul Auster, of the Auster Detective Agency. As the phone calls repeat themselves, Quinn decides to take on the identity of Auster, the private investigator and the cast that is presented to him; that of finding and trailing Peter Stillman, Sr. who was recently released from prison after completing a long sentence for abusing his son as well as to ensure he does not return to do further harm to him. Quinn becomes Virginia
Stillman’s client. Virginia is married to Peter Stillman, Jr. Quinn’s dead son is also named Peter). Stillman, Jr. was irrevocably damaged by his father cruel treatment of him as a child. At a very young age Peter, Jr. was locked in a dark room and denied contact with other humans and with the outside world. Peter, Sr. was conducting an experiment intending to prove his theories about an “original” language (Priestman 259). John Scaggs’ assessment of Auster’s City of Glass echoes Priestman’s views. He also contends that the novel deploys and subverts the conventions of detective fiction (Scaggs 141).

Scaggs adds that the postmodern detective fiction emphasizes clear parallels between reading, detection, and interpretation at every turn and it is the ease with which crime fiction can articulate and investigate these parallels that account for both the abundance of postmodern, or anti-detective, novels and the various and analytic responses to them (142). Crime narratives that are structured around the investigation of a crime are by default, metanarratives or narratives about narratives; stories about reconstructing and interpreting the story of a crime, and it is this metanarrative awareness that invites critical and theoretical approaches, thus creating the ideal framework within which the genre can continuously question and reinvent itself (Scaggs 143).

Perhaps the most radical change in form of the postmodern detective novel is it protagonist, Daniel Quinn. According to Jeffrey Nealon, the detective novel rest on the successful collecting of “signs, and …the possibility of deriving order: from conflicting signs and motivations (92). Both the detective and the reader must succeed in the “epistemology work” of solving the clues to the mystery (92). Unlike Chandler’s Philip Marlowe, Quinn is writer of detective stories, and has little actual experience of solving
real crimes. Nealon observes early in the *City of Glass*, Quinn reflection on the role of the detective:

> 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 (9).

The writer and the detective begin a journey that has no guaranteed ending. Once the writer and the detective enter the mystery there is no guarantee of closure (Nealon 93).

In his fiction, Quinn understands the close relationship between the writer and the detective. Quinn’s Max Work, a ‘hard-boiled: detective, and William Wilson, his pen name author, achieve a close working relationship. Work has a Marlowe-like ability to dispel uncertainty and to reach a successful epistemological resolution. Nealon comments that Work allows Wilson/Quinn’s writing to enter a mystery realm where “confusion reigns” (94). Nealon quotes William Spanos, who writes that the postmodernist writer’s most pressing responsibility is to undermine “the detective-like expectations of the positivistic minds.” (94). As the narrator observes:

> Little by little, Quinn began to feel cut off from his original intention and he wondered now if he had embarked on a meaningless project (*City of Glass* 73).

In order to stave off uncertainty, and even a measure of boredom, Quinn buys a red notebook. Here we start to understand that Quinn withdraws from the (W)ork of solving or preventing, a crime into a purely writerly space (Nealon 96).
Conclusion

As Quinn slips away from being able to decipher mysterious signs, that is, to write and to solve epistemological mysteries, his project of becoming both detective and writer begins to fail. Nealon suggests that the “Edenic”, or natural, language of Peter Stillman, Sr. plays a role in undermining Work’s, Wilson’s, and Quinn’s work. The reader, by means of the epistemological failure, must conclude that the world of signs, in general, as well as those presented within the framework of the detective mystery novel do not really add up. The signs contained in City of Glass do not lead Quinn, or the reader, to new knowledge, but only to more endless alternatives. In essence, City of Glass, becomes a city of glass, where all clues are endlessly reflected (Merivale 127). As Quinn asks at the end of the novel; “What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?” (157). The ending of the City of Glass must therefore be left open. Quinn comments; “I’m not the Sherlock Holmes type” (48). Auster, through Quinn, suggests the possibility that only by recovering the viability of narrative form that readers can address the postmodern situation.

I have tried to demonstrate that radical shift in the development of the detective novel from Raymond Chandler’s The Red Badge of Courage to Paul Auster’s City of Glass. Underlying these changes is the shift from the hero who is both astute and courageous, and able to decipher clues and solve mysteries, to the hero who is imprisoned within his fascination for the mystery itself, thus, isolating and imprisoning him. In its classic phase, the detective story seemed able to achieve its potential as a specific literary genre by finding the sources of the evil within society. In the postmodern phase of the
genre, the detective confronts a reflective wall of clues, all of which point at each other. Although Auster’s intertextual references point the reader in the direction of the “hard-boiled” detective story, as well as backward to a more stable or classic generic system, ultimately the indecision and inability of his hero detective to locate intelligible signs, and order them into a coherent system of names, places, and physical features signals the demise of the detective of intelligence and power.
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