

Degree Project

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Postmodern in the English Classroom

A Didactic Consideration of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*

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Introduction

“All men contain several men inside them, and most of us bounce from one self to another without ever knowing who we are.” - Paul Auster

The syllabus for the Swedish upper secondary school says that, the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity between people are the values that the education should represent and impart (Skolverket 2011). It also says that pupils are supposed to be given conditions to acquire the more diverse forms of knowledge which constitute the common frame of reference in a society which is based on fundamental democratic values and the human rights we all share. Pupils should also be able to orient themselves in a complex reality with its enormous flows of information and a rapidly changing world. The ability of pupils to find, acquire and apply new knowledge thus becomes important. Pupils should develop their ability to think critically, examine facts and relationships, and appreciate the consequences of different alternatives. By these means students will come closer to scientific ways of thinking and working (Skolverket 2011). Sven-Eric Liedman has explained how teachers and pupils can develop these abilities by understanding how knowledge works. Liedman explains that knowledge and representing information are two different things. Knowledge is all about the ability to understand, to see the connection between different concepts and phenomena, and to see the casual patterns and connections between these different concepts and phenomena (Liedman). The teacher's role in this is to arouse interest and maintain curiosity in the process of knowledge seeking. What pupils need to learn is how to handle the growing flow of information in society through the internet, mass media

and social media. Pupils need to be critically reflective towards all information, in order to understand what actually happens in the world. Pupils need to be given the ability to critically evaluate the growing information flow and develop the ability to see their existence in a larger context, and to be able to understand how the world and their identity are related. What is of great importance in this pedagogical process is to give the pupils new ways and opportunities to explore and understand reality itself. In this sense education is about creating new perspectives on the world, society, people and the individual (Liedman).

One contemporary novel that can be used as a learning tool in order to develop the critical abilities mentioned above is Paul Auster's postmodern novel *City of Glass* (1985). *City of Glass* was first published in 1985. The setting of the novel is New York during the 1980s. The novel describes the life of the protagonist Daniel Quinn, a thirty-five year old man who had once been married and had a child. Quinn writes detective and mystery novels under the pseudonym William Wilson. The novel begins when Quinn receives a phone call from someone that asks for someone he is not. The person asks for Paul Auster, the detective. Quinn lies to the voice and tells the person he is Paul Auster and he then becomes employed by Peter Stillman Jr., to follow a former convict named Peter Stillman Sr., and to prevent him from murdering his son. In this story, Quinn also takes on the characteristics of his own fictional detective Max Work. After pursuing Peter Stillman Sr., and as the case develops, Quinn appears confused and irresolute about how to act so he contacts Paul Auster himself to get clarification, but the situation becomes more confusing for Quinn because he cannot distinguish what is real and what is not anymore.

A number of scholars have discussed the novel as a significant postmodern text. Dennis Barone claims that Auster's work always contains aspects of his own life, references to literature, and descriptions of actual historic figures and events, and engages productively with metafiction (Barone 5). According to Barone, Auster's use of metafiction does not frustrate or disrupt the reading process, but rather invites a philosophical interpretation of fiction (7). The term metafiction is given to fictional writing which "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to a series of constructions, artifices and impermanent structures in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 2-7). Barone also argues that *City of Glass* and many of Auster's other fictional texts could be used to illustrate the sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard's principles of "simulation", "simulacra", and "hyperreality" (Barone 9). Baudrillard created the terms to capture and explain a profound reflection on the excessive reproduction of reality in modern life (Lane 2). The term "hyperreality" can be explained as a fabricated and more intensified version of reality (Barone 9).

Similarly, Madeleine Sorapure claims that *City of Glass* is a sophisticated metafictional puzzle from beginning to end, where the author plays with the metafictional space between Auster, the real life author, and "Auster" the author-character in the novel (Sorapure 85). Yet, Ramón Espejo adds a slightly different interpretation of the novel, which is not simply concerned with metafiction. Espejo claims that *City of Glass* challenges any possibility of meaning in a traditional sense (Espejo 148). Postmodern literature is largely about how reality cannot always be easily explained; it is not fixed or stable. In turn this point-of-view can cause a sense of unease, and yet not "knowing" is an important characteristic of the postmodern novel. Espejo also mentions that Auster's novels

would not be half as attractive without the inclusion of other postmodern characteristics, for example: Metafictional play, where a character is named after the author (Espejo 151).

Another critic who has analyzed the use of postmodernism in Auster's *City of Glass* is Chris Tysh. Tysh considers that *City of Glass* questions and gives life to the different textual strategies associated with postmodernism in general (Tysh 46-52). Literary devices associated with postmodernism are: identity, metafiction, intertextuality and fragmentation (Barry 87).

Pupils commonly meet a simulated reality in their everyday lives, through the internet, mass media and social media. In this sense it can be suggested that pupils have little or no direct access to reality, but are increasingly having reality mediated to them. Crucially postmodern fiction questions the contemporary bombardment of information and mediated forms of reality. But most of all postmodernism foregrounds fiction in a way which makes the real obscured (Barry 87). By reading *City of Glass* pupils can be introduced to how postmodern fiction as a mode of literature can allow seeing the world differently. Pupils can also be given the conditions to develop core abilities, such as critical thinking, named in the syllabus for upper secondary school (Skolverket 2011). By learning to question reality, fiction, internet, mass media, social media and information in general pupils will develop critical thinking abilities, which will not only guide them through information, but will also help pupils to know how to critically examine mediated reality.

The ultimate aim of this thesis is to show how Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, a postmodern fictional novel that explores and questions reality and identity, can fruitfully be used to achieve the goals stated within the Swedish

syllabus for upper secondary school. In relation to this aim two key features of postmodern fiction will be examined and discussed, namely hyperreality and metafiction. By examining these two postmodernist theoretical concepts in *City of Glass*, this thesis will argue that analysis of these concepts can be employed in the classroom to promote critical thinking.

Postmodernism - Hyperreality

Postmodernism is the broad movement in the arts and society that followed modernism, from the mid-to-late twentieth century. According to Richard Appignanesi and Chris Garratt what makes postmodernism “post” is that it embraces and captures the modernist idea of an unstable identity, but in a different spirit – postmodernism embraced and developed this instability (Appignanesi, Garratt, et al 4). Postmodernism focuses on turning away from absolute truths and coherent identities to question what is real and what is not. Reality is reproduced, represented and simulated in a postmodern contemporary society by different media forms that mediate reality. This reproduced, represented and simulated reality actually gives ‘no access’ to reality itself at all. It tries to explain the complex contemporary world that we live in. We meet simulations of reality every day through media, the internet, newspapers and television. According to Baudrillard, images are simulations or representations of reality that become our reality (Lane 2). A simulation is an imitation of the real world which lets us see the world from a simulated perspective which has its own rules. The mediation of reality, through digital images, for example, has a powerful influence on how we perceive the world. Baudrillard calls these imitations, signifiers of reference (Gane 97). According to Gane, the mass media’s representation of reality through images

is the reality that a television viewer has direct access to. However, while the viewer might accept what they are seeing as reality, they probably think less about the various stages of production and editing that have mediated this reproduction of reality. This mediated reproduction of reality will have an effect on the information's original form because the makers of television programs choose to add or remove things, in the reproduction of reality. The information can even be produced by different companies with different political intentions, but they all ostensibly represent the same reality, which makes it very hard to distinguish what is real, and thus hyperreality becomes *the* reality (Gane 101-102). All of this makes reality hard to determine and distinguish. Postmodernism questions the reproduced represented and simulated reality and what is real and what is not (Barry 86-87).

The concept of the hyperreal as mentioned earlier was developed by Jean Baudrillard. During the 1980s Baudrillard created terms such as "simulation", "simulacra" and the "hyperreal" to capture and explain a profound reflection on the excessive reproduction of reality in modern life (Lane 2). According to this theory, the original or external reality cannot compete with the hyperreal because this intensified hyperreal has subsumed the external reality (Barone 9). Barone explains Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality and simulation as:

In a world of simulations that lack an original the difficulty of attaining any authentic connection increases, and if there is no longer a stable, centered human subject, then any depiction of a postmodern character will be either an exercise in nostalgia or the writer must

confront difficulties that earlier writers could not have imagined.
(Barone 12)

The simulacra/simulation theory builds on different levels of simulations where simulacra can be explained as a sign, and simulation as a process. Baudrillard argues that there are three levels of simulation that build on the concept of signs, and which blur the lines between reality and fiction. The first level of simulation is an obvious copy of reality that everyone can determine. The second level of simulation, however, is a copy that is so effective that it blurs the boundaries between reality and the representation. The third level of simulation is one which produces a reality of its own, without having any discernible connection to an external reality or any particular aspect of the real world. Lane explains how a good illustration of Baudrillard's third level simulation concept is a video game or computer game where the fantasy world in it is generated by a computer. A computer game very easily creates abstract lines between reality and fiction. These abstract lines can often be hard to distinguish and applied in what can be seen as reality. It is this third level of simulation, where the sign or model appears with no relation to reality, that Baudrillard calls the hyperreal. The hyperreal is the effect of simulation (Lane 30).

Jean Baudrillard has controversially claimed in his essay *The Gulf War Never Happened* that the 1990-1991 Gulf War in Iraq never actually took place (Baudrillard 69). Baudrillard even claimed that the casualties for the Western armies participating in the war would have been greater if they just stayed home, due to road deaths for example (Baudrillard 2). The media event which the war became exemplifies how hyperreality works, where the hyperreal becomes more

real than reality itself. The media images of the war showed no human casualties but only technological images and illustrations of “surgical strikes” on the television which would become the reality for most people, a hyperreal form of reality. What Baudrillard wanted to show with his essay was that reality and a reproduction of reality by the media can differ, and that an event can become blurred when it is mediated to us, thus representing another reality (Barry 283).

Postmodernism - Metafiction

The second postmodern feature that will be analyzed in the novel is metafiction. Metafiction is described by Patricia Waugh as: “A term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh 2). Metafictional writing explores how layers of fiction and several structures of fiction parody or depart from the traditional `rules` of writing novels. It is also used to explore the relationship between fiction itself and the world outside of fiction (Waugh 2-3). Metafictional writers know the dilemma of explaining the world in novels and fiction. It is almost impossible to actually describe a complete image of reality. Metafictional writers are very conscious concerning this problem, so instead metafictional writers tend to embrace representations over direct attempts to depict an external reality (Waugh 4-5). Furthermore, Patricia Waugh points out that: “Contemporary metafictional writing is both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history is provisional: no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures” (Waugh 7). This quote summarizes metafictional writing and the postmodern features of metafictional

writing. Postmodern writers accept the impossibility of describing an external reality, and instead they accept that the construction of fiction itself is in many ways a representation of reality, since it is also a 'series of constructions'. A response to this is that postmodern writers try to describe and question the relationship between fiction, reality and the series of constructions.

***City of Glass* – Encouraging critical thinking in the ESL-classroom**

The didactical strategy is to introduce critical thinking, postmodernism, hyperreality and metafiction in the second language learning classroom. Regarding the lesson plan, in the first lesson the pupils will be introduced to critical thinking and postmodernism. After this, they will be given the novel *City of Glass* as an introduction to a larger theme of critical thinking. After reading the novel there will be a lesson discussing and analyzing of the novel and its theme, subject, plot, postmodernism, hyperreality and metafiction. After the discussion and analysis of the novel *City of Glass* the pupils will be introduced to a theme where they will be analyzing and writing an essay on the growing flow of information in society through the internet, mass media and social media.

By reading *City of Glass* and learning about postmodernism, pupils will meet difficulties in critical examination of a text and critical thinking. Pupils will not only meet this by reading the novel, but particularly because the content of the novel questions reality itself. For pupils to make sense of a novel in a second language they need to make sense of the text and its content. By doing so pupils become involved in the text, and by trying to create meaning out of it, reading becomes an active process. The pupil reads the text and interprets it and applies the knowledge he or she has on the subject. This creates a sort of dialogue between the

reader and the text (Hedge 188-189). Since *City of Glass* questions reality, it will test the pupil's critical examination of the text even more; Auster's novel makes it challenging to analyze and to test assumptions since it contains hyperreality and metafiction.

When reading this postmodern novel, it is necessary to be critical and question what is written in the novel, regarding both the structure of the novel and the subject of the novel. The novel is also useful because the vocabulary is not overly advanced but the meanings of passages are often deeply nuanced, and therefore it challenges pupils, and will get them more intrinsically motivated to actually read the whole book (Deci and Ryan 68). *City of Glass* meets a very broad reading skill since it is written in relatively simple language and is only 125 pages. On the other hand its content is rather complex. The pupils at this level have the necessary language skills to read and understand the plot. What the pupil will need help with is to understand the complex postmodern concepts such as hyperreality and metafiction to totally make sense of the text while discussing its rather complex plot.

Before pupils read the novel they will be given an introduction to postmodernism. In order to be able to analyze the novel, three key features will be introduced: hyperreality, metafiction and how postmodernism questions many long held beliefs on reality and the nature of existence. Postmodernism also examines life issues because it questions the idea of absolute truths. Nothing can really be explained when we have no direct access to reality, therefore postmodernist criticism questions reality itself (Barry 86-87).

According to Tricia Hedge pupils also need knowledge about six different concepts to be able to interpret and read the text interactively, as Hedge

argues it should be read (Hedge 188). What Hedge means is that the pupils should not just read the text without giving any deeper thought to what is actually written in the novel and thus easily forgetting what they have been reading. While reading interactively the pupils will read the novel, imagine the setting, the protagonist, and try to make sense of the plot. Hedge has categorized the concept that pupils need to learn in order to make sense of a text and read interactively into six categories: Firstly they need syntactic knowledge, which means that they need to understand English syntax and grammar in order to read properly and understand the sentences. Secondly pupils also need morphological knowledge, which means that they know that things can take, for example, different prefixes and affixes, which will result in different forms and meaning. Thirdly, pupils also need general world knowledge, which means, for example, that they know what a notebook is and why people use it to write down notes. Fourthly, pupils need sociocultural knowledge, for example the architecture of a church and its meaning. Fifthly pupils need topic knowledge. Finally, pupils need genre knowledge in order to realize and question the setting and plot (Hedge 189).

There are several different ways to read a novel, but when pupils read *City of Glass* reflective and critical reading of the novel will be encouraged. Reading a novel reflectively and critically means that pupils look carefully at the text and its content to understand what it means. It also means that pupils appreciate the choice of words and reflect on the meaning of the content, and are able to come to conclusions on subjects and understand the theme of the novel (Hedge 195).

Reading novels such as *City of Glass* is instrumental in developing pupils' critical thinking in a second language. When a teacher chooses this kind of

texts and novels, which introduce and present ways of thinking that are not familiar to pupils, pupils need to assert their own cultural values on the text or novel, to either resist or believe in what the author of the novel writes; this is where pupils become critical (Hedge 197). In *City of Glass* pupils will meet Quinn the “detective” on his journey through mysteries. Pupils will need to read interactively and critically to be able to understand the postmodern features of hyperreality in the novel. Pupils will also realize, as they are reading the novel, how metafiction parodies and departs from a traditional novel and how it explores the relationship between reality and fiction. So while reading this novel the pupils will read it interactively and critically develop their second language skills as well as relevant transferable skills.

Possible difficulties with this method of teaching are how to get pupils motivated to read a whole novel and to discuss it. Motivation is described by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan as the energy and direction of an individual’s behavior (Deci and Ryan 68). The energy and direction must work in symbiosis in order to create motivation. Self-determination theory builds on describing the quality that drives motivation in individuals. In order to achieve intrinsic motivation individuals need to be self-determined. Self-determination means that the individual has control over the situation and also has opportunities of choice, which the individual can understand and control, but most of all the individual should have a perceived self-determination (Deci and Ryan 68). Hedge also describes how pupils need to reflect, make choices and arrive at personally constructed decisions in order to be self-determined. By giving pupils a novel it will not give them much of a choice to read it. However, they will have some time to read it and they will be given opportunities and knowledge to be able to

understand the text. In this manner they will feel independent and have control over their situation of learning.

***City of Glass* – Hyperreality and Metafiction**

Among the many postmodern aspects of the novel, metafiction and hyperreality are central. Every character in the novel foregrounds fiction and especially the protagonist Quinn himself. Quinn is apparently so tired of his own miserable life that he assumes other people's identities, and by taking on other people's realities Quinn can accept himself. He always thinks in terms of what another person would do or what it would be like to be another person: "That night, as he at last drifted off to sleep, Quinn tried to imagine what Work would have said to the stranger on the phone" (Auster 9). Quinn also takes the job as a detective without even knowing anything about crime or how to solve one: "Whatever he knew about these things, he had learned from books, films and newspapers. He did not, however consider this to be a handicap" (Auster 7). In other words, Quinn's way of thinking about detection is closely related to the simulation process: he creates images which tend to become his (hyper) reality, and then his own reality becomes blurred (Barone 9). Quinn is lost both in the city and within his own identity:

New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well. (Auster 4)

He cannot comprehend the real world or what happens in it, the mystery evolves too fast. Quinn has been writing several books of poetry, plays and critical essays, but he no longer has the motivation to continue writing (Auster 4). Therefore, Quinn takes on the identity of his own pseudonym William Wilson. Quinn explains the reasons for taking on the identity of Wilson in this way: “Because he did not consider himself the author of what he wrote, he did not feel responsible for it and therefore was not compelled to defend it in his heart” (Auster 4). Quinn also takes on more identities throughout the novel. Quinn even states that: “he had, of course, long ago stopped thinking of himself as real. If he lived now in the world at all, it was only at one remove, through the imaginary person of Max Work” (Auster 9). All this invites a metafictional reading of the novel, where reading and writing about characters are themselves among the themes and subjects of the novel.

Quinn’s identities eventually become real. An example of Auster’s metafictional play with layers of identities and how identities are “fake”, but become real as they have effects in the world the novel is set in, is when Quinn takes on the role as Max Work. In the novel Auster portrays the thought of having no real identity, and how everything and every individual is made of just layers without any depth. Rubenstein explains layers of identity as a name, an image, a sign, a year someone was born, clothes, work or education, anything that defines someone or something as a unique individual with an identity. Rubenstein argues that: “The loss of the idea of a fixed identity is central to postmodernism” (Rubenstein 248).

Despite all the various identities and names Quinn takes on and the various outcomes of the story, Quinn tries to stay sane to himself and not lose his

grip over the situation and the fictional identities (Rubenstein 247). He tries to explain the situation of his identity conflict within himself, and to sort out his identity:

And then, most important of all: to remember who I am. To remember who I am supposed to be. I do not think this is a game. On the other hand, nothing is clear. For example: who are you? And if you think you know, why do you keep lying about it? I have no answer. All I can say is this: listen to me. My name is Paul Auster. That is not my real name. (Auster 40)

Thus Auster portrays the thought of a potentially endless postmodern questioning of identity. Auster plays with the layers of identity, and how a name is only loosely ascribed to an individual. A name is just arbitrary; it is a created surface of identity that is provided by somebody else. A name does not necessarily define a person as an individual. To explain this further, Baudrillard's theory on the 'loss of the real' in his simulacrum/simulation theory can be useful. There is no corresponding reality beneath the surface of a provided name; there is no actual identity (Barry 84). And Auster the author cleverly plays with Quinn's identity to prove the point.

Quinn assumes several identities just to forget his own and, as a result he is not a reliable narrator. Quinn states early in the beginning of the novel: "remembered things, he knew, had a tendency to subvert the thing remembered. As a consequence, he could never be sure of any of it" (Auster 13). Because Quinn can never be sure of anything and has a tendency to subvert the things he remembers, he can never interpret reality as a whole. When Quinn takes on all

these identities he forgets himself and that is what he wants. The forgetting about a unified individual self is part of the novel's metafictional strategy to challenge the boundaries between fiction and reality – a real individual and a fictional character. Just as the reader of a novel forgets the real world and starts to get involved in the plot of the story and acts as if he or she is the detective. What Auster does here is foregrounding the metafictional characters and layers. Identities become subjects in the novel and whatever meaning they have is temporary, uncertain and partly determined by the reader.

Quinn explores the concept of signs in Baudrillard's simulacrum/simulation theory when Quinn meets Peter Stillman Jr. for the first time. Stillman Jr. explains the situation about his father and that he thinks that he is going to kill him. Quinn receives a photograph of Peter Stillman Sr., so he will be able to recognize him at New York's Grand Central Station. In this part of the novel Quinn finds himself in a situation which is comparable to Baudrillard's stage three sign; the photograph and what it means to the story can be seen as an illustration of the hyperreal and identity: "but the picture told him nothing. It was no more than a picture of a man. He studied it for a moment longer and concluded that it could just as easily have been anyone" (Auster 31). It is a photo of the real Stillman Sr., but it is an old photograph which had a link to a historical reality that is in the past and thus unobtainable. After the meeting Quinn starts to try to picture Stillman Sr. in his mind. He clears his desk and looks at the picture and writes down and mediates in his red notebook the attributes of the face:

Stillman's face. Or: Stillman's face as it was twenty years ago.

Impossible to know whether the face tomorrow will resemble it. It is

certain, however, that this is not the face of a madman. Or is this not a legitimate statement? To my eyes, at least, it seems benign, if not downright pleasant. A hint of tenderness around the mouth even. More than likely blue eyes, with a tendency to water. Thin hair even then, so perhaps gone now, and what remains gray, or even white. He bears an odd familiarity: the meditative type, no doubt high-strung, someone who might stutter, fight with himself to stem the flood of words rushing from his mouth. Little Peter. Is it necessary for me to imagine it, or can I accept it on faith? The darkness. To think of myself in that room . . . (Auster 39)

After the meeting with Peter Stillman Jr. Quinn's analysis of the meeting and photograph can be seen as a stage four sign, because Quinn tries to access the reality behind the photograph. But the Stillman Sr. of the photo is not real, he no longer exists. By questioning the change in appearance of Stillman Sr., Quinn has problematized the process of identification. Quinn tries to add depth to the abstract image of Stillman Sr. by visiting the library to read the man's book.

This state of hyperreality makes it impossible for Quinn to see Stillman Sr. since for Quinn there is no underlying identity to Stillman Sr.; everything he reads is produced and so he has no real access to Stillman Sr., who at this stage is just an old photograph. When Quinn finally starts to pursue the man he believes is Stillman Sr., at the train station, he becomes unsure. Quinn studies the crowd of people again and sees another man looking exactly like Stillman Sr.:

His face was the exact twin of Stillman's. For a second Quinn thought it was an illusion, a kind of aura thrown off by the electromagnetic currents in Stillman's body. But no, this other Stillman moved, breathed, blinked his eyes; his actions were clearly independent of the first Stillman. (Auster 55)

All the signs of Stillman Sr. are now so abstract to Quinn that the aura of the man is getting reinforced and Quinn does not know how to react to this. The two Stillman Sr's then part ways, one to the left and one to the right, and Quinn has to make a choice of which one he should follow. He decides to follow the left one, but is still uncertain about his choice: "Something told him he would live to regret what he was doing. He was acting out of spite, spurred on to punish the second Stillman for confusing him" (Auster 56). Quinn is again uncertain of what is real and what is not, and he cannot decide his own reality, he is lost in different signs, he is a part of something he cannot comprehend. It seems that there are no fixed identities or meaning that Quinn can hold on to.

Quinn tries to find the meaning of Peter Stillman Sr.'s walks but he is unsuccessful. Subsequently, when Quinn starts to pursue Peter Stillman Sr. everything seems like a big mystery. However, it can also be argued that Quinn is actually seeing a mindless wandering illusion of himself in Stillman Sr. It soon becomes clear to Quinn that the man has a routine during his walks, though a routine that appears to have no purpose: "By eight o'clock Stillman would come out, always in his long brown overcoat, carrying a large, old fashioned carpet bag." (Auster 58). Quinn is confused. He can see with his own eyes what happens, and all these things he dutifully writes in his red notebook but he does not understand

their significance (Auster 58). Quinn describes Stillman Sr.'s behavior during these walks:

As he walked, Stillman did not look up. His eyes were permanently fixed on the pavement, as though he were searching for something. Indeed, every now and then he would stoop down, pick some object off the ground, and examine it closely, turning it over and over in his hand. It made Quinn think of an archeologist inspecting a shard at some prehistoric ruin. Occasionally, after poring over an object in this way, Stillman would toss it back onto the sidewalk. But more often than not he would open his bag and lay the object gently inside it. Then, reaching into one of his coat pockets, he would remove a red notebook—similar to Quinn's but smaller—and write in it with great concentration for a minute or two. Having completed this operation, he would return the notebook to his pocket, pick up his bag, and continue on his way. (Auster 59)

Stillman Sr.'s behavior can be interpreted as a hyperreal and metafictional mirroring of Quinn himself, as he wanders the city looking for clues, which are not really clues at all, but just signs of other signs (Barry 84-85). This creates metafictional layers and an echo in the novel, because the novel creates signs of other signs which Quinn has a hard time to distinguish and make sense of. Quinn sees his own reflection in Stillman Sr. without even knowing it. In one sense he is doing exactly what Paul Auster the detective does. He is looking for answers and

he sees clues in everything. It is almost as if the entire story depends on his detective work and his red notebook.

The metafictional layers of identities and signs Quinn uses all throughout the novel result in a deeply metafictional novel, and this is clearly shown in two key scenes. The first scene is when Quinn talks to Peter Stillman Sr. for the first time, and the second scene is when he meets Paul Auster for the first time. When Quinn talks to Stillman Sr. it is an awkward conversation, and Quinn feels alienated. However the most interesting part of the conversation is when Quinn gives his name to Peter Stillman in order to talk to him, because Peter Stillman Sr. insists that he does not talk to strangers:

Quinn had been prepared for this and knew how to answer. He was not going to let himself be caught. Since he was technically Paul Auster, that was the name he had to protect. Anything else, even the truth, would be an invention, a mask to hide behind and keep him safe. "In that case," he said, "I'm happy to oblige you. My name is Quinn." (Auster 73)

The significant part here is that Quinn does not believe that his own name is related to him, it is just related to the persona of Quinn. He is without an identity and yet his perceived 'real' identity becomes the cover for his assumed identity. He does not want to give out his other identity as Paul Auster the detective because that would reveal his cover. Since Paul Auster is also the author of the novel *City of Glass*, Paul Auster shows that reality is just signs upon signs (Waugh 7).

The second scene is when Quinn meets Paul Auster the detective/writer, who is described like the real Paul Auster. This serves to reinforce the dissolution of the borders between fiction and reality. Metafiction is the play between fiction and reality, since the fiction draws attention to itself as fiction, thereby implicating its opposition to reality (Waugh 2-3). By including himself in the plot, Paul Auster, the real-life author, implicates the metafictional nature of his role as the author of the novel:

Quinn paused, looked around the room without seeing anything, and tried to start. "I have a feeling there's been a terrible mistake. I came here looking for Paul Auster, the private detective."

"The what?" Auster laughed, and in that laugh everything was suddenly blown to bits. Quinn realized that he was talking nonsense. He might just as well have asked for Chief Sitting Bull— the effect would have been no different.

"The private detective," he repeated softly.

"I'm afraid you've got the wrong Paul Auster."

"You're the only one in the book."

"That might be," said Auster. "But I'm not a detective."

"Who are you then? What do you do?"

"I'm a writer."

"A writer?" Quinn spoke the word as though it were a lament.

"I'm sorry," Auster said. "But that's what I happen to be."

"If that's true, then there's no hope. The whole thing is a bad dream."

"I have no idea what you're talking about." (Auster 93)

Paul Auster first includes himself in the novel as a fictional character that another character mistakenly identifies as a detective. However, it turns out that Paul Auster in the novel is a writer just like the real Paul Auster. On the other hand, had not Paul Auster the detective appeared (albeit mistakenly) in the novel there would have been no story. Similarly if there had not been a real Paul Auster, there would not have been a novel in the first place. In this manner, Paul Auster systematically draws attention to the novel's status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. Ultimately, this seems to make the reader question the distinction between a fictional character and a 'real' author.

The plot of the novel *City of Glass* has no real ending to the story. Traditionally novels provide a beginning, middle and end to a story (Nealon 118). However, in this novel there is no ending. In *City of Glass* Paul Auster destabilizes the reader-writer contract. The character Quinn feels tensions between reality and fiction. He also feels tensions in his own relationship to his pseudonym William Wilson and his fictional character Max Work. Accordingly, Jeffrey Nealon contends: "Indeed, the destruction of Quinn's initial 'positivistic' relation to (his) writing arises when he allows himself to be caught up in the difficulties of a 'real' story" (Nealon 120). What Auster does here is that he plays with the reader creating a novel with no clear or real end to the story, leaving the reader questioning.

All through the novel Quinn obtains clues, follows leads, and follows Peter Stillman Sr, and is convinced that he is on to something. This makes the reader initially believe that a conclusion or an answer has been reached, but the novel ends without providing any satisfactory conclusions. Many readers may expect to find connections between events happening in the novel, but there are

none. The novel ends when Quinn's notes in his red notebook end and the narrator of the story explains:

As for Quinn, it is impossible for me to say where he is now. I have followed the red notebook as closely as I could and any inaccuracies in the story should be blamed on me. There were moments when the text was difficult to decipher, but I have done my best with it and have refrained from any interpretation. The red notebook, of course, is only half the story, as any sensitive reader will understand. (Auster 130)

Auster plays with the fact that the narrator of the story has retold the story by just reading Quinn's red notebook and that this is only half of the story. After this the reader is left with an open-ended conclusion to the story, which is a feature of postmodern fiction. The reader is left to resolve Quinn's situation with imagination.

Conclusion

To conclude the literary analysis, one can see how Paul Auster utilizes hyperreality and metafiction, more or less from the beginning to the end of the novel, and these features contribute to identifying the novel as a postmodern text. The protagonist of the story Quinn is used to showcase the difficulties in distinguishing between fiction and reality, character and identity. The novel is content with its own status as a work of fiction, with no direct access to reality at all; it is just a representation of reality. It plays with signs to create truths and a reality that does not even exist.

The fictional characters in the novel do not exist in the novel or in reality itself. They are only metafictional layers that point to the relationship between fiction and reality and Quinn's truth and what leads Quinn on his detective work is to be found beneath these layers. Quinn, a persona made up of a series of characters and pseudonyms as is the protagonist of the novel. He does not have knowledge about anything, as all his knowledge originates from what he has seen on TV, in pictures or read in books or newspapers.

Paul Auster creates in the novel the fictional Paul Auster, which is an exact copy of himself in real life, which really confuses Quinn. Quinn then questions his own reality and has difficulties in distinguishing between reality and fiction. Of all the identities Quinn assumes, he is certain of one thing: that every identity is just a layer of somebody, that identities are not fixed, but fluid and in a continual process of being. Quinn assumes several identities throughout the novel, and therefore he sees identities as not related to him but just related to other identities. He, therefore, assumes several different identities or tries to think how an identity or fictional character would do or fit into the situation he encounters.

The layers of metafiction go on, and so does the story, not only because of Paul Auster, but also because the end of the novel discloses that this story is an anonymous narrator's interpretation of Quinn's red notebook. The red notebook is a symbol of fiction. However when the notes in the red notebook come to an end so does the story. What makes this interesting is that the detective story itself is metafictional, as it makes the reader look for clues or try to solve the mystery, while Quinn tries to solve a mystery and all he does is follow a reflection of himself, Peter Stillman Sr., who also just wanders the city trying to find clues which lead nowhere. When reading the novel it is easy for readers to forget the

real world and start to get involved in the plot and story and act as if they are also a detective trying to solve the mystery. However this mystery has no real ending or a solution. The ending is created for endless imagination. What Paul Auster does here is to parody the traditional detective genre, which traditionally should have a solution to the mystery by the end of the narrative, but Paul Auster plays with his own protagonist and manipulates the reader's mind and imagination.

The educational study concludes that postmodernism is a very useful theoretical approach promoting critical thinking. Pupils need to be critically reflective towards all information, in order to develop the ability of understanding what actually happens in the world (Liedman). In this sense, postmodern fiction is important because through the use of hyperreality and metafiction it questions existence, identities and reality in a critical way. It also examines and provides examples connected with a modern Western democratic society. It turns away from the idea of absolute truths, since nothing can really be explained. There is no direct access to reality as it is getting reproduced, represented and simulated. It questions the distinction between what is real and what is not. By reading *City of Glass* pupils will be invited to think critically and to question reality, which is what reading as a critical process involves. Most pupils are not familiar with the main tenets of postmodernism and learning about them and postmodernism itself will help them to start questioning the distinction between reality and fiction, as well as the representation of reality on the internet, media, social media. In this manner reading of novels in general and reading as a critical process will be promoted as motivated in the Swedish syllabus for upper secondary school (Skolverket 2011).

When reading postmodern novels like *City of Glass* the pupils will need to be very critical towards the reality in the novel that is presented to them. What is real and what is not? And what is an absolute truth? Can absolute truths even exist? This will help pupils to critically examine the produced reality they meet every day and the information flow. This is a keystone to live in a modern Western democratic society where school is supposed to teach the pupils that every human being regardless of their skin color, gender or sexual orientation should have the same rights in society (Skolverket 2011). This is not obvious for pupils before they start at upper secondary school. By reading novels like *City of Glass* the pupils will start questioning mass and social media, to understand the political agendas mediating truths and not working in symbiosis with the modern Western democratic society. Each and every day pupils meet mediated information about reality from sources which change the “real” to favor their own political agendas. By reading postmodern fiction like *City of Glass* the pupils will start to test assumptions and analyze reality, and by doing so they will start to evaluate statements. What is new and of value in this study is the approach to use *City of Glass* and postmodern fiction in general for pupils to see the world differently and how postmodern fiction can create new perspectives on the world. Besides, this will also encourage pupils to start reflecting on reality and the information flow, what is getting reproduced and mediated for them through the internet, mass media and social media. At the same time the pupil will get deeper knowledge of English as a language in general, through their engagement with key postmodern theoretical concepts.

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