Constructed
Gender Roles in
City of Glass
A Third Wave Feminist Approach

Viktoria Sofia Björklund
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Introduction

“There is little that need to detain us…we know that he was thirty-five years old…he had once been a father, and that both his wife and son were now dead” (3).

This is as much as the reader learns about the protagonist Quinn in City of Glass, the first novel in The New York Trilogy, which is said to be Paul Auster’s most frequently discussed postmodern work (Ferry 37). It is not without a modicum of confusion that one follows the story about Quinn; whose identity is introduced as ambiguous already at the beginning of the novel as he is described as “a triad of selves” (6). Thereafter, the following chapters progress through perplexing twists in the plot, and arbitrary happenings with the protagonist’s set of personas in New York City’s postmodern settings. The principal character of all of Quinn’s personas is the detective, but instead of solving a case he becomes a victim himself; the outcome of embodying this character leads to meaninglessness instead of satisfactory conclusions.

As James Wood suggests in Shallow Graves, Auster’s novels emphasize the narration of male protagonists: “A protagonist, nearly always male, often a writer or an intellectual, lives monkishly, coddling a loss—a deceased or divorced wife” (J. Wood). In City of Glass, the story about the protagonist Quinn follows a similar pattern to what Wood suggests. Quinn is a middle aged man who has lost the notion of himself, the meaning of life, and the passion he once had for writing, especially mystery novels (3). The text shows the loss of Quinn’s wife and son, to be the turning point which causes Quinn to become the embodiment of stereotypical “male” personas that are mainly narrated as being solid and tough (Beasley 229). Moreover, as seen in the following quote, the novel stresses that Quinn’s different personas have qualities that Quinn himself
does not possess. “The very thing that caused problems for Quinn, Work took for
granted, and he walked through the mayhem of his adventures with an ease and
indifference that never failed to impress his creator “(9).

Based on the information given about the different personas Quinn takes on,
they certainly exclude the complexity of different forms of masculinity. At times, they
have different names, and at times they change conditions and environments, but it is
mainly their conduct that is significant in order to define them. Quinn’s personas are
(stereo)typically male figures, such as the flaneur (Dreyer and McDowall 30), the
Robinson Cruise figure, and the detective (Douglas B. Holt and Craig J. Thompson 425–
426). Most importantly, Quinn’s personas are ascribed different purposes and depict him
as a hero and a protector. However, none of the purposes are fulfilled, and the reader is
introduced to personas which all of a sudden cease to exist at the point when they fail in
their different missions.

Auster’s novels have been, among other perspectives, discussed by critics in
light of postmodernism, but he has also been criticized for excluding hybrid identities.
Brendan Martin suggests that Auster could be categorized as a postmodern writer, given
that the story leads to unthinkable situations with unexpected outcomes, “Auster
highlights the continual presence of arbitrary happenings, and his concept of chance
confirms his status as a self-consciously postmodern writer” (Martin 10). William
Lavender argues that the novel parodies the very idea of structure. Given that Quinn
never finds a meaning and the objective is never fulfilled in any of the personas that he
embodies. “Characters appear, they are sketched full of potentials which we logically
expect to be fulfilled, and then they walk off the page never to return” (Lavender 220).
The novel has also been labelled as metaphysical anti-detective fiction by authors such as Nasim Sarkar, who claims that Quinn is rather represented as a defeated detective instead of the classical detective who solves the mystery by following a plan and a studied structure which in the end solves the case (Sarkar 13). Instead, Sarkar suggests that *City of Glass* is a deconstruction of the detective novel, because, unlike a traditional detective story “Paul Auster does not offer any resolution to his text” (Sarkar 12).

According to W. Lawrence Hogue, Auster challenges metaphysical realist thinking by objecting to a fixed truth and accepts chance, coincidence, and open-endedness. He further claims that Auster, one of the most representative postmodern American male writers, has “blind spots”, and “Auster critiques the enlightenment logicality of modernity without accepting the subjectivity of the other” (qtd in Zhou 783). He suggests that Auster relegates women to a marginal position and renders them as “static beings” (qtd. in Zhou 783-785). Thus, according to Hogue’s interpretation, male subjectivity and experience is central in the novel, and that contradicts the notion of postmodernism and hybrid subjectivities.

Previous studies emphasize that Auster is challenging structures and fixed categories, given that the protagonist Quinn’s search for meaning leads to failure by conforming to those concepts. Auster certainly attempts to expose stereotypes and the novel seemingly mirrors a critique of gender roles. Therefore, it is relevant to investigate Quinn’s different personas in the novel in order to discern what role they play. There is also relevance in investigating how the female characters are described in order to see whether the representation of female and male characters differs. The meaning of the detective character has been discussed in Auster's novel, but none of the previous studies
provide an analysis of how the text appears to expose Western-constructions of gender roles. Nor have the previous studies explored the significance of how it juxtaposes male stereotypes by letting the protagonist Quinn try on different masculine types. Drawing on third wave feminism, the present essay discusses Quinn’s personas to show that the text’s representation of Quinn’s different personas and his female antagonists in *City of Glass* correspond to gender constructs.

”Third wave feminism is born out of contradictions, complications, and a lack of predictability; and it carries these features into its self-definition” (Budgeon 3). Third wave feminist theory will be helpful for the discussion, and the exposure of gender constructs in the novel, given that it challenges the construction of gendered categories according to a dualist Western logic of feminine and masculine (Budgeon 4). Third wave feminists have been preoccupied with the construction of the categories of man and woman, and tried to constitute a point of view outside constructed identities by embracing and analyzing individual identities rather than group identities (Budgeon 16). Moreover, it aims to abolish gender expectations, and also specifically deals with ideas regarding the subject of identity and the meaning of “gender”. Furthermore, the third wave also works against such ideas being contradicted in literature (Budgeon 8).

As seen in the following quote, the narration in *City of Glass* provides little information about the female antagonists, more than their physical appearance, and this leads to assumptions about the meaning of female and male identity. “He watched her leave the room and once again found himself imagining what she would look like without any clothes on” (31). However, the interiority of the male protagonist is described which shows a great contrast. “He was pleased with his own cleverness” (31). Judith Butler is often
associated with being a third wave feminist, and she claims that Western culture associates women with body, and men with mind. Moreover, she claims that the masculine pose acts as a disembodied universality, whereas the feminine is constructed as corporeality (*Gender Trouble* 16). Butler further suggests that women are represented falsely due to Western hegemonic thoughts of substance, which structures the notion of the subject in the way that it informs thinking about the categories of sex. These categories reject the universal capacity for reasoning. Instead, the subject is the bearer of essential or non-essential attributes, and gender is understood as an attribute of a person who then is pregendered (*Gender Trouble* 15-17). Drawing from a third wave feminist standpoint on gendered identities, this thesis explores the following question: What role do different stereotypes play in the novel?

My analysis is divided into four sections and is performed through a close reading of the text. In the first section, I will discuss Quinn’s personas and third wave feminism. In the second section, I will analyse Quinn’s different personas, the third section will explore binary positions between male and female characters in the novel and, lastly, the fourth section will examine Auster’s thoughts on gendered identity. Consequently, after an investigation concerning gender norms and categorized identities related to femininity and masculinity, this thesis argues that Auster juxtaposes male stereotypes in the novel in order to expose that they are gender constructions, and moreover, the stereotypes play a fundamental role in the representation of the critique of gender constructs.
Third Wave Feminism and Quinn`s Personas

Third wave feminism refers to feminist theory developed since the early 1990s which has sought to explore the structure and meaning of gender relations and to question feminism’s applicability to contemporary gender relations (Budgeon 1). It has debated those issues in relation to societal changes, increased cultural diversity, expansion of information technologies, and diversifying sexualities and intimate practices. Feminism and the study of gender has reached a state in which there are a broad range of opinions about why the study of gender is relevant, and therefore the third wave is difficult to define (Budgeon 3). Ednie Cahe Garrison suggests,” [t]he very claim to know what third wave feminism means is riddled with contradictions and problems. Few can agree about what and whom it encapsulates” (Garrison 24). Third wave feminism is highly relevant in a postmodern novel given that postmodernist affinities symbolizes a change to what have existed previously (Martin 5). Just like postmodernism, the third wave insists on starting from new perspectives by embracing diversity and replacing previous fixed categories of identity with hybrid identities (Budegon 4–5). Hence, regardless of disagreements, the key to understanding third wave feminism is that it critiques mainstream norms, stereotype and everything that has previously been taken for granted about gendered identities. (Beasley 16). This section will analyse what social norms are taken for granted, and how they may be relevant to Quinn’s different personas in City of Glass.

The author and the protagonist go by the same name and doppelgängers appear throughout the novel – for example, Paul Auster 1 and 2, and Peter Stillman and Peter
Senior Stillman. Previous researchers such as William Lavender and Hilary Ashton, have used different methods in order to distinguish them, and to avoid any confusion. It is important to point out that Paul Auster has used his real name for two different characters in the novel. Therefore, in this paper the author of *City of Glass* will be named “Auster”, the persona that the fictional protagonist Quinn takes on as a detective will be named Paul Auster, and the second fictional character, Paul Auster the writer, which in the novel, has been mixed up with Paul Auster the supposed detective, will be named “Paul Auster 2”.

All Quinn’s personas may not typify stereotypical male values. Nonetheless, all personas demonstrate categories and characteristics that have been socialized to be masculine. Judith Butler claims that the various acts of gender create the idea of gender (*Performative acts* 526). Social constructs of masculinity, such as the idea that masculinity accords with attributes such as strength and protectiveness is represented in the text through the personas that Quinn embodies (Beasley 229). Furthermore, the novel focuses on the loss of Quinn’s family, and presents the loss as a key factor in Quinn’s feelings of meaningless, and it further shows his attempts to make up for the loss of his family by saving and protecting someone else. The quote below is an example of how Quinn’s thoughts are described and rationalized around the loss of his family as he becomes the detective Paul Auster. “He thought of the little coffin that held his son’s body and how he had seen it on the day of the funeral being lowered into the ground. That was isolation, he said to himself. That was silence. It did not help, perhaps, that his son’s name had also been Peter” (35).
Throughout the novel, Quinn’s personas do not take on missions or responsibilities in which he cares for elderly people or nurture children. These responsibilities are more commonly perceived as feminine. As Chris Beasley suggests, women as an engaged nurturing mother shows a preferable model in society (Beasley 56), and the traditional hierarchical equation of masculinity is power, aggression, toughness and stoicism (Beasley 239). Passivity, instability, compliancy and irrationality are some negative adjectives that are often used by male writers to describe female characteristics (Moi 34); those are not characteristics that fit with Quinn’s different personas. Quinn’s personas are active or heroic: “He knew he could not bring his own son back to life, but at least he could prevent another one from dying” (35). Furthermore, as one can see in the next quote, the description of Quinn’s personas is positive in comparison to the feminine stereotype. As his own fictional detective he is quick, and confident; “Work was aggressive, quick tongued, at home in whatever spot he happened to find himself” (9). As the detective, Paul Auster, he is a brilliant, respected, and an analytical person. The following quote is a conversation between Quinn and Peter Stillman’s wife, Virginia Stillman:

‘One last question, who was it who referred you to me?’

‘Mrs. Saavedra’s husband, Michael.’

‘He used to be a policeman and he did some research.’

He found out that you were the best man in the city for these things. (30)

As the exchange above implies, Quinn’s personas are not rationally discussed, but rather they are described as fixed categories which have been established historically and have attached social norms and value. Furthermore, Quinn’s different personas are represented
according to a concept of masculinity in which the characteristics of masculinity are cleverness, and fearlessness.

The result of the meaningless clues leads to failure, and Quinn abandons his embodiment as the detective Paul Auster. Instead, he takes on yet another identity, which could be compared to a Robinson Crusoe-like character, due to the hard environmental and psychological conditions he goes through as he lives out this persona. As Robinson Crusoe, Quinn adapts himself to live in an alley outside Peter Stillman’s house; with practically no money he lives under extremely harsh conditions and gets virtually no sleep nor food. “His ambition was to eat as little as possible” (115), until Quinn finds out that Peter Stillman has committed suicide, and with that he surrenders. “It was gone, he was gone, everything was gone” (126). The next persona is nameless and has no aim. The author himself steps into the novel and claims that he has a complete lack of understanding of the protagonist’s destiny “as for Quinn it is impossible for me to say where he is now” (133). And with that there are no further events that can take Quinn into another persona.

The narration stresses that Quinn’s routine of taking walks is a procedure Quinn does before he embodies different personas, and this routine gives him structure and comfort. Moreover, it is the only activity in which Quinn is no one and nowhere, as seen in the following quote: “And this, finally, was all he ever asked of things; to be nowhere. New York was the nowhere he had built around himself, and he realized that he had no intention of ever leaving it again” (4). In many ways, Quinn would theoretically represent a free man, and according to Peter Ferry, Quinn could even be categorized as a flaneur. “Motion was of the essence, the act of putting one foot in front of the other and allowing
himself to follow the drift of his own body” (4). A flaneur is a wanderer, an observer who is conscious of the various discourses at play within temporary society (Ferry 22), and, moreover, a flaneur is seen as the sociological embodiment of literary representations of masculinity in contemporary New York fiction (Ferry 28). Baudelaire’s concept of the flaneur is the following; “The poet enjoys the incomparable privilege of being able to be himself or someone else, as he chooses” (qtd. in Tester 4). This concept is slightly different with respect to the protagonist Quinn’s motive. However, it is noteworthy to think about the fact that Quinn is still represented according to masculine constructs, which are based on the idea that men are active and free while women are passive. According to Todd W. Reeser, Widespread constructs of masculinity are dependent on an image of freedom. Such as the cowboy, the Marlboro man, and the swinging bachelor (17-25). The flaneur is another example of a social construct which is assigned as masculine.

The historical tracing of the flaneur during the 19th century was a symbolic representation of modernity and a personification of contemporary modernity. The flaneur was exclusively male, given that women were not able to walk around the city as they pleased (Dreyer and McDowall 30). Therefore, the flaneur can be seen as yet another character which is a masculine stereotype adding meaning to what is feminine and masculine, since, the Flaneur, by earning meaning from urban space, adds meaning to the space itself (Dreyer and McDowall 30). As a Flaneur, Quinn is described as a free figure that lacks any expectations or aims. It is the one figure in which the protagonist is described as not having any obligations.
Each time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind, and by giving himself up to the movement of the streets, by reducing himself to a seeing eye, he was able to escape the obligation to think, and this, more than anything else, brought him a measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within. (4)

Quinn’s personas represent ideas of masculinity embodied in figures that are pregendered. As the Robinson Crusoe character, Quinn is a survivor, a person who can live through hardship, a martyr who does not give up the struggle. “There were a number of problems to be faced, but one by one he managed to solve them, first of all there was the question of food, because utmost reliance was required of him, he was reluctant to leave his post” (114). Todd Reeser suggests that masculinity is not a clear concept, and there are different influences that create the idea of it. Myths and images are just an example of those. Similarly, to images, myths also function as a way to make certain forms of masculinity seem eternal and unchanging, not open to change or variation, and not ideological in nature (Reeser 1-16). Often one may not be able to reproduce the whole idea of masculinity from a fantasy figure, such as James Bond. However, it is clear that the idea of James Bond’s masculinity is based on his ability to seduce women. The whole idea of masculinity is experienced as a tension in an image of masculinity that cannot be reproduced in actual life (Reeser 1-16). As discussed in this section, then, Quinn’s personas represent that the idea of masculinity is based on ability to protect someone and endure hardship. Moreover, the features of Quinn’s personas are the opposite of the stereotypical features of femininity that Moi views male writers as having constructed, namely: passivity, instability, and compliancy (Moi 34).
Quinn’s Different Personas

Quinn’s different personas may seem confusing and irrational to the reader because they lack a clear definition. The novel tells the story of the personas in chronological order, and common to all personas is the description of Quinn’s thoughts around them. The narration shows that the idea of Quinn as a detective is invented, based on general beliefs about how a detective ought to behave: “Quinn was not a real detective, like most people, Quinn knew nothing about crime” (7). As the detective Paul Auster, Quinn’s observations are described as follows: “He was the hare in pursuit of the tortoise” (58). Moreover, “[t]he 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” (8).

Quinn’s personas are narrated as fictional, nevertheless; Quinn strategically follows a pattern of clues in his embodiment of fictive personas which in the end are meaningless. “There no longer seemed to be a question about what was happening. If he discounted the squiggles from the park, Quinn felt certain that he was looking at the letter E” (69). Thus, the text’s presentation of Quinn is not that he is just “a triad of selves”, he is also engaged in the role and the expectations of his different personas; personas that the text shows Quinn knows are not real. At first, Quinn pretends to be a fictional character from his own detective publications, Max Work: “If he lived now in the world at all, it was only through the imaginary person of Max Work, his detective necessarily had to be real “(9). And, William Wilson is the name under which Quinn publishes his books – “Quinn never went so far to believe that he and William Wilson were the same
man” (5) –, he keeps Quinn alive by paying his bills, and hiding him from the outside world and contact with other people. “He had an agent, but they had never met. Their contacts were confined to the mail…the same was true for the publisher, who paid all fees, monies, and royalties to Quinn through the agent” (4). Furthermore, as the next quote shows, the novel stresses how Quinn’s thoughts shape his personas;

His private eye-narrator, Max Work, had solved an elaborate series of crimes, had suffered through a number of beatings and narrow escapes, and Quinn was feeling somewhat exhausted by his efforts. Over the years, Work had become very close to Quinn. Whereas William Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist. (6).

The different stereotypes that Quinn embodies are created after what the novel shows to be Quinn’s ideas of how these figures ought to be, and that is an indication towards gender constructs. His thoughts are rationalized according to assumptions of how the personas ought to act and think: “He had never been inside a police station, had never met a private detective, had never spoken to a criminal. Whatever he knew about these things, he had learned from books, films and newspapers” (7).

Quinn’s personas illustrate the expectations placed on men in postmodern society to still live up to the traditional features associated with masculinity, such as being a saviour, a protector, and a leader (Iannello 70–77). It was chance that made Quinn become the detective Paul Auster, as a caller by the name Peter Stillman begs to be protected from his own father Peter Sr Stillman. “’Is this Paul Auster?’, asked the voice” (7). As the detective Paul Auster, Quinn follows and locates Peter Sr Stillman in order to solve the case and prevent Peter Stillman from getting killed. “Quinn waited outside for
the next two hours, pacing up and down the block, thinking that Stillman would perhaps emerge to look for dinner in one of the local coffee shops” (57). Quinn was assigned a dangerous mission without being related to the caller, Peter Stillman: “There is great danger. They say you are the best one to do these things” (11). Quinn embodies the role as a detective, immediately taking on the responsibility of a protector. “If Stillman was the man with the dagger, come back to avenge himself on the boy whose life he had destroyed, Quinn wanted to be there to stop him” (35). As this suggests, Quinn’s personas show expectations and meanings that traditionally have been given to the man as a protective and fearless figure.

**Constructed Gender Roles in City of Glass**

This section will discuss the different representations of female antagonists and male characters in the novel given that the narration of male and female characters differs. For instance, Quinn`s thoughts before he embodies one of his personas, the detective character, are described as encouraging and confident: “This is not a story, after all. It is a fact, something happening in the world, and I am supposed to do a job, one little thing, and I have said yes to it. If all goes well, it should even be quite simple. I have not been hired to understand-merely to act” (40). whereas Quinn’s thoughts about Virginia, Peter Stillman’s wife are described as devalued and doubtful; “As for Virginia, I am in a quandary. Not just the kiss, which might be explained by a number of reasons; not what Peter said about her, which is unimportant. Her marriage? Perhaps, the complete incongruity of it. Could it be that she is in it for the money?” (40). Equally important, examples of great men are mentioned as a reference in the text, such as Columbus and
Raleigh; however, there are no references to females with high intellect; instead, women in the text are described as rather dumb or not much of their intellect is mentioned, as, for instance, in the next quote where Quinn observes a girl in the metro who is reading one of his books:

Quinn turned his attention to a young woman on his right, to see if there was any reading material in that direction. Quinn guessed her age at around twenty. There were several pimples on her left cheek, obscured by a pinkish smear of pancake makeup, and a wad of chewing gum was crackling in her mouth. (52)

The female antagonists are described in terms of their exterior appearance rather than what they do. Furthermore, they are also described passively, and as devalued. Moreover, they are not narrated as active or as having roles which includes responsibility as for Quinn’s characters. The description of the characters in the novel therefore, accord with Butlers ideas of that men are described with mind and women with corporeality. (Gender Trouble 16).

Female characters are described sexually, and as one concept, instead of a diverse set of women with a diverse set of identities. The most representative concept of female characters in the novel is the wife and the mother – Peter Stillman’s wife Virginia, Auster’s dead wife, and Paul Auster 2’s wife. The female characters conceivably all belong to “one identity”, despite the postmodern tendency to refuse categorization (Sarkar 84). Catharine MacKinnon’s theory of gender as a theory of sexuality is that “the social meaning of sex (gender) is created by sexual objectification of women whereby women are viewed and treated as objects for satisfying men's desires” (qtd. in Mikkola "Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender"). As seen in the following example when
Quinn meets Peter Stillman’s wife, Virginia, for the first time she is described in terms of her sexuality;

The woman was thirty, perhaps thirty-five, average height at best; hips a touch wide, or else voluptuous, depending on your point of view; dark hair, dark eyes, and a look in those eyes that was at once self-contained and vaguely seductive. She wore a black dress and very red lipstick……’I’m Virginia Stillman. Peter’s wife’. (13)

The novel portrays women that do not articulate themselves, but show a femininity which is marked by passivity and dependence, and that is a signpost of gendered dualism (Budgeon 52). However, masculinity is exemplified as sexual dominance, whereas femininity is portrayed as involving sexual submissiveness in the novel. Virginia is described as a highly sexual being who uses her sexuality in order to persuade Quinn to protect her husband. At first, the depiction of the event when Quinn meets Virginia for the first time, maintains a focus in that Virginia pays prostitutes in order to avoid a sexual relationship with her husband (21). However, the following quote which takes place at Virginia Stillman´s house, shows that Virginia tries to convince Quinn to take on the case, and in order to persuade him she tempts him with sexual favors by indicating what she is capable of, after kissing him. This does not just suggest that Virginia is sexually submissive; moreover, it suggests that the male characters in the novel are sexually dominant;

’- ’I just wanted to let you know what I’m capable of”

- ‘I think I have a good idea’ (32).
Images of female characters are often described according to male fantasies in fiction (Moi 57), and in *City of Glass* the concept of the female characters are based on the description of Quinn’s thoughts and assumptions about them. They are described as complimentary, supportive, passive, and attractive, and little about their ambition or capacity is described. Also, the eternal feminine in the past have been a vision of angelic beauty (Moi 58), this vision is implied in several scenes in the novel. The following scene takes place in an indoor environment with Virginia Stillman: “Mrs. Stillman bent over, put her arm around Peter’s shoulders, and spoke softly into his ear” (23). The quote below takes place at the doppelganger Paul Auster 2’s place, the man that was supposed to be the detective character, who by chance, instead, became one of Quinn’s personas.

Auster and his wife entered the room… in that one brief moment he knew he was in trouble. She was tall, thin blonde, radiantly beautiful, with an energy and happiness that seemed to make everything around her invisible…. It was too much for Quinn. He felt as though Auster were taunting him with the things he had lost. (101)

The fact that Quinn felt taunted with “the things he had lost”, stresses again that the female is described as a beautiful object and not as a person with her own identity.

When detective fiction became a recognized genre in the nineteenth century, the detective was a hero and was also represented as dispassionate, analytical, and brilliant (Griffith 33). Moreover, the traditional definition of the detective is a hardboiled male and a sturdy-individualist (Smith 80). One can observe that the text at first portrays Quinn as a traditional detective; however, Quinn never succeeds in solving the Peter
Stillman case, which gives meaning to the following quote: “The injunction ‘to be’ a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated” (Gender Trouble 198). An example of what may be represented as Quinn’s failure is that he failed to protect his family. He was not able to live up to being a protector or a hero, because his family died.

Even though the novel displays stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity there are clear signs that the novel undercuts these images. The two male characters in the novel that are considered highly mentally unstable, i.e. Quinn and Peter Stillman, have similar characteristics to the female characters in the novel; they also lack the characteristics of independence and ambition. This implies that the novel exposes gender categories as constructed and so revealing the different expectations placed on men and women. Primarily, Quinn is reportedly perceived as suicidal after the trauma. “He no longer wished to be dead. At the same time, it cannot be said that he was glad to be alive” (3). Besides, he was described as weak: “He did not sleep with the lamp on anymore, and for many months now he had not remembered any of his dreams” (5). Add to this that, as a detective, his aim is to protect Peter Stillman, a highly mentally unstable person, since he was abused by his father as a child. “No questions please, the young man said at last. ‘Yes. No. Thank you.’ He paused for a moment. ‘I say this of my own free will. Yes. That is not my real name. No. Of course, my mind is not all it should be’” (15). Therefore, this leads one to conclude that they do not live up to the social norms associated with their gender, since the female characters, with passive and dependent characteristics, are described as being comfortable in their roles. This shows that
masculinity and femininity are shaped by how girls and boys are brought up to learn what is proper for their gender in relation to; character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression. In conclusion, one can find that the female and male characters in City of Glass are described differently with different expectations and different values, and the narration mirrors how women in contemporary society are socialised into subordinate social roles (Mikkola, "Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender").

**Auster and Gendered Identity**

Auster has during interviews, mentioned that more than his own name, the character Quinn maybe even has characteristics of his own person in the novel. (Freeman “American Dreams”). Auster has also expressed his thoughts on gendered identity, and on existence, which may give significance to what William Lavender claims, that “the author is implied as the motivation which places Quinn’s hand upon the doorknob” (222). One can, by observing the following comment that Auster made in an interview with Michael Wood, draw the conclusion that Auster not only felt lost about his own identity, but, moreover, that he questioned his own existence; “Was I some kind of freak or was reality truly as strange and incomprehensible as I thought it was?” (“Paul Auster, The Art of Fiction No. 178”). Moreover, Auster has in other interviews indicated that he has felt limited in his life, possibly because of the restricted choices that follow the masculine gender norms. Auster mentions and describes, in Hadley Freeman’s article, the moment in his life when he could not write poetry, which caused him great feelings of solitude, depression and loss: “He feels himself sliding through events, hovering like a ghost around his own presence” (“American Dreams”). Quinn´s inner crises appear to be very
similar to the author’s own personal experiences and maybe even crises. Auster himself is a writer just as Quinn. Moreover, Auster has mentioned that his own life would have been just like Quinn’s after the divorce with his first wife, had he not met his second wife, Siri. According to Auster, this was his “happy ending” (Freeman, “American Dreams”).

Auster shows by juxtaposing male stereotypes through the protagonist Quinn how one is doomed to fail in meeting the expectations by living up to a constructed gender category. Masculine stereotypes are exposed not to be real, as they disappear and result in meaningless outcomes. As Christina Biochieri suggests, the expectations of gender roles sides with moral rules, which can cause feelings of guilt and remorse if they are not fulfilled. “Guilt and remorse will accompany regression, as much as the breach of a moral rule elicits painfully negative feelings in the offender” (8). During the interview with Michael Wood, Paul Auster reveals that his father was critical of him, before he had achieved any critical acclaim as a writer and commented how he had "produced a poet for a son" (“Paul Auster, The Art of Fiction No. 178”). This comment could possibly suggest why the male and female characters in the novel are described differently, and, furthermore, why the text may be a critique to gender roles, in showing that they are constructs. The motive may be reflected on Auster’s own life as he mentioned that he was criticized by his father for writing poetry; a profession which does not accord with the stereotypical masculine attributes discussed in this paper.
Conclusion

At the core of this study were the concepts of constructed gender categories and performative identities in the novel *City of Glass*. The aim of the current thesis was to analyse, by way of close reading that draws on a third wave feminist approach the role gender types play in the novel.

The novel illuminates that subjects are produced with expectations of what is feminine and masculine, since the narrative voice focuses on the interiority of Quinn’s different personas, meanwhile the focus on the female antagonists are on their appearance. The female characters are described marginally, and the narrator’s depiction of them shows their unique value as mothers and wives whereas Quinn’s different personas are ascribed different purposes, and depict Quinn as a hero and a protector. The descriptions of the male and female characters seem to take up a binary polarisation on gender, and the portrayal of Quinn’s different personas suggest that stereotypes are inventions. The presentation of female and male characters in binary positions, and stereotypes with traditional male masculine attributes, disappearing or resulting in meaningless outcomes, suggest a critique of gender constructs.

*City of Glass* illustrates how masculinity and femininity are socially constructed categories. The female characters are described as attractive and passive, as rather dumb, or as static beings with traditional values of femininity such as being supportive, submissive and beautiful. Meanwhile, the male characters are described as ambitious, quick, clever and active. Quinn’s personas are also described as failures once they do not fulfill their missions, and insecure in how to behave. This is seen as the narration shows how Quinn imitates and tries to live up to the characteristics of different male
stereotypes. The female characters are not seen as rounded individuals exhibiting a range of gendered characteristics. Information about their professional life is almost non-existent; meanwhile, there are more detailed descriptions about their sexuality and physical appearance. The majority of the male characters are searching and discovering, they are struggling to fulfil an aim, whether it is about finding themselves or something related to a mission to protect someone or solve a case. Hence, female and male goals and purposes are portrayed differently in the novel.

The fact that the female characters in the novel are passive, dependent and seem to lack their own autonomy is not seen as problematic for any of the characters. This is an interesting point, because the male character in the novel that is described as highly mentally unstable, Peter Stillman, is described as dependent and passive. Quinn is described as passive at the very beginning of the novel; however, that changes as he becomes male personas in the novel that are ambitious and active. Again this implies that being a man and being a female has a particular meaning, and expectations follow from this.

Lastly, one can further conclude that the author has translated his own personal experience of questioning meaning and structure onto his fictional protagonists. The personas that Quinn embodies are at first described with positive attributes. They are fearless, clever, quick and the constructed illusion is that they handle all tasks without any problem. However, the narration shows them to be fictional and emphasizes that the protagonist fails to live up to the expectations he assumes his different personas have. Therefore, the novel critiques gender roles by emphasizing the protagonist’s failure after
following false structures and assumptions about how to behave and act as a detective and a protector.

By examining the different personas of Quinn, one can deduce, that Auster’s novel exposes and critiques gender roles by juxtaposing different masculine stereotypes such as leaders, detectives, flaneurs, and protectors that the protagonist Quinn embodies. These personas are described as male copies of figures that historically have been associated as male. Hence, the novel shows a possible outcome of following fictitious constructs and conforming to social norms, instead of embracing diversity and different forms of femininity and masculinity.
Works Cited


11 of March 2016.


