

JOANNA STOLAREK

**Spatial, Temporal
and Identity Labyrinths
in American and French
Metaphysical Detective Novels**

Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities

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***Spatial, Temporal and Identity Labyrinths
in American and French Metaphysical Detective Novels***

*Labirynty przestrzeni, czasu i tożsamości w amerykańskich i francuskich
metafizycznych powieściach detektywistycznych*

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Introduction

Spatial, Temporal and Identity Labyrinths in American and French Metaphysical Detective Novels is an attempt to explore the concept of labyrinth and its rhizome structure as central to the reading of spatial, temporal and identity relations in the metaphysical detective story. I have selected for this examination texts that place labyrinths of space, time and identity in various configurations that constitute significant interpretative problems for the understanding of the process of detection, investigation, reading and interpretation, mainly in the context of postmodern crime studies, comparative literature and experimental fiction. *The New York Trilogy* (1987), *The Book of Illusions* (2002) and *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2007) by Paul Auster, *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* (1978), *Quartier perdu* (1984) and *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* (2014) by Patrick Modiano as well as *Les Gommages* (1953) and *La Reprise* (2001) by Alain Robbe-Grillet all bring into prominence protagonists whose search for identity or another “self” is inextricably linked with their urban or metropolitan experience of mainly New York and Paris, next to Berlin and an anonymous Flemish town, as well as with their individual, fragmentary perception of time in their investigative process. Written by the American and French novelists, these texts thus encourage an insightful discussion on the condition of detective literary tradition in these countries, principally in the context of its postmodernist variants and modifications. The present monograph undertakes to scrutinise the thematic and structural correspondence between all eight novels in spite of different time periods in which they were written as well as distinct literary and philosophical backgrounds that shaped their authors.

Prior to the analysis of the theoretical-historical aspects of Auster’s, Modiano’s and Robbe-Grillet’s selected novels, it is worth referring to some fundamental assumptions of the metaphysical detective fiction and its critical reception. As a mainly postmodern variant of the detective genre,

the metaphysical detective story has challenged traditional detective story conventions, such as causality, induction, hermeneutical assurance, teleological structure and narrative closure, in order to ask questions about mysteries of being and knowing; it has become pivotal for the readers endeavouring to understand the sense of existence, identity, the nature of human knowledge and the mystery of the universe. It is worth highlighting that the metaphysical detective story, albeit retaining essential features of traditional detective stories, such as the detective's position as surrogate reader and the narrative closure, actually goes beyond such traditions in a "metaphysical" way, as its name indicates. By becoming highly self-reflexive, the metaphysical detective story particularly stresses the significance of transcendence abstractly, compared to traditional detective texts¹.

The metaphysical detective story has received relatively little critical attention in comparison with other detective narratives, such as gothic fiction, the classic detective story, mostly whodunnit or a thriller, as well as hard-boiled crime fiction and a horror². It is due to the fact that this variant of the detective genre is not homogeneous but constitutes a complex, experimental, frequently confusing, mixture of a metaphysical spy story, an

¹ See Roth, Marty. (1995). *Foul & Fair Play: Reading Genre in Classic Detective Fiction*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

² Apart from an in-depth study of the metaphysical detective fiction in Merivale, Patricia and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney. (1999). *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*, Dechêne, Antoine. (2018). *Detective Fiction and the Problem of Knowledge: Perspectives on the Metacognitive Mystery Tale*, Holquist, Michael. (1971). "Whodunnit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-war Fiction", as well as general critical works on detective fiction in Walker, Ronald, G. and June M. Fazer. (1990). *The Cunning Craft. Original Essays on Detective Fiction and Contemporary Literary Theory*, Most, Glenn, W. and William W. Stowe (eds.). (1983). *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory* and Cook, Michael. (2011). *Narratives of Enclosure in Detective Fiction. The Locked Room Mystery*, the critics made perfunctory contribution to this variant of the detective genre, devoting single chapters in their books: see Knight, Stephen. (2004). *Crime Fiction since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity*, Scaggs, John. (2005). *Crime Fiction* and Rzepka, Charles, J. and Lee Horsley. (eds.). (2010). *A Companion to Crime Fiction*. Tani, Stefano. (1984). *The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian Fiction* constitutes a valuable discussion on postmodern detective fiction, yet the critic analyses here the anti-detective story, which is comparable to, yet by no means synonymous with, the metaphysical detective story, as still a number of scholars and critics argue.

anti-detective novel, and an existential mystery tour. Rigorous research into this intricate amalgamation of genres may be therefore a significant challenge for numerous critics and scholars.

The concept of the labyrinth is by no means a unique and an isolated phenomenon in the detective writing. It has been a central motif of the detective story from its very beginnings, constituting a powerful driving force and the main determiner of the induction process, cause and effect relationship and linear progression in the narrative text. Labyrinth is the catalyst of every investigation process, reflecting the structure of multifarious roots and containing numerous blind valleys which make all the participants of the drama, such as the criminal, the victim, the detective, and the reader, disorientated and lost before finding the exit. Nevertheless, the concept of the labyrinth is highly complex and ambiguous, reflecting an enigmatic character of the detective genre, both in classical and especially postmodern variants and offshoots. Owing to the fact that the present monograph brings into prominence the metaphysical detective fiction as a subversive form of traditional detective literature and therefore contrasts the classical and postmodern models of the genre, the subjective, frequently contradictory nature of the labyrinth is reflected in traditional and postmodern variants of the detective fiction.

Although an in-depth analysis of the labyrinth in the context of the detective fiction will be based on Umberto Eco's classification and subsequently extended into Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the "rhizome" (see Chapter 1.4), it is worth undertaking an introductory study into the character and structure of the labyrinth as opposed to the idea of the maze³. In general, both labyrinth and maze depict a complex and ambivalent series of pathways, the former being unicursal (it has only a single, non-branching path, pointing to the centre), whilst the latter constituting an intricate, multicursal puzzle which comprises choices of paths and directions. As for the meaning, a labyrinth has a single through-route with twists and turns which are yet devoid of branches, whereas a maze is a perplexing pathway containing multiple branches, choices of path,

³ In the monograph I use the terms "labyrinth" and "maze" interchangeably, as reflected in most linguistic dictionaries (among others, <https://www.definitions.net/definition/Labyrinth>), only in order to avoid repetition. However, due to the marking structural distinctions between these two categories, a comparative preliminary analysis of the labyrinth and the maze ought to be undertaken.

dead-ends and blind-valleys. In terms of the level of difficulty, a labyrinth is designed to be easy to navigate – albeit its relative length, it is unicursal, thus one is bound to find an exit. In contrast, a maze exemplifies a tour puzzle, designed with varying levels of difficulty and complexity. And, most of all, taking into account the categories of entry and exit, a labyrinth contains only one entrance, being simultaneously the exit, as compared with a maze, having diverse entry and exit points.

It is also worth noticing that a labyrinth has visibly stronger links to the history, particularly to ancient Greece and classical Greek. Among multifarious historical labyrinth symbols suffice it to mention the mythological Labyrinth constructed by King Minos of Crete with the help of a craftsman Daedalus, an “Egyptian labyrinth”, a “Lemnian labyrinth” and an “Italian labyrinth”. Contrastively, the word maze lacks significant historical references. Instead, it has more concrete spatial associations. Among its most distinct types, one can identify: logic mazes having rules for leading to different directions, mazes in three or more dimensions, such as mazes of bridges or natural caves, dead-end mazes or loops and trap mazes featuring one-way doors – the opening doors which create dead ends and loops that lead people back to the starting point instead of the end point (<https://www.definitions.net/definition/Labyrinth>).

The above classification may constitute an invaluable contribution to the comparative scientific study of the labyrinth and the maze, yet it fails to faithfully reflect a highly complex and ambiguous nature of the concept of the labyrinth, especially in the context of detective fiction. Furthermore, critics and scholars do not follow such a rigid discrimination between a labyrinth and a maze in classical, modern and postmodern detective fiction. Interestingly enough, a labyrinth can be marked by a spiritual significance, illustrating the long, complex path to reach God or some “high” form of spiritual existence, whilst a maze is more often associated with science, thus is used in scientific experiments to study spatial awareness and sometimes intelligence. In fact, it is the blend of the labyrinthine spirituality or its existential spirit and the scientific, or empirical as well as structural side of the maze which constitutes the essence of the metaphysical detective fiction, stressing on the one hand, an existential aspect of detection based on contingency and chance in lieu of causality and hermeneutical assurance, and, on the other hand, a metafictional game between the author, characters and the reader as well as an intertextual dimension of the detective story.

The above categorisation invites us into a more profound analysis of the nature of the labyrinth, advocated by Eco along with Deleuze and Guattari. Firstly, following the classification conducted by one of the most eminent semioticians, one cannot fail to notice an immediate distinction between the second and the third kind of labyrinth, defined respectively as the mannerist labyrinth (Eco 1984: 57) and the rhizome (57) (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 6-7). The first one creates the enigma in order to provide a solution to the mystery at the end. The mannerist maze, with its trial-and-error process, is applicable to the problem-solving techniques employed in various classic detective stories which, having offered a number of obstacles and a chain of misleading paths, ultimately indicate the right direction in the investigation.

When set beside the mannerist maze, leading to a rational elucidation of the crime mystery and thus providing the climactic closure at the end, as visible in both classic detective stories (Arthur Conan Doyle's, Agatha Christie's or Dorothy Sayers's novels) and hard-boiled crime fiction (Dashiell Hammett's, Raymond Chandler's, Mickey Spillane's or Elmore Leonard's works), the labyrinthine structure of the metaphysical detective story fails to provide any satisfactory solution to the criminal enigma. Such a labyrinth, referred to as the net or the rhizome (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 6-7), with its un-hierarchical, heterogeneous structure, proliferating connections and infinite possibilities, without centre, periphery and exit, closely mirrors impenetrable, insoluble mysteries of the metaphysical detective fiction, and illustrates a disordered, fortuitous aspect of investigation and the universe ruled by contingency.

The rhizome structure of the labyrinth is a point of departure for miscellaneous critics and writers experimenting with classical detective story conventions, challenging its crucial components, such as causality and the deduction process, linear progression, closure, and reversing the roles of the detective, the criminal and the victim, thus destabilising their identities and exposing complex, ambiguous relations between the author, the characters and the reader. Their works reflect the profound questions that the metaphysical detective story raises about the narrative, interpretation, subjectivity, the nature of reality and the limits of knowledge. As this largely postmodern subgenre of detective fiction, with its rhizome structure of endless possibilities and an un-hierarchical model, a metaphysical detective story calls into question firmly established in the traditional detective fiction hierarchical relations between the literary

subjects. Thus, the novelists experimenting with the detective genre invariably overthrow the hierarchical world in their fiction, usually by challenging the privileged status of the detective who triumphs over the murderer and subverting the conflict caused by the chain of binary oppositions which results in the victory of the hero (detective) over the villain (culprit). Furthermore, they frequently challenge the dominant position of the narrator and the author, bringing into prominence the deep, intense involvement of the reader. Finally, being subversive variants of the traditional detective fiction, both the British whodunnit and the American hard-boiled fiction, a metaphysical detective story exposes the limits of social order and investigative closure (Goulet 2015: 208-223).

The metaphysical detective story, designed in the form of a textual labyrinth, and reflecting uncertainty, randomness of the fictional world and the maze-like relations between the literary subjects, is marked with such features as playfulness, pastiche or hybridity of the detective genre, metafiction, hyperreality, fragmentation and non-linear narrative. Critics and novelists frequently accentuate a heterogeneous, polyvalent elements of this variant of the detective story, its complex and ambivalent nature, therefore it is more pertinent to define and examine metaphysical detective fiction narratives in relation to their neighbouring genres like the anti-detective story, the metaphysical spy story, the existential mystery story, *neo-noir*, *neo-polar*, or possibly Po(e)st-modernist fiction in which it is embedded, rather than as distinct genres. Furthermore, the metaphysical detective fiction raises questions about its links with other literary modes, among others, magic realism, surrealism and the neo-expressionism of numerous recent psychologised crime fictions, popularised most visibly by the Hispanic, especially Latin-American novelists (José Donoso, Ariel Dorfman, Carlos Fuentes, Ricardo Piglia, Manuel Puig, Gabriel García Márquez, and, above all, Jorge Luis Borges) (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 19). On the other hand, one may witness a growing interest in miscellaneous postmodern variants of the detective fiction in the Nordic region whose writers have defined a new, popular middle ground, in which they have made detective literature a forum for circulating language, images and critical theories to reach numerous reading public (Nesting 2008: 6). Ultimately, a metaphysical detective story has recently become the subject of intense studies of non-European, and non-North American authors, most notably, Asian, African and Australian novelists, which reflects an

increasingly global facet of the genre, once being exclusive to the European and North-American literary world, particularly the Anglophone fiction. Nevertheless, due to the limits of space, opportunity and accessibility, the author of the present monograph is forced to omit certain trends and movements of the metaphysical detective fiction, such as largely unexplored currents of African-American, Aboriginal Australian postmodern detective novelists, like Ishmael Reed or Arthur Upfield on the one hand, and the increasingly more studied new Scandinavian crime fiction, like Steen Christensen's police procedurals or Michael Larsen's metaphysical detective stories on the other hand.

The present monograph aims at analysing the specificity of spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths in the contexts of selected American and French metaphysical detective novels. Despite a multifarious character of both American and French models of this genre, the novelists' distinct approaches to the detective genre and its postmodern variants, which problematizes the status of the metaphysical detective fiction as a homogenous, consistent genre, some critics have formulated the criteria of classifying the crucial directional models of this fiction. One of the most graphic illustrations of the categorisation of the metaphysical detective story is Merivale and Sweeney's (1999: 18) creation of the story's tentative genealogy chart in which special emphasis is placed on the distinction between the minimalist and the maximalist models of the postmodernist detective story (see Chapter 1.2). The former type, also called the Poe-to-Auster line, and characterised by the inclusion of centripetal forces, reflecting unity, homogeneity and centrality (Bakhtin 1981: 272) which lead to the reduction of plural identities into one and the elements of pursuit or chase, is the one in which the maze is fully mapped out. In contrast to the minimalist model of detective fiction, represented by the authors like Flann O'Brien (*The Third Policeman*), Umberto Eco (*The Name of the Rose*), Italo Calvino, Witold Gombrowicz, Alain Robbe-Grillet (*Les Gommages*), Paul Auster and Patrick Modiano, the maximalist type is featured by the incorporation of such constituents as centrifugal forces of differences, dispersion and decentring (Bakhtin 1981: 72), resulting in the proliferation of identities, as well as highlighting the carnival and party, which are outlined in the works of Eco (*Foucault's Pendulum*), Robbe-Grillet (*La Maison de rendez vous*), Gilbert Sorrentino, Thomas Pynchon, Carlos Fuentes, Robert Coover, Donald Richard DeLillo or Jean Echenoz.

Nonetheless, despite Merivale and Sweeney's detailed classification of the metaphysical detective story outlined above, being its first widely-known grouping, one cannot fail to notice that many a writer does not fall into either of the two types, which is the case of authors like Peter Ackroyd, A. S. Byatt, Peter Greenaway whose novels could be called pseudobiographical detective stories (Ackroyd, Byatt), or historical detective novels (Greenaway, Ackroyd, Eco). Moreover, the works of certain novelists, like Jedediah Berry (*The Manual of Detection*) (see Chapter 1.4), exemplify the texts in which both centripetal and centrifugal forces are intertwined, and where the elements of pursuit and carnival acquire equal status. Therefore they do not visibly fall into either a minimalist or maximalist type but a combination of both.

The above deviations and inconsistencies illustrate certain shortcomings of Merivale and Sweeney's chart. This gives evidence to the fact that the metaphysical detective story's structure reflects the rhizome of multiple, heterogeneous roots and infinite possibilities, thus different novelists' texts including various elements of this subgenre do not fall into some coherent, homogeneous groups but represent diverse models and patterns. Having said that, despite some weaknesses and deficiencies of the above classification, Merivale and Sweeney's tentative graph, illustrating a visible genealogical correspondence between American and French detective fiction tradition paths, constitutes a prelude to a more in-depth analysis of the labyrinth in the transatlantic context of the American and French novels.

The aim of this monograph is to explore spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths as central to the reading of Paul Auster's, Patrick Modiano's and Alain Robbe-Grillet's texts. Although one cannot initially see any direct influential links between the three novelists whose examined texts were written in different periods and reflect diverse literary critical assumptions and philosophical schools, a careful scrutiny of American and French historical detective fiction studies and the genre's critical background enables to situate the three authors in comparative configurations of the postmodern model of detective fiction, specifically a melange of the metaphysical hard-boiled variant and an existential *neo-noir* novel. Since one can barely trace any systematic critical works dedicated to the correlation between, as well as juxtaposition of, these writers, either in the context of the detective story tradition or the postmodern literary studies, my main objective is to closely inspect the three authors' problematization of the categories of space, time and identity as reflections of textual constraints, urban labyrinths, memory

lacunae, consciousness, self-reflexive storytelling, reader-response and reception theories.

The purpose of my study is to explore selected novels by Auster, Modiano and Robbe-Grillet in comparative, yet at times oppositional contextual relations, with the accent being placed on the analogy between their critical approaches to the notions of temporal-spatial labyrinths, the investigative process, the figures of the detective, the culprit and the victim and the relations between the writers, the narratees and the reader. All the three novelists call into question crucial elements of traditional detection, such as chronological depiction of events, the logical sequence of time/space and cause/effect relationships in the story and a clear-cut distinction between the detective, the criminal and the victim. In Merivale and Sweeney's classification of the metaphysical detective story, almost all of the discussed novels faithfully represent the minimalist model as they are designed in the form of a textual and thematic labyrinth where plural identities are reduced into one, mostly by pursuit, with the exception of Robbe-Grillet's *La Reprise*, constituting an experimental amalgamation of the minimalist and maximalist type of the metaphysical detective story and the anti-detective novel. However, regardless of the eight texts' shared structural and thematic components, principally, the inclusion of textual and spatial labyrinths, highlighting temporal distortion and ambivalent relations between the author, characters and the reader, all these works constitute unique and particular illustrations of their novelists' critical views and approaches to postmodern detective fiction, narratology, phenomenology, historical and psychoanalytical criticism.

Paul Auster's novels are the starting point in the analysis of spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths with respect to the detective story tradition, self-reflexive storytelling, reader-response and reception theory, deconstruction approach and existentialist studies. The American author is credited with creating a particular form of postmodern detective fiction which could be defined, or rather "redefined", as a form which makes use of widely known variations of the detective novel that have evolved during the long tradition of the genre, such as the classical whodunnit and the hard-boiled detective novel. On the other hand, however, these variations of the classical model of the genre are only applied by Auster to veer from its course, overthrow the existing constituents and purposefully negate the fundamental

objectives of the genre by introducing a multifariousness of postmodern features. In this respect, the American writer adheres to the rules of the anti-detective genre, promulgated by authors like Robbe-Grillet, Sorrentino or Pynchon. Needless to say, in contrast to these novelists, Auster is credited with establishing a new form which exceeds the boundaries of the anti-detective novel by incorporating a neo-realistic approach which combines the traditional elements of the genre with the experimental, metafictional and ironic features of postmodernism. More importantly, however, one cannot fail to notice the writer's engagement with the world he depicts, and, what stems from it, his fascination with "the fundamental experience" (Auster 2012: 15) of an author and narrator as a private investigator, "the exuberant complexities of his brilliant mind" and his involvement with the world as well as his tenderness in narrating the events, which the novelist mainly attributes to such writers as George Perec. In view of this, Auster's oeuvre, comparably to Modiano's and Perec's texts, have above all an existential and metaphysical dimension which often overshadow their avant-garde and metafictional aspects.

This monograph, devoted to the scrutiny of Auster's detective novels in correlation with two French postmodern detective novelists, Patrick Modiano and Alain Robbe-Grillet, aims at demonstrating how and to what extent the American and French writers transform not only the classical model of the whodunnit but, above all, challenge the rules of the hard-boiled crime fiction and *roman noir*, simultaneously retaining their fundamental elements, such as urban jungle, the figure of a lonely private eye and his existential quest for the missing person, fortuitous concatenation of circumstance and opportunity in the investigative process. Thus, juxtaposing Auster's texts with Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's works' as being influenced by the hard-boiled crime fiction and *roman noir* on the one hand and existentialism on the other hand remains an indispensable introductory part of the analysis of the three novels by the American writer. Suffice it to mention that such notable novels by Auster as *Squeeze Play* (written under the pseudonym of Paul Benjamin)⁴ and *The New York Trilogy* are

⁴ Despite the fact that Auster wrote and published *Squeeze Play* as a "proper" or routine detective novel, he never revealed it until 1997 and does not consider it a part of his corpus, I still argue that it can be regarded as an insightful and valuable study of the author's early experimentation with the hard-boiled crime fiction and detective

undoubtedly attributed to the influence of the hard-boiled crime fiction, *noir* and *neo-noir* tradition as well as existentialist literature. In fact, the works by Auster to be scrutinised in the present monograph could be referred to as hard-boiled existential outsiders in which the investigative process led by amateur detectives or writers-cum-private investigators mirrors an existential anguish of an estranged individual in his desperate attempts to disclose his own identity or other self.

Moreover, Auster's writing is frequently associated with the theories of such French writers as Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and, above all, Maurice Blanchot⁵. The influence of the French critical thinkers which saturates the majority of these books is intertwined with the impact of multifarious literary movements, predominantly American and Irish critical works. Taking into account Auster's three texts to be examined in the three consecutive chapters of this monograph, *The New York Trilogy*, *The Book of Illusions* and *Travels in the Scriptorium*, it is worth referring to the pivotal literary traditions that shaped these novels. One of the most profound influences is the American nineteenth-century transcendentalism represented by Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, which becomes combined with the impact of Nathaniel Hawthorne's dark romanticism, Herman Melville's gothic romanticism and existentialism, and, first and foremost, Edgar Allan Poe's detective stories and critical theories. Furthermore, Auster's novels mirror the blending influence of nineteenth-century American literary and philosophical works, particularly Hawthorne's and Melville's play of "light and darkness" and Beckettian theory of self-negation.

Auster's recurring motifs, such as an existential quest for identity and self, a sense of an imminent disaster, the world's randomness and chaos, a fortuitous dimension of investigation, frequent portrayal of an ascetic life of a writer or a detective, writing and storytelling, intertextual playfulness, self-referential and metafictional idiosyncrasies, closely reflect his links with the above-mentioned American, French and Irish literary movements and critical theories. Hence, his oeuvre exemplifies a unique fusion of a deep nineteenth-century American pessimism and threatening postmodernist French solipsism. In Paul Auster's postmodern detective novels, being

literature conventions in general which had a lasting influence on his later more mature metaphysical and anti-detective novels.

⁵ See: Arce, Maria, Laura. (2016). *Paul Auster and the Influence of Maurice Blanchot*, Jefferson: McFarland.

frequently referred to as existential mystery tours (Holmes 2005), the process of detection closely reflects the narrators' and main characters' private obsessions, and their endeavours to unravel a mystery unavoidably leads to their attempts at self-discovery (Holdenraber 2012: 11). Similarly to Modiano and Perec, the American author often uses amnesia and memory as recurrent motifs in his works which constitute the driving forces of the process of detection and are the means of bringing relative peace to the protagonists: amnesia paradoxically prompts them to obsessively investigate the past mystery whilst the desire to recall past events and recover the memory, even the most distressing one, ultimately heals them and allows them to survive. This narrative exhaustion and obsession with self-discovery and recovery of one's past, combined with the author's "engagement with the world, his need to tell stories" (Auster 2012: 12), are indubitably common denominators in Auster's, Modiano's and Perec's texts. On the other hand, the American novelist's contestation of the conventions of the classic detective fiction relying upon plot, linear narrative, character and mimesis, reflects technical parallels with Robbe-Grillet's texts. Auster's accentuating the correspondence between the act of crime, mystery and the process of detection on the one hand and the acts of writing and reading on the other hand, combined with his esteem of the craft of writing mirrors the French author's formula of writing skill, both with respect to detective fiction writing as well as the literary writing process in general. Auster's conception of writing constitutes a genuine craft, the materiality, all the more "the tactility of the words, manipulating language to effect... finding the cleanest, purest, more beautiful way of expressing" the main thought or central idea (Auster 2012: 16). Thus, it is the blend of an existential quest for truth and mystery resolution, a nauseating experience of the investigation on the one hand and a metafictional game between the author, reader and the narrative itself on the other hand that becomes a point of departure for studying Auster's three postmodernist detective texts in relation with Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's novels. Even though in most of the interviews and books critics like Shiloh underline the impact of such French writers on Auster's literary output as Sartre⁶

⁶ In her book, *Paul Auster and Postmodern Quest: On the Road to Nowhere* (2002: 61), Ilana Shiloh draws the analogy between Blue's activity of looking to Sartre's existentialist philosophy. The author refers specifically to Sartre's work *Being and Nothingness* (1943) where the look becomes the main means by which the subject creates his relationship with the other. The critic argues that the other look is crucial

and Perec⁷, in the present monograph I will attempt to demonstrate some crucial parallels and, at times oppositional relations between, Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's texts which embody a combination of self-reflexive, metafictional narratives and metaphysical detective stories accentuating existential anxiety, or mental amnesia of defeated sleuths struggling to find their other self in a hallucinatory world of spatial and temporal vacuity. As previously pointed out, the examination of Auster's metaphysical detective novels in relation with Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's postmodern mysteries deserve special attention due to the elements of the hard-boiled crime fiction, *roman noir* and *neo-noir* lying at the core of all these texts. In this sense, the scrutiny of Auster's novels in parallels with Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's works seems more accurate when set beside the analysis of his texts in correlation with Perec's more disturbing, traumatic and openly experimental books⁸. To take the analogy further, the existential vacuity or void, along with memory lacunae and textual blanks which constitute the essence of the eight postmodernist detective novels, is the prime common denominator of the three authors' critical studies. These gaps or loopholes, being ubiquitous elements of metaphysical or anti-detective variants of the detective genre are brought into prominence during a detailed discussion of the American and French novels provided in the second, third and fourth chapters of the monograph.

The American novelist's three works, *The New York Trilogy*, *The Book of Illusions* and *Travels in the Scriptorium*, have been the subject of an in-depth analysis by numerous critics, writers, reviewers and scholars, such as Brown, Peacock, Russell, Holzapfel, Bloom, Pinder, Holmes and Brendan⁹, to

to the individual's existence, which constitutes for himself through human interaction. Nonetheless, in comparison with Blanchot's theory on a metaphysical encounter with the individual's inside that is reflected in Auster's novel, Sartre's existential theory brings into focus a social relationship based on the acceptance of the other and the existential consequences that confrontation entails.

⁷ See "Paul Auster in conversation with Paul Holdengräber", *Winter Journal*, October 1, 2012.

⁸ This does not deny, however, Auster's huge contribution to Perec, especially his direct and indirect references to the Holocaust as well as personal holocausts, and the difficulty of approaching the topic, see "Paul Auster in conversation with Paul Holdengräber" (2012).

⁹ Except the critical works on Auster's *The New York Trilogy* I frequently refer to in this monograph, it is worth mentioning Bloom, Harold. (ed.). (2004). *Paul Auster* (*Bloom's Modern Critical Views*). Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, which

name but a few. The first of the aforesaid novels, considered a blend of a suspense story, existential récit, postmodern mystery and autobiography, is one of the most extensively and systematically studied texts by Auster, not solely from the perspective of the detective genre conventions but above all with regard to the existentialist studies, postmodern writing, reader-response and reception theory. The 1987 novel by Auster which I scrutinise in correlation with Modiano's *Rue des boutiques obscures* in the context of spatial and textual labyrinths, addresses in fact many other quintessential issues recurring in his writing, such as an existential quest for identity, questions of space, language and literature. Employing the detective form to reflect the existential problems and issues related to text, language, reading, interpretation and writing, the American author creates his own distinctively postmodern form in the process.

An existential search for identity and the missing person, the protagonist's alienating writing experience and metaphysical distress in confrontation with the world's contingency and chaos next to an extended focus on the character's fictional body of work and a meta-referential ending that places the protagonist as the author of the book itself, are central to the reading of *The Book of Illusions*. In opposition to the widely recognised and critically acclaimed *The New York Trilogy*, this 2002 book by Auster has received a comparably few reviews, being the subject of analysis of such literary and film critics and scholars as Peacock (2006), Brown (2007), Wood (2009), Huebert (2016) or Carstensen (2017). Interestingly enough, among different critical voices (such as Peacock's and Carstensen's critiques) (see chapter 3.2.1 and 3.2.2), it is worth mentioning the opinion of Wood who praised Auster's "painstaking and vivid fictional re-creation of the career of a silent-movie actor of the nineteen twenties", yet, who added later that the novel "soon hurtles into absurdity" (Wood 2009). It is the protagonist's isolating experience, his spatial and temporal odyssey in search of the missing person who dies after being found that perhaps best mirrors the absurd dimension of human existence in the face of random working of the universe. *The Book of Illusions*, in which I foreground the motif of temporal

includes several essays on *The New York Trilogy*, Brendan, Martin. (2008). *Paul Auster's Postmodernity*. Oxford: Routledge, and Bran, Nicol. (2009). *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, who devotes Chapter 7, "Two postmodern genres: cyberpunk and detective fiction", to *City of Glass*.

circular labyrinth, undergoes a close examination, next to Modiano's *Quartier perdu* and Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages*.

Travels in the Scriptorium (2007) is Auster's novel discussed in the ultimate chapter of this monograph. Constituting an amalgamation of the motifs from most of his previous texts, most notably, *The New York Trilogy*, *In the Country of Last Things* (1987), as well as *The Invention of Solitude* (1982) and *Oracle Night* (2003), the novel brings into prominence the notion of the hyperreal locked room as a determinant of human experience and the investigation of self-referentiality as an illustration of the metafictional game between the author, the characters and the reader. This book by Auster has invited a comparatively small number of critical reviews, among which one ought to mention Butler and Gurr's (2008), Sanjoy and Neelakantan's (2010), Alexander and Chatterjee's (2014), Buday's (2014) and Stolarek's (2015)¹⁰ articles and critical essays. The above-mentioned critics and scholars underline metafictional elements of the novel, its intertextual playfulness combined with the notion of the locked room as an embodiment of human incarceration. All of these themes become pivotal in the comparative study of labyrinthine identity relations in Auster's *Travels in the Scriptorium*, Modiano's *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* and Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages* and *La Reprise*.

Paul Auster's metaphysical detective stories are central to the reading of Patrick Modiano's three postmodern detective novels. The recipient of the 2014 Nobel Prize in Literature, described by the Nobel Academy as "a Marcel Proust of our time"¹¹, Modiano is widely known for his unique portrayal of the Paris of the Occupation and post-Occupation period, placing special emphasis on the depiction of all spatial details mingled with constant references to the idea of memory and its fallibility and the notion

¹⁰ See the reference to Auster's *Travels in the Scriptorium* in Stolarek, Joanna. (2015). *"Narrative and Narrated Homicide: The Vision of Contemporary Civilisation in Martin Amis's Postmodern Detective Fiction"*, Chapter 3, section 3.3 – pp. 100-103.

¹¹ During the Nobel Award ceremony, 9 October 2014, Peter Englund called Patrick Modiano "a kind of Marcel Proust of our time", yet with caveats. The critic stated that "This is a very different project from the one Proust once undertook. One of the central themes of Modiano's work are the problems of reaching back; not reaching back, not understanding, not getting to grips with it". See "Nobel Prize winner Patrick Modiano hailed as modern Marcel Proust". *The Guardian*, 9 October 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/oct/09/nobel-prize-literature-winner-patrick-modiano-hailed-modern-marcel-proust>

of war and post-war trauma¹². His stories depict a universe of haunted places, absentee parents, lost youths and, most of all, writers undergoing a mounting personal crisis. Analogously to Auster's postmodern detective novels, the French writer designs his books in the form of a textual labyrinth where spatial, temporal and identity relations are interwoven. As an exemplary postmodern mystery writer, he toys with the concepts of search, investigation and detection. However, as the writer emphasises in numerous interviews, among others in a conversation with Euan Cameron (Modiano 2015), his entire interest lies in a quest and mystery itself, not in solving an enigma, as depicted in classic detective stories. The three novels to be inspected in this monograph mirror visible transformations from hardboiled *noirs* into a Proustian examination of memory and trauma. Furthermore, Modiano's works, inspired by the early Modernist and Imagist style of Paul Morand, hyper-realism and fragmented narratives of Louis Ferdinand Céline, and above all, Raymond Queneau's surrealist and experimental writing, are often analysed in the light of self-reflexive and self-referential storytelling, a theory of fragmentation, reader-response and reception theory and existentialist studies. It is indubitably Queneau's fascination with the hard-boiled crime fiction combined with his sardonic treatment of the genre's recurrent motifs like sex gratuitous violence that profoundly shaped the theme and narrative techniques of Modiano's works. This fusion of intertextuality, hyperreality fragmentation, existentialism and mystery writing constitutes the base for examining his three texts, *Rue des boutiques obscures*, *Quartier perdu* and *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* in line with Auster's and Robbe-Grillet's novels.

The first novel by Modiano to be scrutinised in the second chapter is one of his most internationally recognised books, being awarded the Prix Goncourt in 1978. In the analysis of *Rue des boutiques obscures* (1978)

¹² Although Modiano is little translated into English, he is not just widely read in French but has received a number of international as well as national awards, including the 2012 Austrian State Prize for European Literature, the 2010 Prix mondial Cino Del Duca from the Institut de France for lifetime achievement, the 1978 Prix Goncourt for *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* (translated as *The Missing Person*) and the 1972 Grand Prix du roman de l'Académie française for *Les Boulevards de ceinture*, not to mention the Prix Roger-Nimier and the Prix Fenéon for his début novel *Place de l'étoile* in 1968, See: Anderson, Jean. (2015) "Another "Unknown" Nobel Winner?: Reflections on Translations of Patrick Modiano's Works", *Translation Review* 92. 40-53.

(*The Missing Person*, trans Daniel Weissbort, 1980), numerous critics, reviewers and scholars, among others, Boisdeffre (1980), Ewert (1990), Botta (1999), Best (2016)¹³, and, first and foremost, Kawakami (2000) and Flower (2007)¹⁴, highlight a maze-like character of identity quest and the investigation of the missing person, the tension between a hermeneutics of time and a hermeneutics of spatial detection, alongside the mysteries of youth, particularly tracking evidence of the protagonist's existence through the traces of the past related to the heinous war experiences, and a complex, ambiguous process of writing and storytelling, as the story's dominant motifs. Moreover, the protagonist's failed search for his roots and identity, the eponymous missing person embodying a doomed detective who is to confront spatial, textual and temporal labyrinths, constitute a parallel with *The New York Trilogy's* urban and existential maze, accompanied by an impenetrable textual space of the locked room.

When set beside *Rue des boutiques obscures*, delving into the puzzle of identity largely in the light of the war and post-war experience, which is the subject of many other works by Modiano, like "the trilogy of the Occupation", *La Place de l'étoile* (1968), *La Ronde de nuit* (1969) and *Les Boulevards de ceinture* (1972), as well as *Villa triste* (1975), and, most prominently, *Dora Bruder* (1997), *Quartier perdu* (1984) (*A Trace of Malice*, trans. Anthea Bell, 1988) exemplifies one of those works of the French novelist which are not associated with the pervading theme of the Occupation period. Relating the narrator's search for the key to the criminal enigma which turns into the spatial, and especially temporal, odyssey during which he endeavours to uncover his true identity and track down the murderer, *Quartier perdu* constitutes a more conspicuous example of the contemporary detective fiction. Nonetheless, as an exemplary postmodernist text, the novel challenges classical detective story conventions, like linear progression, the logical chain of time/space and cause/effect relationships in

¹³ See Best, Victoria. (2016). "Missing Persons. The Novels of Patrick Modiano". In *Essays. Numéro Cinq. Magazine, Nonfiction*, Vol. VII, No. 6, June 2016. <http://numero-cinqmagazine.com/2016/06/08/missing-persons-the-novels-of-patrick-modiano-victoria-best/>.

¹⁴ Among the most systematic Anglophone critical texts dedicated to Patrick Modiano one ought to mention: Flower, John, Ernest. (2007). *Patrick Modiano*, Cooke, Dervila. (2015). *Present Past(s): Patrick Modiano's (Auto)biographical Fictions* and Polizzotti, Mark. (2015). *Pedigree: A Memoir*, the last of which throws a new light on Modiano's fiction and life.

the story, by focussing, as in Auster's works (in particular *The Book of Illusions*), on the protagonist's temporal journey in pursuit of another person, and his "lost" self. More importantly, along with the motif of temporal labyrinth, specifically the narrator's individual treatment of time, linked with geography rather than chronology, as various critics, like Kawakami (2000), Warehime (1987) or Brândușa–Steiciuc (2015) emphasise, the 1985 Modiano novel brings into focus the problem of narrating the events, particularly those connected with the criminal past, and a complex, arduous process of reading by filling lacunae in the narrative.

Modiano's third and final text to be explored in chapter four is based on a very broad motif of identity relations, their exchange and transformation in the context of the main character's empty, unreliable narration and a labyrinthine, equivocal relationship between the author, narrator and the reader. In contrast to the two preceding novels, being widely-known and having received innumerable international critical responses in the form of essays, articles, or reviews, *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* (2014) (*So You Don't Get Lost in the Neighbourhood*, trans. Euan Cameron, 2015) so far has seen several international reviews and a scarcity of critical essays and articles (Autrey, Michael, Sep1, 2015, *The Booklist*, Vol 112 (1), 44, www.booklistreader.com, Maerz, Melissa, Oct 2, 2015, *Entertainment Weekly*, Issue 1383, 79), except in France¹⁵. The lack or perfunctory analysis of the French novelist's latest book appears unusual in the light of Modiano's invaluable contribution to postmodern fiction and literary criticism, and his

¹⁵ In the French press, Modiano was mentioned in *Télérama*: "Patrick Modiano: "Celui qui écrit a besoin que subsiste une certaine opacité". (30 September 2014). <http://www.telerama.fr/livre/patrick-modiano-celui-qui-ecrit-a-besoin-que-subsite-une-certaine-opacite,117465.phb>; Raspiengeas, Jean-Claude. (2014). "*Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*". In *La Croix*. 1 October 2014. <http://www.la-croix.com/Culture/Livres-Idees/Livres/Lambeaux-d-un-passe-obscur-2014-10-01-121465>; Chevillard, Eric. (2014). "Créateur d'ambiance". In *Le Monde*. 2 October 2014. http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2014/10/02/createur-d-ambiance_4499467_3260.html; Gandillot, Thierry. (2014). "Le Presque rien de Patrick Modiano". In *Les Echos*. 9 October 2014. <http://www.lesechos.fr/week-end/culture/0203841848360-les-presque-rien-de-patrick-modiano-1051541.phb>; Roman, Thomas (2014). "La part de l'ombre". In *Le Monde*. 2 October 2014. http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2014/10/02/createur-d-ambiance_4499467_3260.html. DOA: 6.07.2019 or Gandillot, Thierry. (2014). "Le Presque rien de Patrick Modiano". In *Les Echos*. 9 October 2014. <http://www.lesechos.fr/week-end/culture/0203841848360-les-presque-rien-de-patrick-modiano-1051541.phb>.

international acknowledgement since the Nobel Award nomination. Hence, a thorough analysis of this novel by Modiano may successfully fill the gap in the research on the French author with respect to crime fiction, existentialist philosophy, postmodernist discourse, alongside memory, trauma and history studies.

Alain Robbe-Grillet's novels are the final component of this monograph's comparative studies related to spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths in the American and French postmodern detective texts. In opposition to the more contemplative and reflective facet of Auster's and Modiano's metaphysical mystery novels, Robbe-Grillet's works are overtly experimental, speculative and invariably provocative. Drawing upon the phenomenological philosophy of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist theories, his writing style has been often described as "realist" or phenomenological, or "a theory of pure surface" (Donadio 2008). One of the most prominent figures associated with the *nouveau roman* movement and a member of L'Académie française, Robbe-Grillet is known for methodical, geometric and frequently repetitive depiction of objects which substitute, though frequently reveal, the psychology and interiority of the character. His most distinguished *nouveau roman* works, like *Le Voyeur* (1955), *La Jalousie* (1957), *Dans le Labyrinthe* (1959), *La Maison de rendez-vous* (1965) or *Projet pour une révolution à New York* (1970), disclose timelines and plots which are fractured, and the resulting novel echoes the literary equivalent of a cubist painting.

The novels to be systematically explored, *Les Gommages* (1953) (*The Erasers*, trans. Richard Howard, 1964) and *La Reprise* (2001) (*The Repetition*, trans. Richard Howard, 2003), illustrate transitional works oscillating between the detective genre, particularly its metaphysical hard-boiled and anti-detective variants, as well as the espionage novel, and the *nouveau roman*. I selected these texts by Robbe-Grillet due to their reflecting, in contrast to fully experimental and stylistically innovative postmodern works, a more speculative and existential side of the detective genre. *Les Gommages* and *La Reprise*, scrutinised in correspondence with Auster's and Modiano's above-mentioned books, mirror for the most part the minimalist model of the metaphysical detective story in which the labyrinth is mostly underlined and where accent is put on the pursuit of the missing person and one self at the same time.

“The true writer has nothing to say. What counts is the way he says it”, the French writer once announced in his characteristically enigmatic fashion (Robbe-Grillet 1963: 45; trans. Howard 1989). Accordingly, in *Les Gommès*, his debut novel, it is not foregrounding the theme of crime and investigation, or rather a reversed sequence of events involving the investigation followed by the murder, but the very challenging of the rules of the detective genre, combined with the structural and stylistic innovation of the narrative that have become the subject of intensive research studies. Critics such as Durozoi (1973), Ricardou (1973), and most notably, Morrissette (1975), highlight the Oedipus structure and references to the ancient myth in Robbe-Grillet’s *Les Gommès* as well as in his other novels, in particular *La Reprise*. Furthermore, the 1953 Robbe-Grillet novel, exemplifying a pastiche of the detective story, reflects the process of the novelist’s literary experimentation during which he employs the detective genre in order to exploit, manipulate and subvert its elements, as visible in the *nouveau roman*.

Circular time and ambiguous relationship between the author, the characters and the reader to be closely examined in the final sections of chapters three and four, next to the disturbing and nauseating spatialities of the narrative, constitute Robbe-Grillet’s novel’s driving forces and central motifs. Significantly enough, when juxtaposing insolvable mysteries, the investigative void and anti-climactic closure of his later *nouveau roman* texts, *Les Gommès*, which begins by subverting a number of fundamental elements of the detective novel and mystery story, ultimately validates them by exposing a genuine culprit and an actual victim in a surprising, unsettling ending.

Due to a variety of theoretical and philosophical approaches Robbe-Grillet’s debut novel adopts and critical reviews and essays it invites, I decided to scrutinise the text from two angles, the first being a perspective of temporal labyrinth, and the second one mirroring power relations and identity imprisonment in the investigative cell of postmodernism. Identity labyrinths, reflected in the light of their doubleness and duplicity, are central to the reading of *La Reprise*. Interestingly enough, when set beside a worldwide recognition Robbe-Grillet’s previous works attained, his final novel received several critical reviews, mostly in the French-speaking press, and very few scholarly critiques¹⁶. This is partly connected with the fact that

¹⁶ See Abramov, Tamar. (2008). *To Catch a Spy: Explorations in Subjectivity*, Gwyn, Betsy. (2002). “*La Reprise*” (Spring 2002), review in *World Literature Today*,

the book, constituting a highly experimental amalgamation of the *nouveau roman* and a postmodern (counter)espionage novel, is relatively little known outside French literary establishment. Thus, similarly to the examination of Modiano's still unexplored *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, a critical analysis of Robbe-Grillet's *La Reprise* may initiate international research on this book in the context of postmodern espionage and counter-espionage genres as well as the metaphysical and metafictional mystery stories.

The present monograph is divided into four chapters. The aim of chapter one, "Tracing the metaphysical detective story – a historical and a theoretical perspective", is to provide a historical, literary and critical background to the metaphysical detective story which is followed by crucial assumptions about labyrinth, both in the context of the classical detective story and its metaphysical variant. This part will reveal in-depth research findings into American and European postmodern detective fiction with the emphasis being placed on selected critics' classifications of the concept of the labyrinth, particularly in the context of its spatial-temporal and identity dimensions. At the outset of this chapter, I focus on the examination of the historical and literary stages of the metaphysical detective story, the evolution and transformation of this detective subgenre, principally with respect to the classic detective story and hard-boiled crime fiction. In the introductory study of the metaphysical detective story, involving the critical investigation of such writers as Poe, Chesterton, Borges, Eco, O'Brien, Robbe-Grillet, Perec, Auster and Berry, I attempt to situate this subgenre as central to postmodern crime studies. Furthermore, in this section, I reflect on the postmodernist detective story's tentative genealogy chart created by Merivale and Sweeney (1999: 19, Appendix) which will be followed by a juxtaposition of its minimalist and maximalist types, bringing into prominence the former model as it becomes a pivotal investigative determiner of the eight texts scrutinised in the following chapters of this monograph. The subsequent part aims at exploring some crucial critical approaches to the metaphysical detective story when contrasted with the classic detective fiction, and the reception of the subgenre after World War II. At this point, I refer to miscellaneous critics' interpretative theories, such as

Vol. 76(2), p. 178 and Murphy, Robert. (2004). "'The Immortal' Alain Robbe-Grillet" (interview), June 11, 2004, p. 23.

Merivale and Sweeney's (1999) self-reflexive narrativity, Carl D. Malmgren (2001)'s comparative study of British and American crime fiction, David Platten's (2011) and Claire Gorrara's (2003) critical approach to French crime fiction and its links with American crime literature¹⁷, Pyrhönnen's (2010) historical and critical analysis of detective fiction and Hilfer's (1990) studies of the genre with regard to both its classical models and postmodern variants. A postmodern model is exemplified by Gregoriou's (2007) theory of deviance and Tani's (1984) critical approach to an anti-detective novel. Moreover, I refer to feminist reaction to the metaphysical detective story and to the detective genre in general, and, finally, to Cook's (2011) scrutiny of the idea of closure both in classical and postmodern detective novels.

The subsequent sections of the first chapter are devoted to the theoretical grounding of the idea of labyrinth, especially its spatial and temporal dimension. The concept of the labyrinth will be explored in the context of the classic detective story and its metaphysical variant, as put forward by Eco in *Postscript to the Name of the Rose* (1985). Eco's critical analysis and categorisation of labyrinth, preceded by Ingarden's (1973b) and Iser's (1978) views on reading the concept of the labyrinth in detective texts, as well as Borges's theory on spatial maze, being an allegory of the locked room, are points of departure for the concept of the rhizome formulated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), constituting the essential structure of the maze illustrated in the metaphysical detective story. A reflection of the idea of the rhizome structure of the labyrinth, completed by the study of the map-plus-narrative text, is extended in the ultimate part of this chapter to the examination of spatial, temporal and identity relations in selected texts by American, French and Irish authors. The investigation of labyrinths of space, time and identity in the works of writers like O'Brien, Perec, Berry and King constitutes a prelude to an in-depth study of Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's selected texts in the next three chapters of the monograph.

The following chapters place the concept of the labyrinth in thematic configurations of space, time and identity which are evidenced in selected novels by Auster, Modiano and Robbe-Grillet. My aim is to show a close link

¹⁷ See: Gorrara, Claire. (2003). *The Roman Noir in Post-War French Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Gorrara, Claire. (2003). "Cultural Intersections: The American Hard-Boiled Detective Novel and Early French Roman Noir" *The Modern Language Review* Vol. 98, No. 3 (Jul., 2003), 590-601).

between these three categories, particularly the relationship between the concepts of space and time as a reflection of the chronotope/time-space continuum. Thus, I devote three separate chapters to the notions of space, time and identity only for analytical purposes. Chapter two, "Exploratory spaces in Paul Auster's and Patrick Modiano's novels", incorporates a comparative examination of Auster's *The New York Trilogy* and Modiano's *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* in the light of spatial and (inter)textual labyrinths which closely reflect existential and metaphysical aspects of detection and investigation. Both novels lay emphasis on the correlation between the urban maze-like experience of the protagonists in their quest of the missing persons which turns into the search for their own selves and a complex process of approaching these self-reflexive, intertextual detective narratives.

The first part of this chapter dedicated to Auster's book aims at highlighting spatial and textual dimensions of labyrinth contextualised in the metropolitan experience of the three characters, embodying amateur detectives, private eyes and amateur crime writers, and the readers' exposure to the textual arcana of the novel. In this section I apply, among others, Brown's and Peacock's reading of Auster's characters' metropolitan experience, in particular, their views on the relationship between the protagonists' subjective inner terrain and their physical outer territory. The critics' approach is followed by Merivale and Sweeney's theory of textual constraints and text as object, self-reflexive storytelling, reader-response and reception theory, next to Bernstein's concept of the locked room as a spatial and textual maze, and linked with it, Cook's idea of the locked room as the symbol of the writer's authorial power and the confining nature of writing as formulated by Fredman. The second part, devoted to Modiano's novel, explores a spatial dimension of the labyrinth as a reflection of the protagonist's mind and memory map and its textual aspect as central to the reading and approaching the detective narrative. On the other hand, search for identity in space and time, followed by the investigation of the breakdown of the hermeneutic code and the treatment of space as a textual realm, are the subjects of another particular scrutiny in this section. At this point, Ewert's, Botta's and Robinson's interpretations of a hermeneutics of suspicion, or critical openness, next to Foucault's theory of textual heterotopia, constitute significant contributions to the analysis of Modiano's work. When set beside a primarily spatial aspect of the labyrinth discussed with regard to *The New York Trilogy*, constituting the dominant

yet not exclusive factor of interpreting this postmodern detective novel, the tension between a traditional hermeneutics of time and a more modern hermeneutics of spatial detection, as formulated by Michel Foucault and advocated by Anna Botta, is an indispensable comparative component of approaching *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*. Irrespective of the thematic and structural differences the two texts exhibit, both of them deftly manipulate and subvert the elements of traditional detection and investigation, reinforcing an aura of non-solution, failure of the detective quest, ambivalent relations between the author, narrators and characters, and a complex, painstaking process of reading Auster's and Modiano's self-reflexive, deconstructive detective narratives.

The purpose of the third chapter, "Various faces of temporal labyrinth in Paul Auster's, Patrick Modiano's and Alain Robbe-Grillet's narratives", is to examine the concept of time in three texts: *The Book of Illusions* by Paul Auster, *Quartier perdu* by Patrick Modiano and *Les Gommages* by Alain Robbe-Grillet. Whereas the idea of time is partly the subject of analysis linked with the hermeneutics of spatial detection discussed in the preceding chapter, this part undertakes to scrutinise closely the three novelists' distinct approaches to time, with special emphasis being placed on temporal circularity, void, relativity and ambiguity. In this chapter I apply Genette's categorisation of narrative order, extended by the study of temporal ordering undertaken by Kawakami, next to Fedosova's, Warehime's, Tibbitts's, Cooper's and Durozoi's showcasing temporal disorder in the three selected novels. All the examined texts reflect the abandoning of the chronological order of events, thus breaking the logical sequence of time/space and the analogy between cause and effect in the story. Temporal distortion and an individual perception of time are what define Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's narratives, however, each of them is a unique illustration of the ways the writers approach temporal labyrinth and use its forms.

In *The Book of Illusions* the American author employs spiral time, overlapping mostly the past and the present, and a sequence of fractured narratives as a mirroring of the fragmented, chaotic, atemporal nature of existence in the present. In Auster's postmodern mystery novel temporal circularity, reflecting an enigmatic, disorientating process of searching for the missing person and simultaneously one's self, replaces linear progression and unravelling of the mystery with a sceptical post-historical present. This book is scrutinised largely with reference to Fedosova's (2015) and Heise's

(1997) concepts of temporal distortion and fragmentation, enhanced by Carstensen's highlighting metaphysical and existential dimensions of the detection and identity search in Auster's text on the one hand, and Peacock's emphasising the burden of representation and postmodernist intertextual playfulness of the novel on the other hand. The idea of circular time, explored in the first part of this chapter, is foregrounded while analysing *Quartier perdu*. Here, I use the theories of Gérard Genette and Akane Kawakami as a proposition to view temporal ordering in the text reflecting the narrator's personal experience with time based on geography in lieu of chronology and an illustration of the circularity of his narration. The above critics' narrative and temporal schemes are points of departure for the exploration of temporal disorder in Robbe-Grillet's experimental detective novel. Nevertheless, in opposition to the preceding texts, mirroring principally the protagonists' individual treatment of time in their undertaking investigative journeys as pretexts to explore their traumatised pasts, *Les Gommages* foregrounds temporal circularity as an alienating and disorientating experience for the character who fails in his investigative work by being subjected to the dictates of the novel's fictional universe. In this respect, Robbe-Grillet's text underlines a destabilising, hallucinatory, anti-humane, dimension of time when set beside its existential and metaphysical facets as evidenced in Auster's and Modiano's novels.

Spatial maze and temporal distortion provide an accurate reflection of labyrinthine, tempestuous identity relations which become the central point of the analysis in chapter four, "Narrative and narrated confinement: labyrinths of identity in Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's texts". As a complex and highly ambivalent concept in postmodern crime writing, identity is approached from various angles in the four texts: *Travels in the Scriptorium* by Paul Auster, *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* by Patrick Modiano, *Les Gommages* and *La Reprise* by Patrick Modiano. This chapter incorporates the American and French writers' distinct addressing the notion of identity with respect to the motif of crime and investigation, while bringing into focus identity duality, ambiguity, hierarchy and confinement, being common denominators of their novels. In the examination of Auster's book, I attempt to place the idea of the locked room in the light of Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal as a determinant of human existence and problematize postmodernist reading of the hierarchical relationship between the author, narrators and the characters, referring to Brown's, Cook's, Alexander and Chatterjee's critical assumptions.

The process of the imprisonment of the literary subjects becomes closely linked to the status of the reader who is exposed to the metafictional game designed by the author and to the rules of his self-reflexive and self-referential novel.

Auster's delineation of torturous and highly ambiguous relations between the author, the characters and the reader, reflecting closely yet not exclusively those between the murderer, the victim and the detective, is central to the reading of Modiano's novel. Similarly to *Travels in the Scriptorium*, highlighting dual and equivocal roles of his protagonists, *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* mirrors the destabilisation of identities, particularly the reversal of the roles of the detective, the criminal and the victim, bringing into prominence the quest for one self. By referring to Kawakami's the *degré zéro* narrator, next to Boisdeffre's theory of "empty locus" of the narrative organisation, I foreground the concept of an empty narrator as an illustration of an individual's struggle with the vacuity and alienation of the contemporary world on the one hand, and the novel's ironic depiction of the process of investigation conducted by an unprofessional, disorientated detective on the other hand.

The two final sections of chapter four are dedicated to the study of power relations and double identities in Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages* and *La Reprise*. In the examination of the former text, accent will be placed on power hierarchies and the imprisonment of identities in the investigative cell of postmodernist writing. Among miscellaneous critical theories and approaches to Robbe-Grillet's novel, I refer to the Oedipus reading of *Les Gommages*, offered by Morrissette and Ewert, as well as Ramsay's and Dey's examination of hermeneutics of power and authority with regard to ambivalent and reversed statuses of the detective, the victim and the criminal. Double agents and ambiguous acts of espionage explored in Robbe-Grillet's first novel become the subject of particular study in *La Reprise*. When set beside all the previously discussed books in this chapter, the French writer's finally scrutinised work constitutes the most experimental reworking of the espionage genre and one of the most unique subversions of the detective fiction in general, bringing into focus duplicitous identities, such as double narrators and simultaneously twin characters, who embody double agents, suspects and victims.

The entire monograph attempts therefore to outline multifarious facets of Paul Auster's, Patrick Modiano's and Alain Robbe-Grillet's fiction in the light of their three leading elements. It simultaneously aims at demonstrating how the novelists overstep the boundary between detective and anti-detective fiction in pursuit of new, uncharted literary territories.

Chapter One

Tracing the metaphysical detective story – a historical and a theoretical perspective

1.1. Introduction

The study of the metaphysical detective story involves cultural background and numerous critical approaches ranging from the fields of literature, psychology, philosophy and science. The examination of the metaphysical detective story, a genre of largely 20th and 21st century experimental fiction with a complex relationship to the detective story, and a kinship to modernist and postmodernist fiction in general, has been recently extended to include the studies on the notions of existence, time-space relativity, cultural memory, identity and consciousness. The story is distinguished by the questions it raises about narrative, interpretation, the limits of knowledge and the sense of existence. The genre attracted authors as diverse as Edgar Allan Poe, Jorge Luis Borges, Umberto Eco, Flann O'Brien, Paul Auster, Alain Robbe-Grillet, George Perec, Patrick Modiano, Jedediah Berry, Gilbert Sorrentino and Stephen King. The metaphysical detective story which has challenged traditional detective story conventions, such as narrative closure and the detective's role as surrogate reader in order to ask questions about mysteries of being and knowing, has become pivotal for the readers endeavouring to understand the sense of existence, identity, the nature of human knowledge and the mystery of the universe. Besides, as an example of postmodern literary discourse, the metaphysical detective story draws on self-reflexive storytelling, reader-response and reception theory, deconstruction, hermeneutics, intertextuality, narratology, phenomenology and psychoanalytical criticism, and displays ontological concerns within an epistemological genre (Merivale 1999: 7).

The first thorough critical analysis of the metaphysical detective fiction was undertaken by a Canadian critic Patricia Merivale and an American analyst Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, in their edited monograph *Detecting Texts. The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*, published in 1999. Nevertheless, prior to Merivale's and Sweeney's book, several essays, articles and monographs devoted to this genre were published. The most prominent works include: Michael Holquist "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Postwar Fiction", in Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (eds.) (1983) *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, eds. Glenn W. Most, 149-74, Tani Stefano *The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian Fiction*, 1984, William V. Spanos "The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination", *Boundary 2* 1, 1 1972: 147-60. Reprinted in *Repetitions: The Postmodern Occasion in Literature and Culture*, 1987. 13-50, Ronald G. Walker and June M. Frazer (eds.) (1990) *The Cunning Craft: Original Essays on Detective Fiction and Contemporary Literary Theory* and Heta Pyrhönen (1994) *Murder from an Academic Angle: An Introduction to the Study of the Detective Narrative*. In 2018 Antoine Dechêne published *Detective Fiction and the Problem of Knowledge: Perspectives on the Metacognitive Mystery Tale* which takes a new and innovative approach to address aspects of the mystery tale that were not discussed extensively before. In the Introduction and the first chapter of the monograph, the author uses the term a metacognitive mystery tale instead of a metaphysical detective story in order to highlight the unfulfilled quest for knowledge. However, in Dechêne's monograph, a corpus of texts presenting "unreadable" mysteries which subvert traditional detective-story conventions, offer a multiplicity of motifs which closely reflect the metaphysical detective story, like the overwhelming presence of chance and the loss of the urban stroller in a labyrinthine text (Dechêne 2018: 3). These themes generate a vast array of epistemological and ontological concerns examined by the genre. *Detective Fiction and the Problem of Knowledge* which ranges across the work of a broad variety of both canonical and less-known authors like Edgar Allan Poe, Jorge Luis Borges, Paul Auster, or Roberto Bolaño, contributes to the burgeoning field of literary urban studies.

Apart from the above-mentioned works, in the 20th and 21st centuries the metaphysical detective story has received relatively little critical attention in contrast to such genres as gothic fiction, horror, whodunnit or

a thriller. Furthermore, when set beside miscellaneous late 20th and early 21st century detective story genres, such as spy fiction, ethnic postcolonial crime fiction, feminist crime fiction, Afro-American detective fiction, neo-gothic genre, crime in comics and the graphic novel, which have been frequently analysed and popularised by prominent crime story writers and analysts, such as Chester Himes, Barbara Neely or Frankie Bailey, the metaphysical detective story still remains an enigmatic genre, with its convoluted plot structure, self-reflexive concern with its own search for meaning, its subversive and parodic refinements as well as self-reflexive pastiche to imply that “reality” is unexplored, mysterious and indefinable.

Howard Haycraft was the first who coined the phrase “metaphysical detective story” in 1941 to delineate the paradoxical plots and philosophical-theological hypotheses of Chesterton’s Father Brown tales. Nevertheless, the term was redefined by Merivale (in “The Flaunting of Artifice”, 1967), and Holquist (in “Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Postwar Fiction”, 1971-72) who noticed that the emergence of this variant of detective fiction unveils more mystery than a denouement, and who showed how “«the new» metaphysical detective story finally obliterates the traces of the old which underline it” (Holquist 1971: 153). Finally, the definition of this phrase became significantly extended by Merivale and Sweeney in *Detecting Texts. The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism* (1999).

In “The Flaunting of Artifice” Merivale attributes the metaphysical detective story to the subversion, or a parodic form of the classic detective fiction. Referring to Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov, and indirectly to Alain Robbe-Grillet, she maintains that they “exploit for their own thematic purposes, all the narrative tricks and devices of the Gothic fantasy writers of the last two centuries, and they blend mannerism and Gothicism together in their single most important parodic pattern, the metaphysical detective story” (Merivale 1967: 37).

When set beside the analysis of the metaphysical detective story only with regard to its role of a parodic subgenre of detective fiction, in *Detecting Texts* Merivale and Sweeney justify the usage of the term “a metaphysical detective story” while juxtaposing it with a wider variety of designations, such as an “anti-detective story” (Spanos 1972: 154), or “metaphysical detective fiction” (Tani 1984: 24), a “deconstructive mystery” (Brantlinger 1987: 25), “ethical romance” (Scheick 1990: 90), a “post-*nouveau roman*

detective novel” (Sirvent 1999: 157), an “analytic detective story” (Irwin 1999: 27) and an “ontological detective story” (Gomel 1995: 346). A Canadian critic and an American analyst argue that Brantlinger’s phrase “deconstructive mysteries”, illustrated, most notably, by Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925) in which embedded texts “deconstruct” the crime-and-detection genre in parodic ways” in fact inordinately accentuates the narrower category of “deconstruction” instead of the more spacious “metaphysics” (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 3). Furthermore, Scheick’s “ethical romance”, the term used to denote how G. K. Chesterton’s detective stories encourage the reading public to analyse their own epistemological assumption (Scheick 1990: 90), fails to recognise the fact that such tales serve but to broaden the detective-story tradition whilst the metaphysical detective story defies it (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 3).

Furthermore, Merivale and Sweeney refer to the term “postmodern mystery”, justified by Dettmar who explained that “according to all commentators this perverted detective tale is a postmodern genre” (Dettmar 1990: 154). Nevertheless, the authors of *Detecting Texts* emphasise that “postmodernism” is a broad, variegated and polyvalent term which manages to be both protean and procrustean at the same time (Merivale 1997: 195) and that could be defined from the historical, thematic and formal standpoints. The critics remark that it ineluctably leads Dettmar to such incongruities as, for instance, endeavouring to apply the name “postmodern” to James Joyce’s story “The Sisters” written before World War II, and crediting the author of *Ulysses* with being an unheralded progenitor of postmodernism (Dettmar 1990: 154). Moreover, Merivale and Sweeney scrutinise a “post-nouveau roman detective novel”, coined by Sirvent, however, they assert that the term is applicable exclusively to novels, predominantly the French ones, written roughly within the last decades of the 20th century (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 3). As regards the “analytic detective fiction”, the category proposed by Irwin to differentiate Edgar Allan Poe’s and Jorge Luis Borges’s tales from those that explore explicitly a detective’s adventures, the critics maintain that the term closely reflects the stories’ self-reflexive concern with their own quest for meaning, yet it fails to distinguish between Poe’s early detective stories and the later, parodic versions of the genre he created (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 3,4). With respect to Gomel’s coinage, the critics point out that the “ontological” designation which addresses the genre’s

metafictional concerns and its correlation with science fiction, nonetheless excludes those tales that concentrate particularly on epistemology.

Ultimately, Merivale and Sweeney argue that the “metaphysical detective story” has been misleadingly considered synonymous with the “postmodern” detective story, or the “anti” detective story (Merivale 1999, Rzepka and Horsley 2010). The authors astutely observe that when set beside Tani’s designation which purposefully negates the entire detective genre (Tani 1984: 24), metaphysical detective stories constantly challenge the classical model of detective fiction, yet they “apply the detective process to that genre’s own assumptions about detection” (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 3). In this regard, they contradict the above view by Dettmar who justified the term “postmodern mystery”.

According to the critics, “metaphysical detection”, when juxtaposed with all the above-mentioned designations, denotes distinctly how late modernist, proto-modernist and postmodernist writers have altered and played with the conventions of the classic detective story. They assert that such authors have based their stories on Poe’s ratiocinative process to ponder fundamental epistemological and ontological questions about the capacity and reliability of human knowledge, the world’s reality and our own constructions of reality. Furthermore, in *The Mystery to a Solution* (1993)¹⁸, Irwin’s comprehensive account of what Borges’s three metaphysical detective stories of the early forties (“Death and the Compass”, “The Garden of Forking Paths” and “Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth”) owe in homage to the three works Poe wrote a century earlier (“The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, 1841, “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt”, 1842 and “The Purloined Letter”, 1844), the author proposes an epistemological allegory for metaphysical detection. According to it, there is no solution, only the wrong or incomprehensible elucidation, or, as in Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1983), a purposeless, disordered, fortuitous solution (Merivale 2010: 309).

Besides these aspects, Merivale and Sweeney argue that the metaphysical detective stories constitute a unique blend of 17th-century English literature and the 20th-century Italian art. On the one hand, they echo the abstract conceits, wit, ingenuity, a liking for paradox and a caustic

¹⁸ Irwin, John T. (1991). *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

humour of (17th-century) “metaphysical” English poets (Cuddon 1992: 508). On the other hand, they reflect the bizarre images of 20th-century “metaphysical” Italian surrealist painters whose works are saturated with marvellous symbols, intricate ironies, incongruous juxtapositions and self-reflexive pastiche to point out that “reality” is enigmatic and unexplored (Cawelti 1980: 196; Tisdall 1971: 7-9). Similarly, metaphysical detective stories, encompassing elements of parody, paradox, contradiction, epistemological allegory and impenetrable mystery, overtly call into question the nature of reality.

1.2. A historical and literary background of the metaphysical detective story

Although the metaphysical detective story has been thoroughly studied in the second half of the 20th century, its roots go back, in fact, to the 19th century. The genre was inaugurated by Poe’s self-reflexive, philosophical, consciously literary detective stories in the 1840s. Poe, who is indubitably regarded as the pioneer of detective fiction, determined the course of the genre and paved the way for the metaphysical detective story both with its Dupin tales, and especially with his earlier stories, most notably “William Wilson” (1939) and “The Man of the Crowd” (1940). The American author introduced such key generic tropes as the armchair detective, the purloined letter, the spurious text, the gumshoe, and the missing person. Poe’s detective stories were first followed by Doyle’s adventures in positivistic detection, in the 1890s whose material served as parody and challenge for future writers. Subsequently, Howard Haycraft in *Murder for Pleasure* (1941) attributed the term to Chesterton’s early 20th-century tales, in which earthly crimes became solved largely thanks to divine mysteries, and only partly by the human mind.

Poe is credited with inaugurating not only classic detective fiction and its “offshoot”, the metaphysical detective story, but also a self-reflexive storytelling which closely reflects postmodernist fiction (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 6). Prior to the scrutiny of Poe’s contribution to creating two most illustrious modes of the metaphysical detective story, the soft-boiled detective fiction and its hard-boiled variant, it is worth underlining the impact of the French literary tradition, with the accent being placed on the detective

story, on the oeuvre of the American writer. In fact, a number of critics strive to conceive and interpret the phenomenon of France, particularly the French capital city, as the setting for the first American modern detective stories (such as “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841)) (Goulet 2015: 1). Ironically enough, Poe had never set foot in France while creating the first Dupin mystery. Nevertheless, he had paved the way for his worldly ambitions with French or French-sounding pseudonyms (“Henri Le Rennet”), protagonists (“The Duke de l’Omelette”) as well as epigraphs (La Bruyère’s “Ce grand malheur, de ne pouvoir être seul”) for a number of years (Goulet: 2015: 1). Furthermore, from the social and historical perspective, Paris, constituting the background for the tales like “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, was a home to the *Gazette des Tribunaux* which disseminated detailed information about domestic crimes to a readership and a place in which a former thief, Eugène François Vidocque, is said to become director of the Sûreté Nationale. Paris is the place where a detective agency was found and where Vidocq’s autobiography was published to a world-wide renown. By referring to the *Gazette* and Vidocque in his first tales of ratiocination, the American author used in 1841 what may nowadays be defined as “Global French”, a language that paradoxically reaches transnational proportions and, in Poe’s texts, is placed in a transatlantic context, preserving simultaneously local particularity.

Numerous critics, among others Dechêne and Goulet, scrutinise Poe’s stories’ affinity with the French crime fiction. In this regard they take the tales of the American author as the starting point for the metaphysical or metacognitive detective genre, defined to comprise modern crime fiction, originating from popular *feuilletons* of the nineteenth-century sensationalist press to twenty-first-century novels in the *Série noire* and incorporating the classic, detective-centred *roman policier* (Goulet 2015: 2). Nonetheless, while attributing the growth and popularity of the detective fiction in the Anglo-American world with the French setting to Poe, it would be an oversimplification to stake that the American novelist was the inventor of detective fiction as a distinct genre. Firstly, one may trace the archaic roots of the genre’s epistemology: from Oedipus via the Chinese Judge Ti, premodern heroes unveiled mysteries through induction from clues and evidence. On the other hand, one cannot fail to notice that the immense proliferation of criminal fictions in the nineteenth century was particularly shaped by modern practices of policing the industrialised city (Goulet 2015: 11).

Subsequently, one could apply to Poe's tales the approach used by Bruno Latour in his examination of Pasteur's apparently ex nihilo microbial revelation: nothing, not even the world's "first modern detective story", is completely new (Goulet 2015: 12). It is beyond doubt that crime-centred fiction was previously in *l'air du temps*, with Honoré de Balzac's judiciary novel *Une ténébreuse affaire* which emerged as a series in *Le Commerce* in 1841 and Eugène Sue's literary tour de force – novel of the *bas-fonds* on the near horizon: *Les Mystères de Paris*, published in the *Journal de Débats* (1842-1843). Furthermore, the symbolic transfer of James Fenimore Cooper's native American clue-tracking onto the urban topography of Paris (Goulet 2015: 15) reflects as well the characteristics of investigation.

Although the arena of influence on modern and postmodern crime and detective fiction in the USA and Europe, specifically France, encompasses numerous elements, such as the rise of mass printing and of the popular press (including its *faits divers*) (Goulet 2015: 14), the *romans judiciaires* of Balzac, the increase of sensational fictions which become the battlefield for science and supernatural that vie to unravel mystery, along with the new methods and technologies of the *police scientifique*, it is Poe's detective and crime short stories that are given interpretative privilege (Goulet 2015: 3). It is due to the fact that his tales' uncomplicated structure – moving from criminal mystery to resolution through investigation – shapes detective-centred narration. Moreover, his Chevalier Auguste Dupin, frequently identified by Gaboriau and Doyle as the forerunner to their own fictional detectives, became an archetypal detective figure in Anglo-American literature the moment when Poe paved the way for his deductive reasoning (Goulet 2015: 3). Interestingly enough, the French reading public regarded the tales of the American author as profoundly original, all the more novel and eccentric, constituting "uncanny amalgamations of analysis and unreason" (Goulet 2015: 17)¹⁹. Nevertheless, Poe's tales like "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" encompassed the essence of everything that has blossomed in French detective fiction from the mid-nineteenth century to the contemporary times – from its turbulent

¹⁹ Gaboriau, regarded as the father of French detective fiction, acknowledged Poe's debt to the Americans. His biographer Roger Bonniot (*Émile Gaboriau ou la naissance du roman policier*) states that Poe was an innovator of the *roman policier* form, yet he simultaneously notes that Poe's algebraic dryness and lack of material "fonds" keeps him from being the true inventor of the genre (*Émile Gaboriau ou la naissance du roman policier* (1984). Paris: Vrin, 165.

relation to rationality to the local logic of a nation facing internal crime and colonial violence on the one hand, as well as from the significant transformation of the ratiocinative genre into its subversive, avant-garde and postmodern variants on the other hand.

Poe's tales' reflecting the social and cultural milieu of French detective fiction has inaugurated and popularised the process of transatlantic detective and crime literature studies in the USA and France. Albeit being a powerful role model in popularising American and French links in the detective literature, he was not the sole pioneer displaying American –French affinity. Hence, prior to exploring Poe's contribution to the creation and modification of the metaphysical detective story, and its impact on American and European countries, it is worth referring first to some pivotal linking patterns in North American and French detective genre in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Among miscellaneous literary practices of American and French detective story writers during the Belle Époque period one ought to mention Alexandre Dumas's *Les Mohicans de Paris* (1854), being a police investigation which alluded to James Fenimore Cooper and Eugène Sue. Another glaring example is Émile Gaboriau's publication of the mid-1860s novels which were inspired by Poe's closed chamber mysteries on the one hand and Sue's melodramatic urban settings on the other hand (Peltier 1998: 77). Due to the rapid circulation of mystery stories among a number of other genres of romance and adventure in the American newspaper market, Sue's *Mystères* became modelled in the USA, commencing in 1848 with Ned Buntline's *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York*.

With respect to Poe's contribution to French crime literature, one cannot fail to notice the impact of the gothic on the American writer who, in turn, is credited with influencing Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry (Peltier 1998: 78). The gothic constituted a crucial link between French and American crime literary tradition, evolving into *noir* and hard-boiled fiction which marked significant parallels as well as distinctions in both countries. It is worth mentioning that the Surrealists expressed their esteem for both the gothic and for Sue. On the one hand, in the first manifesto of surrealism, André Breton remarked on Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk*. On the other hand, Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre's *Fantômas* became a source of inspiration for a number of the Surrealists, and Sue was regarded as a reference owing to the fact that the literary practice implicit in the writing of serials was closely linked to *l'écriture automatique*. Furthermore, in a 1943 entry in his journal,

André Gide expressed his admiration for Hammett's works whilst Albert Camus revealed that he had been influenced by Horace McCoy in his idea of *L'Étranger* (1958).

The above exploration of pivotal genealogical relations between American and French crime literary tradition paths, significantly marked by the penetrating influence of Poe, has shown the changing condition of the genre in both countries in the late 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century. However, the scrutiny of the crucial aspects of postmodern American and French detective fiction territories ought to be preceded by the analysis of Poe's impact on shaping two most renowned modes of the metaphysical detective story, the soft-boiled detective fiction, chiefly attributed to Doyle, Christie and Chesterton, and the hard-boiled detective fiction, popularised by Chandler and Hammett. Although the soft-boiled and the hard-boiled detective stories were written in the first half and in the middle of the 20th century, and thus reflected classical models of the detective fiction, both of them, along with less frequent "postmodernised" police procedural, delineated the absence or perversion of the traditional "solution" to the investigation that mostly distinguishes the postmodern era (Merivale 2010: 308). Nonetheless, the structure and thematic components of these early 20th-century categories of the metaphysical detective fiction cannot tally with their late 20th-century and early 21st-century counterparts. The soft-boiled detective fiction, also called "Christie" types and the hard-boiled detective stories, or Chandler kinds, although experimenting with some conventions of the classic detective fiction, such as identity and narrative closure, still provide an explanation to the crime and show that order finally triumphs over bedlam, unlike in the works of Borges, Eco, Auster, Robbe-Grillet and Modiano which are metaphors for de-centred self, a fragmented consciousness and a labyrinthine world.

While analysing the soft-boiled mode of the metaphysical detective story, one ought to refer to its three principal paradoxes, inaugurated by Poe and followed by Chesterton, Christie, Doyle, Borges, Eco and Nabokov. The paradox of Something Hidden in Plain Sight is illustrated in Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (1844) by the over-largely lettered signs which, according to Dupin, "escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious... too palpably self-evident" (Poe 1985: 475). Likewise, Chesterton employs Poe's paradox in "The Sign of the Broken Sword" (1911) where Father Brown, during the reconstruction of a historical crime, hides a murdered body among

soldiers killed in a battle solely for the sake of concealing that particular corpse. A similar strategy is implemented by Christie in *The ABC Murders* (1936) where the crucial four murders are committed in the alphabetical sequence, which potentially implies 26 murders, all of them being of almost equal importance, thus no singular crime among the four is distinguished. As for Borges, he adapts a paradox of a map of the world, which, in order to be absolutely exact, has to be as large as the world itself, and therefore endlessly regressive. Finally, it is worth referring to Eco who, in *The Name of the Rose*, leaves the missing, banned poisoned manuscript of *Aristotle on Comedy*, in a visible place twice (Merivale 2010: 309).

Poe's consecutive paradox of the Locked Room could be observed initially in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" in which two seemingly unfeasible murders take place in a room inaccessible to humans at the moment they are committed. Thus, Poe's culprit becomes an exceptionally dextrous orangutan. As for Doyle, his two stories, "The Adventures of the Speckled Band" and "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (both 1892), slightly challenge the convention with the use of a secret passage in the first case, and an effective camouflage in the second, as well as of numerous other inventive variations. Finally, the paradox of the Least Likely Suspect, also known as "the butler did it" is a strategy which indicates that a person, or an animal, such as Poe's orangutan in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and Doyle's eponymous thoroughbred in *Silver Blaze*, albeit being initially regarded as the "unlikely" category, becomes in fact the most "likely" at the end.

All the aforementioned paradoxes are merged in Chesterton's "The Invisible Man" (2003b) in which the reader may not encounter anyone going into or coming out of the house where the crime was committed, except the postman (Merivale 2010: 310). A more metafictional, and thus potentially metaphysical phrase, "I, the first-person narrator, did it", could be employed with respect to Christie's *Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) which introduced the "unreliable narrator" as an alternative for "the least likely suspect". The figure of the murderer-narrator sparked strident criticism among the ideologists of fair play who charged the author with dislodging detective Poirot from the privileged position in the text and thus postponing the solution to the mystery. Needless to say, critics such as Lovitt assert that Christie created Dr Sheppard as the narrator-murderer in order to reveal in her novel how a classic detective genre exerts fundamentally conservative pressures to oppose experiments that menace to transgress or extend its

boundaries (Lovitt 1990: 83). The paradox of “I, the first-person narrator did it” could be found in other novels that followed Poe’s, Chesterton’s and Christie’s detective traditions, Nabokov’s Kinbote in *Pale Fire* (1963) being particularly memorable, along with Martin Amis’s Sam in *London Fields* (1989). In *Pale Fire*, frequently referred to as a deconstructive anti-detective novel, the author puts forward a “double solution”: on the one hand, the fantastic and irrational one the murderer Kinbote attempts to impose on the reader, and, on the other hand, the credible and rational one the reader-detective manages to work out through Kinbote’s errors (Tani 1984: 145). As for Amis’s text, it shows the readers the identity of the murderer only in the final pages of the novel, yet from the beginning of the story we are informed that the main female character, and simultaneously the co-narrator of the book, is going to be murdered. Interestingly enough, *London Fields*, often labelled as a “whydoid” (Finney, “Narrative”, 1995), investigates why it is the narrator Sam who ultimately kills the female protagonist (Stolarek 2015: 63).

When concluding the analysis of the soft-boiled paradoxes initiated by Poe, it is worth mentioning the phenomenon of the “spurious key texts”, inaugurated by the American writer, and continued by Chesterton, Christie, Borges and Eco. In his book, Black (1991) introduces the concept of the spurious key text of Poe which distinguishes “key” from “prize” texts as well as unreadability from unintelligibility, and further demonstrates how Chesterton adapts components of “The Purloined Letter” in his story “The Wrong Shape” (1911) where Father Brown resolves the case by deducing from the medium, which is an oddly cut piece of paper, the falsity of the hypothetical message. Subsequently, Black refers to Borges who, modelling on Chesterton’s story and Christie’s *The ABC Murders*, elaborates his own version, in “La muerte y la brújula” (1944) (“Death and the Compass”, trans. Anthony Kerrigan 1954) of spurious key texts, and to Eco who employs this device in *The Name of the Rose* (1983) and *Foucault’s Pendulum* (1988). In conclusion, Black extends the subjects into the postmodernist realm of Pynchon’s *V.* (1963) and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) as well as DeLillo’s *Ratner’s Star* (1976) (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 12).

Having explored Poe’s three paradoxes and the phenomenon of the spurious key texts, one may notice that the history of the metaphysical detective fiction, particularly its soft-boiled model, inaugurated by Poe, followed by Chesterton, Christie, Borges, Eco and other prominent writers, such as Nabokov, encompasses diverse, dissimilar texts conveying double,

sometimes polyvalent meanings and cryptic messages. It comes as no surprise that Chesterton's, Christie's and partly Doyle's books, albeit demonstrating the indeterminacy of human action and the contingency of our perception of good and evil in other humans (Farrell 1990: 65-66), together with revealing troublesome aspects of the detective's, the culprit's and the victim's identities, in fact depict the detective's genuine search for truth, and fairness along with his moral and tactical victory over the criminal. In contrast, the works of Borges reflect defeats of detection, the detective's failure to obtain a prize text and solve the case due to his constant misreading of the key text, whereas the novels of Eco mirror the contingent solution or disordered solution. Borges secularised Chesterton's Christian metaphysics while valuing his paradoxes, and in this regard paved the way for the self-referential, metafictional idiosyncrasies, the "flaunting of artifice" (Merivale 1967: 209) which defines postmodern detective stories, and the postmodern in general (Merivale 2010: 309). Unlike Chesterton whose stories could be referred to as epistemological allegories for metaphysical detection in which Father Brown faces with apprehension "a maze with *no* centre" (Chesterton 2003a: 229), Borges apparently revels in writing about a journey into a labyrinth that is centreless and void (Merivale 2010: 309). Chesterton and Borges both adopt crucial elements from Poe's metaphysics, however, they use them for disparate aims: the former confronts his protagonists with threatening situations which are finally resolved and enables his implied reader to experience ontological and epistemological disorientation which in the end turns out to be therapeutic, whilst the latter seemingly finds pleasure in torturing his characters – the detectives and setting an intellectual trap for his reader in order to eventually reveal the purposelessness of their investigative endeavours. The intriguing mysteries in Chesterton's stories, often reflecting divine powers, soon remain unveiled and solved, thus conveying the sense of security, causality and order, whereas Borges's labyrinthine world is saturated with uncertainty, centrelessness and contingency.

A number of critics, including Holquist, perceive a similarity between Poe, Borges, Robbe-Grillet and Nabokov, referring to their dexterous manipulation of the readers and subverting the classical model of detective fiction. With reference to the last-mentioned author, one can notice that five of his major fictions end in fatal gunshots, and a few of his most crucial protagonists, such as Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* (1955), or Kinbote in *Pale*

Fire (1962), are cosmic detectives, who endeavour to find a solution to the crime of their own existence (Holquist 1971: 154). Analogously to Nabokov, Borges and Robbe-Grillet exemplify postmodernist writers who skilfully play with the conventions of the detective story, using the genre for plots and surprises. The writers depend on the readers' familiarity with the rules of the detective story to provide the subtext they may then use by defying expectations. According to Holquist, one of the most general expectations based on reading and interpreting classic detective stories, which postmodernist writers violate, is that of syllogistic *order* (Holquist 1971: 155). Similarly to Poe's texts, Borges' and Robbe-Grillet's stories mirror a deep sense of chaos and the world's anarchy. Nonetheless, contrary to Poe, Borges and Robbe-Grillet are not able to assuage that sense by offering the automatic certainty, the ratiocination and hyper-logic of the classic detective story. Borges, Robbe-Grillet, Nabokov and other postmodernist writers undermine the assumption of detective fiction that ratiocination and common sense are the keys to the solution of the criminal puzzle: they show that by misinterpreting the clues and evidence, the opposite explanation becomes the case. This is neatly illustrated in Borges's story "The Garden of Forking Paths". In this work the author builds the entire effect upon the conflict between two levels, the first being an unsettling philosophical proposition about a construction of a temporal, in place of a spatial labyrinth, and the second constituting a frame story, a form of narration incorporating all the conventions of detective, and some elements of spy fiction. The most disturbing effect is offered at the story's conclusion which constitutes a stark contrast to the traditional model of detective fiction, represented by Christie or Sayers. Instead of proposing a logical solution to the crime and thus providing a reassuring effect of demonstrating a human mind's capacity to order and control the world, Borges's tale offers an alternative ending, its unclear explanation and unconvincing logic in view of the complexity that led to it.

When set beside the three principal "soft-boiled" paradoxes of Poe's most renowned detective stories, paradoxes of identity come to the fore in the exploration of the category of "Chandleresque" hard-boiled private eye stories which stemmed from the American 19th-century writer. The texts like Poe's "William Wilson", a variant of the Gothic "Double" story, incorporate the "tail job", a key element of the Private Eye's assignment which could equally refer to a quest for identity (Merivale 2010: 311). Needless to say, this element is first visible in "The Man of the Crowd". This tale has been seldom

perceived as part of Poe's detective story tradition, except for Jashan's recent article (2008) which corroborates Merivale's (1999: 104-7) viewpoint of the story's substantial contribution to the "hard-boiled" tradition, particularly to its metaphysical elements. Merivale and Sweeney demonstrate that Poe's story profoundly shaped the hard-boiled detective fiction and a "metaphysical hard-boiled detective story", or "Gumshoe Gothic" (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 12, original emphasis). The critics state that "The Man of the Crowd", exemplifying a gumshoe gothic, examines the trope of the missing person, a person followed and shadowed through endless, labyrinthine city streets but never in fact found. Poe's story, illustrating the process during which his eponymous protagonist shadows and is being simultaneously shadowed by an "imaginary" person, became a model for: Chesterton in "The Painful Fall of a Great Reputation" (1905); Greene, in "A Day Saved" (1935), Abe, in *The Face of Another* (1964) and *Inter Ice Age 4* (1970), and most noticeably by Auster, in *The New York Trilogy* (1987). The latter work is also a notable example of postmodernist intertextual gumshoe gothic or a private eye story in which, as Bernstein (1999: 150) claims, one can trace the blend of 19th-century American and 20th-century European literary tradition. In *The New York Trilogy* an evident influence of Poe's story, along with Hawthorne's and Melville's texts reflecting the play of "light" and "darkness", corresponds with the impact of Beckettian self-negation. It is Auster's powerful combination of a deep 19th-century American pessimism and a threatening postmodernist French solipsism that distinguishes his novel.

In the exploration of the hard-boiled mode of the metaphysical detective fiction, Merivale further highlights a similarity between Poe's narrator in "The Man of the Crowd" and the hard-boiled private eye in Hammett's and Chandler's novels. Poe's detective, as well as Hammett's and Chandler's private investigators, frequently happen to be integral parts of the corrupted world to which they are expected to bring sanity and order, however, sometimes at the cost of being suspects themselves (Merivale 2010: 311). Considering metaphysical descendants of the Private Eye, it is worth mentioning Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages* (1953) which reflects the slippage from detective to criminal. In *Les Gommages* whose main character, Agent Wallas, shoots dead the man whose presumed death he was investigating, one notices an inextricable link between an existential accident and the protagonist's Oedipal fate, a recurring motif in Robbe-Grillet's later novel, *La Reprise* (2001). The theme of the detective's defeat of a murderer becomes

conspicuous in Borges's "Death and the Compass" in which detective Lönnrot shows up at the supposed site of the fourth murder, only to become the fourth and simultaneously the last victim of the skilled criminal. Another modification of the hard-boiled detective fiction can be found in the books where the detective becomes the "missing person", like in Auster's *The New York Trilogy* ("The Ghosts"), Modiano's *Rue des boutiques obscures* or Berry's *The Manual of Detection* (2009). Such "slippages" are significant elements of metaphysical narratives which, as becoming more distinctly metafictional, come to be more postmodern (Merivale 2010: 311). This process is visible especially in Auster's novels in which detective-as-writer becomes substituted with writer-as-detective whose task is to report on the man being chased, or comes to be detective-as-author, and detective-as-reader.

The metaphysical "tail job" story, remaining presumably the most successful offshoot of the metaphysical detective tale, attracts, apart from the above-mentioned writers, such authors as Hubert Aquin (*Neige Noir*, trans. *Hamlet's Twin*, 1974 and *Trou de mémoire*, trans. *Blackout*, 1968), Graham Greene ("A day Saved", 1935), José Saramago (*The Double*, 2002), Orhan Pamuk (*Snow*, 2002), Samuel Beckett (*Molloy*, 1953), John Maxwell Coetzee (*Life and Times of Michael K*, 1983) and Kobo Abe (*The Face of Another*, 1964). The last of the aforementioned authors accurately concludes the quintessence of the metaphysical tail job story stating that one man pursues another in order to "understand" him, yet in the end he realises that he himself becomes that man: "No matter how I follow myself around, I will never see anything but my own backside" (Abe 1977: 37).

Beckett's *Molloy*, albeit not being regarded as a standard detective story, remains a metaphysical masterpiece which exerted a considerable influence on Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* in which the protagonist, the Medical Officer, is modelled on Agent Moran figure, and especially on Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, which closely mirrors Beckett's spirit. Like in the work of the Irish writer, in *The New York Trilogy* one may encounter doubling characters who fail their "tail jobs" in each story, all of them being "metaphysical", although in three diverse styles, and synonymous. Moreover, at the end of each part of *The Trilogy* there appears the detective, analogously to a new Wakefield (Merivale 2010: 312). It can be observed that the vanishing eponymous character of Hawthorne's source story who is often evoked in "Ghosts" becomes synonymous with "Flitcraft" in Hammett's *Maltese Falcon* and mentioned in Borges's essay on Hawthorne (1949).

Wakefield populates the works of miscellaneous authors, embodying the fate of the missing persons, like Perec's Anton Vowl, Eco's Adso, or Ackroyd's Hawksmoor.

A crucial constituent of the "tail job" story is the Gothic Double motif which occurs in the books of Saramago, King, O'Brien or Sorrentino. Saramago's *The Double* (2004) offers a moving portrayal of the "antagonist", asserting to be "me" in a phone call and thus initiating a more delicate and sorrowful struggle for identity through love. Conversely, King's "Umney's Last Case" (*Nightmares and Dreamscapes*, 1993) constitutes a darkly comic tribute to Chandler, and indirectly to Auster in which the "antagonist", being the "author", creates the character of Umney, his private eye, out of "fictional" life, only to usurp that role. Nevertheless, it turns out that the protagonist's and his creator's roles have been barely reversed since after some time Umney, living the life of his writer, works out how to retaliate against his author. Thus, the story reflects upon metafictional parricide (the protagonist's revenge on his "paternal" creator) being preceded by metafictional infanticide (the author's attempts to annihilate his fictional "child"). "Umney's Last Case", evoking O'Brien's *At-Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew* (1979), Martin Amis's *Other People* (1981) and partly *Money* (1984), as well as echoing Auster's *Man in the Dark* (2008), incorporates the self-reflexive comic strategy according to which the protagonists in a book return to "life", being released from their creator's surveillance, enduring their author's withdrawal of authorship (Diedrick 2004: 99), and, finally aiming to annihilate their fictional author, in a postmodern game.

In the examination of the typology of the metaphysical detective fiction, one ought to mention the genre's branch of "historiographic metafiction", most vividly exemplified by Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and its followers. Among numerous narrative and thematic components thoroughly examined by Eco in *Postscript to the Name of the Rose* (1989), such as medievalism, the mask, the process of reading and writing, the detective metaphysics, the novel as a cosmological event or, postmodernism, irony and the enjoyment, critics like Merivale and Black accentuate disorientating, labyrinthine liminal spaces of the mediaeval monastery building and the process in which Eco's blind librarian Jorge deftly manipulates people and texts while allegedly fulfilling the prophecy of the apocalyptic Book of Revelation. Likewise, Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985) is both a "historiographic" and "metafictional" detective story where guilt mingling with fate are transformed into "ekphrastic

architectures” (Merivale 2010: 313). Nonetheless, when set beside *The Name of the Rose*, Ackroyd’s text is by far more “Gothic” and “occult”, thus bearing more resemblance to *Foucault’s Pendulum* (1989). *Hawksmoor* is an antiphonal novel which combines two epochs by Gothic metempsychosis. In this book the author shows how the murder of several small boys committed by the architect, Dryer, to conform his devotion to the Evil Powers, sanctions the successful erection of respective churches in London after the Great Fire. In the successive pages of the novel, however, we encounter the detective, Hawksmoor, who, two centuries later, in a kind of occult police procedural, investigates an analogous series of murders, becoming gradually involved in them in the extent of losing his own identity and assuming that of Dryer (Merivale 2010: 313). As *Hawksmoor’s* “historiographic” and “metafictional” constituents of the metaphysical detective story owe greatly to *The Name of the Rose*, the element of the metafictional “double”, conspicuous in Ackroyd’s text, is closely reflected in Nabokov’s *The Real Life of Sebastian Night* (1941) and Auster’s “The Locked Room”, where, dismissing the motif of the occult, we witness in the final pages of the books a coalescence of identities.

The scrutiny of the evolution of the metaphysical detective story, originating from Poe’s “armchair detective” (Dupin) and thus mirroring its soft-boiled variant and announcing its followers, along with the author’s gumshoe (the narrator of “The Man of the Crowd”), echoing its hard-boiled offshoot and its subsequent practitioners, through its branch of “historiographic metafiction”, leads ultimately to the examination of its modernist and postmodernist generic movements.

Modernists such as Agatha Christie and Georges Simenon are perceived by critics like Sirvent as inventors of generative constraints. During his examination Sirvent and Merivale point to *nouveau roman* codes and constraints abounding in Michel Butor’s *L’Emploi du temps* (1957), Robert Pinget’s *L’Inquisiteur* (1963) and Robbe-Grillet’s *Le Voyeur* (1955) and *Dans le labyrinthe* (1959). They stress the fact that code texts monitor the action, rendering it comprehensible when, analogously to cryptograms, they are decoded, like Oedipus in *Les Gammes*, the Tetragrammaton in “Death and the Compass”, the Book of Revelation in *The Name of the Rose*, or the nursery rhyme in Christie’s *Ten Little Indians* (1939). Sirvent draws special attention to the genre’s strategies, such as multiple intertexts and textualized Oedipal threads, vividly depicted in Robbe-Grillet’s *Les Gammes* and in *La Reprise*

(2002), the last of which is officially considered a spy story, despite reflecting more accurately a postmodern metaphysical detective story in which a detective and a narrator turns into a culprit, as seen in Claude Ollier's *La Mise en scène* (1958). It is also worth adding that Borges's and Robbe-Grillet's works are illustrative examples of postmodern detective stories which exploit the conventions of the classic detective story and thus challenge the modernist detective fiction writers' attempts to fill the void of the world with their belief in the power of the human mind and common sense. Instead, Borges and Robbe-Grillet dramatize the void and the world's chaos. Paradoxically enough, when set beside the problem of death solution in the classic detective story, in the metaphysical detective story, like *Les Gommages* and "Death and the Compass", it is *life* that ought to be solved (Holquist 1971: 155).

With reference to Christie and Simenon, Sirvent remarks that the novelists' generative constraints mingled with these early *nouveau roman* strategies herald the beginning of "the post-*nouveau roman* detective novel" (Sirvent 1999: 157). It is illustrated in the way hard-boiled and soft-boiled detective stories are rewritten and redefined by Benoît Peeters, Jean Lahougue, and, most markedly, Georges Perec. The first of the above-mentioned authors writes fictions modelled on Christie's classic detective stories, such as *La Bibliothèque de Villers* (1980) whose title forms the anagram of the culprit: one is supposed to find the book itself in order to be considered guilty. Lahougue's rewriting of Simenon, a hugely influential successor of Chandler, indirectly a cross between Christie and Chandler and father of brooding, contemplative policemen in contemporary detective fiction, closely reflects Peeters's reexamination of Christie's stories. Interestingly enough, Lahougue's dimension of intertextual reworking, combined with Simenon's motifs and Robbe-Grillet's poetics, creates a narratological critique which defies memory and identity. Finally, Perec's *53 jours* (1989), mirroring Christie's stories, constitutes intertextual reading as investigation (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 14). The novel's narrative structure could be compared to a box with four false bottoms comprising *mises en abyme* and overlapping narratives. The text exhibits an embedded narrative pattern "whose center is the detective novel" (Perec 1989: 199), the author of which happens to be, on the one hand, a false victim, and, on the other hand, a real culprit, and whose fictional reader-narrator turns out to be the investigator – in order to be ultimately deceived and found the accused (Sirvent 1999: 170-171). Moreover, the capricious embedding of overlapping

narratives mirrors the structure of a labyrinthine inquiry into one's own past, also a recurrent motif in the works of Auster, Modiano or Tabucchi. *53 jours* incorporates elements of fantasy, autobiography, detective story and the puzzle game in which "Perc" himself comes into view to fulfil the role of the final investigator. Similarly to other post-*nouveaux romans*, the book does not offer any explanation of the mystery, therefore it is the reader that bears responsibility for undertaking a textual investigation through a re-reading, recognising and interpreting scattered textual signs, by searching for clues in the narration instead of in what is narrated (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 15).

When set beside Sirvent's in-depth exploration of Ollier's, Lahougue's and Perc's textual constraints, being equivalent to the shift from modernist to postmodernist detective stories, Ewert addresses McHale's definition of the change from modernism to postmodernism to a shift from mainly hermeneutical to ontological issues. Basing on some critics' view of postmodernism in terms of its ontological instability or indeterminacy (McHale 1987: 26), Ewert asserts that defeated or dead detectives, and frequently their victims, dissuade the reader from the search for knowledge which reflected the core of epistemological concerns. In her examination of metaphysical detection and ontological quests, the critic focuses on the metaphysical detective stories by Jorge Luis Borges, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Heimito von Doderer, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Umberto Eco, and particularly Georges Perc, whose novel *La Disparition* (1969) (*A Void*, trans. Gilbert Adair, 1995) is subject to the analyst's careful scrutiny. Being regarded as tour de force in French as well as in its English translation, the text constitutes a parody of Dupin's strategy for searching for a "purloined letter (*e*)", and playfully denotes the forbidden, and therefore calamitous knowledge of that letter's identity. In this respect, *La Disparition* exemplifies "the artifice of an ontologically oriented text" (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 15).

As seen in the above, the metaphysical detective novel is a vast and still uncharted territory, both in its narrative structure and its theme. Miscellaneous books and essays dedicated to the genre often suggest manifold gaps and aporias in its systematic study. Various critics and analysts attempt to explore its relation to such neighbouring genres as the metaphysical spy story, mystery story, existential mystery tour, conspiracy novel, cyberpunk techno-thriller, next to "Po(e)st-modernist fiction" (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 17) in which it is rooted.

One of frequently debated variants of the genre is conspiracy fiction, exemplified by Pynchon's *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). All these texts, displaying unsuccessful quests for truth, orderliness, and identity, where the world mirrors bedlam and paranoia, firmly adhere to the rules of "metaphysical" conspiracy novel, however, the presence of detective story elements is partly questioned (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 19). Notwithstanding this, critics like Black (1991) consider Pynchon's books part of the detective story tradition, relating *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* with the trope of the "spurious key text" and exploring *The Crying of Lot 49's* lack of closure and instead the presence of gaps and aporias, being integral constituents of the metaphysical detective story.

Another genre worth considering is science fiction. Although the central subject of the present book is the scrutiny of selected postmodern metaphysical detective stories, one cannot fail to mention the genre's affinity with the sci-fi along its several separate paths. The first route is reflected in the works of Kobo Abe (*Inter-Ice Age*, 1970), Haruki Murakami (*The Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, 1985, tr. 1991) as well as Andrew Crumey (*Mobius Dick*, 2004). These authors create books in which apocalyptic science fiction and metaphysical detective stories are intermingled through antiphonal narratives, exchanging "science" and "mystery", to produce alternative modes of dislocation. Another path has been chosen by Gomel (1995) who classified a couple of science fiction tales as "ontological detective stories" where, in worlds enigmatically different from ours, the laws of nature, mirroring the "reality", are preposterous and ought to be figured out. As the critic argues: "the ontological detective story" displays

an ad-ditional aspect of Western eschatology: its connection with the hermeneutics of secrecy. ... What I have called "the ontological detective story" comprises texts in which the world where the action takes place becomes an object of investigation, a mystery to be solved, a secret to be uncovered. ... The question to be answered is not "who done it" but rather "what is it?"; the secret of death is supplanted by the secret of being. (Gomel 1995: 346)

This process is amply illustrated in Christopher Priest's *The Inverted World* (1974, repr. 2008), Simon Ings's *The City of the Iron Fish* (1994) and *The Matrix* (1999).

When set beside the ontological dimension of science fiction mentioned above, another path of the genre has its roots in Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" whose narrator, filtered through Raymond Chandler's noir Private Eye Philip Marlowe, directs us to the fiction represented by Marlowe's investigative successor, the android hunter Rick Deckard, in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968), mostly known in its cyberpunk film version, *Bladerunner* (1982). Taking into account some crypto-metaphysical postulates, according to which Rick is perceived as an android, being simultaneously the android hunter, the story implies interchangeability of the "detective" and the "criminal". A similar motif could be detected in William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1990), whose protagonist, Cybernaut, a flâneur in cyberspace, is considered a descendant of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd", Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin (Merivale 2010: 320). Referring to all these separate routes of metaphysical science fiction and its representatives, it is essential to mention Stanisław Lem, an eminent Polish science fiction writer, whose works provide crucial philosophical dimensions. In the novels by the Polish writer one encounters the author's metaphysical police detectives who are involved in the cases in which "crimes" disregard scientific law, being resolved exclusively by "fortuitous patterns" that tease our devotion to order. Hence, their defeat in identifying the "perpetrator" who is indispensable to verify the detective's existence. In a *mise en abyme* of metaphysical tail jobs, Lem's protagonist recognises in himself the interpenetration of the detective and the criminal, the self and the Other, the familiar and the strange (Lem 1974: 34, 205). In this respect, Lem's books closely reflect Poe's and Chandler's texts.

Besides the scrutiny of the aforementioned genres adjacent to the metaphysical detective story, some of them likely constituting its dominant future variants, the analysis of the genre ought to also involve feminist approaches, ethnic and some national literary history traditions²⁰. Considering female participation in the genre, it is worth referring, for instance, to Joyce Carol Oates. In the examination of her works, one ought to draw special attention to her series of Gothic mysteries, set in 19th-century America, which challenge ratiocinative solutions (*Mysteries of Winterthurn*,

²⁰ See: Sweeney, Susan Elizabeth. (2016). "Gothic Traces in the Metaphysical Detective Story: The Female Sleuth in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*". *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*. May 2016 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.16995/orbit.195>

1984). Other achievements by Oates are her parodies of 19th-century American horrors, such as “The White Cat” (*Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque*, 1995), being a postmodern and parodic rewriting of Poe’s classic “The Black Cat” (1843) in which the author depicts complex, tempestuous relations between men and women, highlighting the superiority of the female, including her ultimate triumph over her husband (Stolarek 2017: 76). Nonetheless, Merivale and Sweeney hold the view that the female authors who genuinely wrote in the spirit of the metaphysical detective story are Margaret Atwood and Gertrude Stein. Paradoxically enough, the critics justly remark that, except for the pseudobiographical mode of the genre, metaphysical detective stories are almost always produced by men. This fact is more astounding in the light of the overwhelmingly dominant role of women in writing classic detective stories (Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, or P.D. James), next to a wave of, in recent years, novelists like Sue Grafton, Sara Paretsky, Patricia Cornwell or Barbara Wilson, who have experimented with the hard-boiled police procedural, defying its male classical model (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 20). Furthermore, male authors such as Robbe-Grillet, in his later works, mostly in *La maison de rendez-vous*, 1965, *The Voyeur*, 1987, and, most recently, *La Reprise* (2001), have incorporated visible elements of highbrow pornography into the metaphysical detective story, whilst other writers, like Modiano and Amis, give prominence to male protagonists and their dilemmas. Thus, these novelists, possibly inadvertently give rise to a feminist concern.

Critics maintain that, apart from the need to more fully explore a feminist accent in the metaphysical detective story, it is essential to fill the gap in a largely unexplored territory of ethnic detective literature (Afro-American, Caribbean, South-African, Asian, Native Australian novels, to mention but a few) (Rzepka and Horsley 2010). So far, owing to the limits of space, opportunity and accessibility, most critics have contributed to the study of European, North American, Latin American and partly Australian metaphysical detective stories. Among miscellaneous authors discussed by Holquist (1971), Most and Stowe (1983), Tani (1984), Walker and Frazer (1990), Merivale and Sweeney (1999), Priestman (2003), King (2004), Scaggs (2005), Rzepka and Horsley (2010), Cook (2011), Dechêne (2018) and others, in terms of metaphysical detective stories and postmodern detective fiction, special emphasis is placed on North American, French, Italian and British novelists. Whereas Priestman, King, Scaggs, Rzepka and Horsely offer

a general outline of various trends and movements of the detective story, Holquist, Most and Stowe, Tani, Walker and Frazer, and above all, Merivale and Sweeney, provide a meticulous examination of the metaphysical and anti-detective stories. When set beside Tani's in-depth study of the correlation between American and Italian postmodern anti-detective stories, as well as Cook's bringing into prominence the idea of closure both in classic and postmodern detective novels, Holquist, Most and Stowe, Walker and Frazer, and especially Merivale and Sweeney, focus almost exclusively on the metaphysical detective story, referring mostly to American, French, Irish and British writers. In the majority of these critical works, particularly written between 1945 and 1990, most of the authors' attention is devoted to American, British and Irish writers, the last of whom, such as Beckett, made a valuable contribution to the shaping of the metaphysical detective story. Nevertheless, besides Merivale and Sweeney, and partly Walker and Frazer, no critical comparative studies have been undertaken with regard to American and French metaphysical detective stories despite a significant correlation between some US and French novelists²¹ ²². In this respect, the present monograph endeavours to fill a niche in the American-French comparative analysis of the metaphysical detective novel, largely with reference to the authors' examination of spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths.

The final stage in examining the evolution of the metaphysical detective story involves a recapitulation of its tentative genealogy and taxonomy which classifies the genre's variants along with their representative authors into distinct groupings (see Introduction). Having scrutinised the metaphysical detective story's genealogical scheme (Figure 1, Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 18; see Appendix), one can trace its main twofold evolution: the Poe-to-Auster line, called the minimalist type, and the Hawthorne-Melville-James-to-Auster line. The second lineage consists of three kinds, referred to as the maximalist

²¹ In the scrutiny of the evolution of French crime and detective fiction and its link with American hard-boiled crime literature, Sita A. Schüt ("French crime fiction" (59-76) in Martin Priestman's (ed.). (2003) *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction.*) and Stefano Tani (*The Doomed Detective*, 1984), accentuate the fact that French writers have been interested in the hard-boiled detective novel and its "existential" derivations, for instance, the fiction of Hemingway. In discussing further historical correspondence between French and American crime fiction, analysts point, among others, to the connection between French Enlightenment (Voltaire's *Zadig*) and Poe's detective stories.

²² See a more detailed analysis of French-American crime fiction in section 1.3.

kind, descending from Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man*, the research novel, having roots in Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*, and the missing person novel, following the model of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Wakefield". In the Poe-to-Auster line, accentuating a centripetal force in which plural identities are reduced into one, frequently by pursuit, the maze is most fully mapped out.

The postmodernist detective story- type 1 is the final component of the Poe-to-Auster line that stems partly from the soft-boiled branch of the metaphysical detective story, initiated by Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", "The Purloined Letter" and "The Murder of Marie Rogêt" locked room texts, and partly from its hard-boiled variant, exemplified by Poe's "The Man of the Crowd". According to the chart, this type encompasses the works of such writers as Nabokov, Eco, Calvino, Gombrowicz, Perec, Robbe-Grillet, Atwood, Ackroyd and O'Brien. Nonetheless, this branch of the metaphysical detective story comprises the authors whose books are heterogeneous and disparate, like O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* or Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*. Hence, they could be also classified into other groupings of the genre, like pseudobiographical (Ackroyd, Atwood) which is obliquely examined by Merivale and Sweeney in their volume, or historiographical (Eco, Ackroyd, Greenaway) which is not marked on their chart.

Furthermore, as pointed out in the Introduction, Merivale and Sweeney's genealogical chart is not devoid of some deficiencies. One of their illustrations is a part of the chart presenting the postmodernist detective story – type 1 which contains some inaccuracy as to the names of some authors and their works. For instance, the critics enumerate O'Brien, without providing his specific novels, like *The Third Policeman*, closely reflecting a minimalist, centripetal, labyrinthine type of the metaphysical postmodernist detective story. Added to that, O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* ought to be included in the second postmodernist grouping – the maximalist type, highlighting a centrifugal force in which identities are exchanged and redoubled, and stressing the crucial function of the carnival and the party. Such a twofold division is marked on the example of Eco, whose *The Name of the Rose* is classified as the minimalist postmodernist detective story, whilst *Foucault's Pendulum* forms the category of its maximalist tradition.

With reference to the second type of the postmodernist detective fiction, one can state that, along with its first category, the maximalist variant, being distinguished by the aforesaid constituents, like the carnival and the centripetal force (generating multiple identities), is marked by dense,

complex structure and is represented by novelists as diverse as Eco, Echenoz, Robbe-Grillet, Sorrentino, DeLillo, Pynchon, or Amis. Among the authors classified in this variant, Sorrentino comes to the fore. Merivale and Sweeney enumerate only the novelist's *Odd Number* (1985) as an accurate reflection of the maximalist type of the postmodernist detective story, which, however, ought to include *Mulligan Stew* (1979) as well since both of the texts are carnivalesque in mode and centrifugal in structure (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 19). The difference lies in the extent to which the former mirrors more closely, in the mode, style and structure, the resistance to classical detective fiction elements like order, lack of closure to the investigation, displaying instead loose ends, uncertain and multiple identities, whilst the latter, exemplifying a postmodernist carnivalesque mode of detective fiction filled with bedlam, disharmony, and multiple ambiguous identities, contains some traces of detective fiction schemata, seen mostly at the beginning and the end of the story. Still, in comparison with the previous variant, this category, as shown in Figure 1, remains less explored and discussed.

Finally, it ought to be remarked that the chart illustrating a tentative genealogy of the metaphysical detective story dates from 1999, and thus it lacks some crucial information on certain authors and their oeuvre within almost twenty years. Hence, there is the lacuna since 1999 (between 1999 and 2018) in the diagram depicting minimalist and maximalist postmodern detective stories, next to “the research novel” and “the missing person” novel that need to be filled by some authors, as well as by some key unmentioned books produced by the writers who have been already indicated in the two postmodern groupings of the metaphysical detective story.

In conclusion, Merivale and Sweeney's typology, despite some of its inaccuracies and inconsistencies, helps to situate a number of postmodernist detective novels, mostly French and American texts, in concrete historical contexts and generic configurations. Having said that, in certain works such as Berry's *The Manual of Detection*, Amis's *Dead Babies* or Robbe-Grillet's *La Reprise*, reflecting a relatively equal proportion of centripetal and centrifugal forces, the elements of quest and investigation on the one hand and carnival and party on the other hand illustrate a combination rather than a clear-cut distinction between a minimalist and a maximalist type of the postmodern detective story. In this respect, they accurately reflect Bakhtin's (1981: 72) contradictory interplay between centripetal and centrifugal forces, involving tracings of unified-yet-vying values, perspectives and concepts.

1.3. The metaphysical detective story in the light of literary theory and criticism after 1945

The metaphysical detective story, along with the detective story proper, plays a crucial role in the history of literary theory and criticism. The poetics of detective fiction has constituted a popular and provocative subject among literary critics. Analysts have frequently scrutinised the genre, from Edgar Allan Poe's own classic essays on literary closure, through Roger Caillois's formalist analysis of the detective story as game, Geraldine Pederson-Krag's Freudian interpretation of it as a repetition of the primal scene, feminist studies, Ernst Kaemmel's Marxist examination of it as product of capitalism to Michael Cook's scrutiny of closure in *Narratives of Enclosure in Detective Fiction* (2011). Nevertheless, the critical studies on the metaphysical detective fiction are an unexplored territory to be invariably revealed and investigated.

Since detective fiction highlights ratiocination, logic and problem-solving, it became a favourite form of popular literature with academic audience. It is attributed to the fact that both literary criticism and detective fiction entail inventiveness and insight. Hence, throughout the years, the genre has been used to mirror the doctrines and principles of numerous theoretical approaches like structuralism (Todorov), psychoanalysis (Lacan, Žižek), or feminism (Paretsky, Grafton, Cornwell) (Pyrhönen 2010: 45). There were mainly two reasons for scholars' and critics' exploring detective fiction. The first one could be referred to as internally oriented criticism since it examines the whole genre, subgenre, or a particular author, in order to provide answers to questions raised by the object of study, whilst the second one, called externally oriented criticism, uses the genre to illustrate some broader theoretical principles.

In the decade after 1945 one can see a marked decline in critical studies in detective fiction which was partly attributed to the demise of the British whodunnit and the American hard-boiled crime fiction. Nevertheless, this inertia became interrupted by the incoming wave of structuralism in the 1960s, which opened the second major stage of detective-fiction studies. When set beside the early critics, the structuralists placed the examination of the genre within a distinct theoretical framework. The studies on detective fiction are vividly illustrated when compared to the analysis of myths and

tales. The Russian formalists held the view that myths and folktales, exemplifying unrefined narratives, were worth examining owing to the fact that their simplicity allowed critics to explore the general laws according to which all narratives work. Popular narratives were considered the modern equivalents of these forms, thus, detective fiction became considered a prototype for narrativity.

Prior to the exploration of the crucial stages of detective fiction criticism, it is worth including, at first, Malmgren's (2001: 139, 145-149) comparative analysis of English and American crime fiction in terms of world structure since it prompts a further discussion on classical and contemporary variants of the genre, alongside Platten's (2011: 13-120, 21-42) and Gorrara's (2003: 209-214 and 590-601) scrutiny of French detective narratives mainly in the context of French-American crime fiction comparative studies. Such an eclectic approach helps to situate detective fiction as a literary genre at the intersection of three national cultures, France, Great Britain and the USA and reflects the process of the genre's global circulation through and across a range of cultural media, comprising the graphic novel, film and the internet.

According to Malmgren (2001: 139), English detective fiction accentuates a centred world ensuring the link between appearance and reality. As a result, the criminal is found guilty, an outcome which guarantees some justice, or, the culprit's pathology is substantiated, which detaches readers from complicity. Contrastingly, the American model depicts a decentred world that is fluid, unsteady, and deceitful since it is composed of signs, people, conducts and actions which are arbitrary and unwarranted. In such a world justice is seldom achieved and administered, whereas crime spreads from one character to another, eventually affecting readers who start feeling guilty and ambivalent.

Malmgren's typology vividly illustrates two different variants of crime fiction, with respect to the vision of the world and its mechanisms. Nevertheless, the critic's division into the English and American models of the genre is too general and requires some clarification. Firstly, it reflects the contrast between two specific kinds of detective fiction, the whodunnit, rooted in England in the interwar period, and the hard-boiled crime fiction that emerged in the USA in the late 1930s and thrived after World War II, yet it became also popular in other countries, especially in France and partly in Italy. Secondly, the critic's use of the term "crime" is sometimes misleading: he applies it both to the American model, which actually closely mirrors the problem of law and justice rather than the process of investigation and

detection methods, and to the English model, which focusses on detecting the crime, instead of analysing criminal justice system. Finally, Malmgren is right to distinguish between the English classical variant of crime fiction and its American modern counterpart. However, regarding the metaphysical detective story, and other postmodern subgenres of detective fiction, like the anti-detective and the metacognitive detective story which are the successors of the 19th-century detective fiction, English whodunnit and the hard-boiled crime fiction, they are practised by writers of different nationalities, like Paul Auster, Jedediah Berry and Gilbert Sorrentino (Americans), Alain Robbe-Grillet, Patrick Modiano, Georges Perec (the French), Martin Amis, Julian Barnes (British), Umberto Eco (the Italians), as well as Eduardo Mendoza and José Carlos Somoza (the Spanish). Thus, when set beside its two predecessors, the postmodern and contemporary variants of both the English and the American crime fiction do not reflect concrete national detective story traditions but illustrate, in their structure and subjects, the subversion of the detective narratives of their forerunners.

Due to the American and French accent placed in the analysis of the metaphysical detective novels in the present monograph, it is indispensable to complete Malmgren's introductory Anglophone comparative studies and enrich it with the French detective variant and French-American crime story interrelatedness in the interwar and especially postwar context. It is worth emphasising at the outset that in France detective fiction is classified as popular literature. Up to now one has observed a rigid, cultural hierarchy in this country, where the barriers between high, popular and mass forms of culture are almost impossible to overcome (Platten 2011: 16). In spite of the fact that such boundaries and divisions are to be observed in other national cultures, the French constant preoccupation with the ideas of cultural distinction in the arts and in education constitutes a startling contrast with the literary tradition in the USA, Great Britain or Russia. Hence, the scarcity of critical studies dedicated to French crime literature noticed mainly till the last decades of the 20th century.

Needless to say, anxieties over the cultural legitimacy of the detective fiction persist and have an impact on its critical reception. One of the exemplifications of this influence is Jacques Dubois's *Le roman policier ou la modernité* (1993) and Marc Lits's *Le Roman Policier: Introduction à la théorie et à l'histoire d'un genre littéraire* (1999) in which the authors are cautious about delimiting the literary scope of their subject matter. Furthermore, other

critics of French detective fiction, most notably Claude Mesplède (*Les Années 'Série Noir' I, II, III, IV*) (1992-1995), Robert Deleuse (*Les Maîtres du roman policier*) (1991) and Claire Gorrara (*The Roman Noir in Post-War French Culture*) (2003), deriving their inspiration from Gramsci and Foucault, assess its social and political puissance, pausing only where necessary to examine aesthetics (Platten 2011: 17). Ultimately, one cannot fail to address the question of literary value with reference to the detective genre. These critics' theories and approaches aim at exploring the attraction of reading and interpreting detective literature and, more importantly, at scrutinising the impact on French cultural life that the genre has exerted at different stages in its history and especially its influence on French-American literary relations.

French and American detective fiction interrelatedness in the 20th century could be traced to the interwar and postwar periods, particularly the turn to naturalism manifest in the hard-boiled narratives of the American Depression, constituting a chief epistemological transformation with the genre that reverberated across continents (Platten 2011: 21). Following Jean-Philippe Mathy's "paradigm of discontinuity" (1993: 338), Gorrara (2003: 510) refers to this period defined as a set of textual constructs which situate America in complex, at times oppositional relations with France. The French-authored *roman noir* of the late 1940s and early 1950s which could be integrated into this model shows apparent links with the American hard-boiled crime novel. Interestingly enough, similarly to Simone de Beauvoir in her travelogue *L'Amérique au jour le jour* (1950), the early French-authored *roman noirs* display some ambivalence towards American culture, on the one hand enchanted by its innovation and modernity but on the other hand repelled by its excesses and brutality.

It is worth remarking that in the post-1945 France, a "*contestataire* status" (Gorrara 2003: 593) of the hard-boiled fiction was one of the most magnetic attractions of the whole range of American literary products, considered as resonating with the rapid growth of post-war French fiction. In his essay "American Novelists in French Eyes" (1946), Jean-Paul Sartre is startled by the fact that French intellectuals showed high esteem for novelists like William Faulkner, John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway, who were not properly appreciated in their own country²³. According to Sartre, these

²³ Sartre, Jean-Paul. (1946). "American Novelists in French Eyes" In *Atlantic Monthly*, Boston. (August 1946: 114-118).

American writers' contribution to the post-war French literary world was two-fold: firstly, they brought an understanding of an alienated humanity that matched the imperfections of our era, and secondly, offered innovations in style and techniques by means of which they could express such a rupture in interpersonal relations. In spite of the fact that the French thinker does not refer to Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler or other American hard-boiled writers, his reflections were to reverberate in the works of other critics who placed Hammett's oeuvre among this privileged interwar generation of American authors.

From a social and political perspective, the hard-boiled crime fiction turned into numerous cultural narratives adapted by French authors to display a precarious sense of national identity at a time of increasing national tensions (Gorrara 2003: 601). In the world of the French-language detective novel after 1945, the influence of the hard-boiled fiction was visible in the publications of such authors as André Hélène, Jean Amila, and Pierre Siniac who, due to their identities being forged during the war and occupation, decided to write in *roman noirs* as the ideal medium through which to present alternative views on the history of their country. *Roman noir* encompasses any kind of crime fiction that engages with the world beyond the text. It is also interesting to notice that the dependence on the hard-boiled fiction drawing on Hammett's minimalist style mirrors a distinctive quality of the *neo-polar*, a school of politicised crime writing that thrived in the aftermath of the student protests in May 1968. In fact, both the *neo-polar* and the *roman noir* have been shaped by the naturalist mode of the American hard-boiled crime story, adjusted to express the specifically French experiences of the 20th century: most notably war, occupation by a foreign oppressor, decolonisation as well as the prospect of social-political revolution (Platten 2011: 21-22).

In the critical studies of French detective fiction, it is worth underlining the process of artistic experimentation with the genre, aptly illustrated by the literary output of Robbe-Grillet who excelled at modifying both the *nouveau roman* and crime fiction, as well as by the oeuvre of Sebastien Japrisot who created crime novels that mirrored literary experimental techniques (*Trap for Cindirella*) (1962). One ought to add perhaps Daniel Pennac to the list of the novelists experimenting with the crime literature as his Malaussène family saga can be regarded as a gentle parody of the genre, yet it effectively defies generic labelling. Nonetheless, since the late 1940s and 1950s most critics and scholars decided to consider any text with a crime fiction label as

the one devoid of any literary value and since the consecutive decade the decrease of the genre in France was predicted, even by writers like Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac who produced many acclaimed jointly-authored novels as Bioleau-Narcejac. It is worth remarking that these novelists benefited from cinematic adaptations of their works by the directors like Alfred Hitchcock (*Vertigo*) (1958). Their suspense narratives were a particular hybrid form of French crime fiction positioned between the traditional whodunnit and the thriller. The psychological thriller has undoubtedly proved popular in France, where Patricia Highsmith realised that she gained more acclaim than in her native country. Moreover, it should be stressed that the late twentieth century witnessed the development of crime fiction that challenged French cultural and historical identity as well as reflecting a renewed interest in World War II. This is exemplified by Didier Daeninkx who in the novels like *Murder in Memoriam* (*Meurtres pour mémoire*) and *A Very Profitable War* (*Le Der des ders*) (both published in 1984) looked closely at the accepted history of the period and the variations between collective and individual memory.

French detective and crime critical studies ought to include the analysis of women writers who have only been recognised in the genre more recently, despite their contribution to it.²⁴ Public recognition has indubitably helped these women writers to become more popular during the last decades of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 3rd millennium. However, as a response to this lack of attention, many of these writers have specifically taken a feminist viewpoint featuring female protagonists. The consequence of this is that they have often found it essential to set their narratives in America rather than in France, thereby avoid the issue of the implausibility of French women in high ranking positions in the police. Furthermore, given the absence of private detectives in France, it is therefore less feasible to feature independent French women private eyes (Neale 2005).

²⁴ Among significant French feminist or gender studies on crime fiction one ought to mention: Hamilton, Deborah. (1994). *The French Detective Fiction Novel from 1920s to 1990s: Gendering a Genre*. Doctoral dissertation.; Desnain, Véronique. (2001). “La femelle de l’espèce’: women in contemporary French crime fiction”. In: *French Cultural Studies*, XII (2001), 175-192; Desnain, Véronique. (2009). “Gender and Genre: Women in French Crime Writing”. In: Gorrara, Claire. (ed.). (2009). *French Crime Fiction*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 86-106.

From the above examination it can be inferred that the Anglo-American and French models of the detective genre, particularly American and French critical tendencies in detective and crime fiction, reflected some crucial movements and trends visible in the literary tradition of other countries. By the 1970s and 1980s, the majority of Western countries had produced their own detective literature. Due to its enormous popularity and mass production, critics focussed on its socio-cultural function. They pointed out that, as a literary form, the genre could thrive only after police force had been established in Western societies, and the public had had some knowledge about legal procedures which enabled them to side with law and order (Pyrhönnen 2010: 47). Thus, in theory, these studies examined the process in which ideology and detective fiction intertwined. Since ideology is defined in terms of concrete strategies that sanction the power of leading social groups, the operations of ideology are perceived in the formal constituents and content that detective fiction selects from the discourses disseminated in culture. In this respect, ideology shapes the structures and subjects of the genre.

In that period there were diverse approaches to generic ideology. One of them, referred to as the escapist theory, was implemented by the American cultural critic John G. Cawelti. The analyst (1976) maintained that detective fiction allows readers to get involved in what he calls moral fantasies, depicting ideal worlds which are created in order to evoke in the audience strong feelings, yet simultaneously convey the sense of security. The critic pointed out that during the process of reading people are thoroughly convinced that any uncertainty is entirely controlled and demystified by the formulaic structure (quoted in Pyrhönnen 2010: 47). Cawelti argued that detective fiction enables readers to address complex cultural and national issues as well as reaching solutions guaranteeing cultural continuum. Other scholars, most notably, Stephen Knight (1980), Dennis Porter (1981), and D. A. Miller (1988) held a critical view of the genre's ideological foundations. From their standpoint, detective fiction incorporates and generates ideas about crime, policing, and the power of the state to monitor the crime world, therefore, it mirrors the discursive practices validating Western capitalist societies. The critics argued that since the genre depicts the law and its implementation as natural and obvious, it promotes the belief that crime and law exist regardless of specific social contexts and historical advancement. Hence, it masks abstruse relations among the state, the law and justice.

Recently, some critics have challenged these views of detective fiction as an exemplification of dominant ideology assuming that detective fiction is associated with conservative ideology, whereas serious literature exists independently of ideology. From Jim Collins's (1989) standpoint, in every form of fiction ideology is a field of negotiation between discourses in which ideological components are blended, forming diverse permutations. In this regard, detective fiction communicates views that are both dominant and contrastive, regressive and progressive. Collins claims that, similarly to modern societies who are determined by the concurring existence of various discursive cultural centres, each reflecting a concrete worldview and vying for cultural dominance, each genre, including detective fiction, tackles cultural issues according to its own ideological discourses that have been reshaped and redefined over the years.

In view of the above detective fiction criticism accentuates these ideological tenets as an arena of contestation. This is vividly illustrated in a number of postmodern trends and approaches to detective literature, such as the theory of deviance, or the anti-detective novel, constituting a departure from dominant discourses preserved principally in the classical model of the genre and the hard-boiled crime fiction. All of them contributed to an alternative perception of the detective story and exerted a lasting influence on present-day writers experimenting with the classical model of this genre.

The first of the aforesaid approaches, the theory of deviance, in particular generic deviance, advocated by Christiana Gregoriou, brings into focus the complexity and ambivalence of the detective and crime genre and therefore contests a social and cultural dominance of one ideological discourse preserved mostly in the traditional detective fiction. Taking into consideration the notion of generic deviance, Gregoriou (2007: 32) highlights that the degree to which a certain text is classified according to a certain genre depends on its resemblance to typical members of the generic group. To exemplify her theory, the critic refers to Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1924), stating that when one considers this detective novel as prototypical of crime fiction, then the degree to which other texts fall into the same generic category will be conditioned by their resemblances to the previous one. The British writer's novel is a point of departure for the discussion on the generic nature of detective literature whose prototype could be observed in a golden age novel which flourished in the 1920s and 1930s. Gregoriou (2007: 134) remarks that in the light of the above the

following interwar and postwar detective books could be seen as a continuum of category membership, grounded on recognised characteristics, spreading from the most to the least representative of the detective fiction category. This indicates that not every feature of the prototypical detective story is equally crucial, and such a characterisation entails difficulties since the majority of the reading public find miscellaneous ways of categorising a set of references and a specific novel's prototypicality rests on the readers' knowledge of the genre available, and therefore of the type of generic conventions that they are acquainted with. Nonetheless, the critic underlines that since contemporary crime fiction no longer adheres to the principles of the prototypical crime novel, the prototype theory seems incomplete or incoherent, and even though former prototypical genres fulfil the role as powerful constraining paragons, the works created in rebellion against the prototypical novels of the genre remain equally influential. As an exemplification of this process, Gregoriou maintains that since the detective genre, both its British and American models, has been perceived as a fundamentally conservative form, the detective writing school has produced its manifold parodies, pastiches and experimental variations, among others Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le labyrinthe*, *La Reprise* or Jedediah Berry's *The Manual of Detection*.

In the analysis of Gregoriou's theory of deviance, one ought to refer to the concept of *defamiliarization* or *de-automatisation* formulated by the Russian Formalists and the Prague School linguists in discussions on literary and non-literary language, alongside Guy Cook's definition of this notion in terms of literature's *schema-refreshing* property creating part of his *schema theory*, which implies the confusion of our traditional ways of seeing the world. According to Cook, schema refreshment which mirrors defamiliarization is reader-oriented and reader-dependent, a relationship between the audience and an object of perception, even if this object constitutes another text or the language itself (Cook 1994: 174, 206-208). Considering genre theory, defamiliarization provokes disturbance, subversion and modification of conventional forms, and therefore makes the reading public reflect on the nature of the genre. As an illustration of this process, the author points to Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, quoting Siobhan Chapman and Christopher Routledge's examination of the reading of the American text: "[t]he difficulties experienced by the reader of Auster's novel are compounded by the extent to which it appropriates and subsequently dismembers the conventions of the

detective fiction genre” (Chapman and Routledge 1999: 244). Gregoriou (2007: 135) argues that, even though in view of the theorists the genre has been recognised as the one which heavily relies on its formal properties, Auster’s novel, in this case, the first part of *The Trilogy*, “The City of Glass”, dismembers the rules and conventions, impelling the readers to be aware of these conventions and simultaneously defamiliarizes the genre itself.

Gregoriou’s profound analysis of the detective fiction in the context of generic deviance exemplifies the process of questioning some salient formal structures and mechanisms of the genre which reflects a dominant ideological discourse preserved in its classical British and American models. This theory has served as an impulse for exploring varied movements and tendencies in postmodern crime literature, and thus has contributed to the assessment of the mechanisms and processes occurring in a number of contemporary detective stories. One of the most glaring examples of such trends is a critical response to the most prevalent generic forms of the detective fiction, the whodunnit and the hard-boiled private eye narrative, visible in the metaphysical detective story or an anti-detective novel. Critics such as Merivale, Sweeney, Tani or Hilfer state that these postmodern variants of detective literature emerged as a reaction to the two traditional British and American variants of the genre, preserving, yet in an inverted form, the generic conventions of detective fiction. According to Hilfer (1990: 2, 6), such variants undermine the reassuring philosophies of both preceding subgenres by questioning the whodunnit’s belief in ratiocination, soluble mysteries and explainable world, and challenging the hard-boiled notion of the self and identity as bases for endowing the world with some meaning. Similarly to the metaphysical detective story, the anti-detective novel subverts the conventions of the classical model of detective genre by calling into question such elements as causality, induction, hermeneutical assurance and teleological structure. Among miscellaneous facets of the anti-detective novel, its three constituents appear to be vital in the debate on the detective genre’s critical contrastive studies. In his in-depth analysis, Tani (1984: 43-44) brings into prominence innovation, a technique illustrating a solution to the investigation based on contingency and chance, deconstruction, exemplifying a fulfilment of the opposite constructive principle, such as a suspension of the solution, and metafiction, emphasising that “book-conscious-of-its-bookishness” aspect of the novel, parody and intertextual detection.

From the above it can be inferred that detective fiction is a point of departure for miscellaneous literary criticism which encompasses diverse approaches and perspectives, each of them accentuating a contestation of the ideological and structural hegemony reflected in the classical model of the genre. Among miscellaneous contemporary critical studies one ought to mention such significant texts as Julian Symons's *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (1992), a popular study which generated a wide-ranging critical debate, Tony Hilfer's *The Crime Novel: A Deviant Genre* (1990) which launched a comprehensive analysis of the forms, norms, motifs and salient authors of crime fiction, as well as Linden Peach's *Masquerade, Crime and Fiction* (2008), a thorough examination of crime and masquerade in fiction, focusing upon the criminal as a "performer". Hilfer, the author of the second of the aforementioned texts, asserts that crime fiction is constructed in contrast to detective fiction as it violates the laws of its predecessors: character and psychology are highlighted in lieu of plot dominance, whilst social and cultural norms are immersed in deviance (Pyrhönnen 2010: 49). Malmgren (2001) relates these transformations to postmodern culture's challenging justice, identity and representation which are regarded as relative and variable. Some of the major research studies on detective and crime fiction published recently incorporate these insights and have contributed to the perception of crime narratives that marginalise the role of the detective or in which the investigative component evaporates²⁵. Peach's *Masquerade, Crime and Fiction* is one of the recent critical texts which integrates incisive literary and cultural criticism with arguments about gender, masquerade, crime and culture. In his book the author argues for the importance of novels that have been frequently neglected, such as Sara Paretsky's *Women on the Case* (1996), Sarah Water's *Fingersmith* (2002), or Toni Morrison's *Love* (2003).

The above critical approaches successfully challenged a dominant conservative discourse and prevalent formal tendencies in the classical models of the detective genre. Although this section is dedicated to the scrutiny of pivotal postmodern critical approaches to detective fiction which fundamentally disavow politics from their narrative spheres, a debate on

²⁵ For more penetrating analysis of the alternative perception of the detective and the investigation see: Cobby, Paul. (2000). *The American Thriller: Generic Innovation and Social Change in the 1970s*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Peach, Linden. (2006). *Masquerade, Crime and Fiction: Criminal Deceptions*. London: Palgrave.

ying contemporary ideological tenets in detective fiction ought to also include a feminist perspective in the context of genuine and symbolic violence reflecting male-female power relations accentuated by the genre novelists. It was the feminist detective story whose development and upsurge in public awareness in the 1980s and 1990s linked the process of solving crimes with a feminist inspection of social conditions under the patriarchal system²⁶. These books examine the formation and justification of sex and gender biases within the genre; they demonstrate the correspondence between the relationship of fictional representations and social reality; and, finally, intend to challenge conventions that undermine the position of women (Pyrhönen 2010: 48). These texts reflect the views of feminist critics who refer to all kinds of detective fiction, specifically to the hard-boiled detective novel, which focuses on the masculine world, and the metaphysical detective story whose authors are in the vast majority men. The metaphysical detective story has attracted the attention of various female critics (Antoine Dechéne, Patricia Merivale, Patricia Smart), and has invited an intense feminist criticism throughout the years (in the 20th and 21st centuries). Nevertheless, owing to the fact that the authorship of the metaphysical detective story is largely attributed to men, only the scarcity of women writers, such as Gertrude Stein, Joyce Carol Oates, or Margaret Atwood, responded to the genre (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 20). It is mostly the absence of female authors, a depiction of the prevailing male world, frequently saturated with violence, that provoked an intense critical reaction from feminist writers. This is mostly visible in the hard-boiled crime fiction, particularly in James M. Cain's and Mickey Spillane's novels, as well as in the works of Hubert Aquin and in Robbe-Grillet's texts, most notably, *Le Voyeur*, *Dans le Labyrinthe* and *La Reprise*.

Victimisation of women, their unaccounted, anonymous murders permeate numerous works of detective story writers. This issue is strongly emphasised in the stories of Poe who claimed that "the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (Poe 1985: 1601-1602). Beside the American author, violence and sexism are chief

²⁶ Reddy, Maureen, T. (2003). "Women Detectives". In Priestman, Martin. (ed.). (2003) *Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 191-208; Gavin, Adrienne, E. (2010). "Feminist Crime Fiction and Female Sleuths". In Rzepka, Charles and Lee Horsley. (eds.). (2010). *A Companion to Crime Fiction*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 258-269.

elements of manifold variants of detective fiction, most visible in the hard-boiled detective stories of Raymond Chandler, Mickey Spillane, Elmore Leonard, James Ellroy and their literary successors (Dennis Lehane, Oswald Mosley). However, as Andrew Pepper argues, hard-boiled crime writing, apparently identified with radical *and* conservative political orientations (Pepper 2010: 150), is a complex and ambivalent genre. On the one hand, it is frequently associated with misogyny, racism, homophobia and promoting white heterosexual male private eyes. On the other hand, the notion of “hyper-masculine identity” as “hard-boiled ideology” (Ogdon 1992: 71, 76), in fact, represents “an aggressive reformulation of male hegemony as much as a defensive reaction to what might have been perceived as a set of economic and social threats to its hegemony” (Breu 2005:5). According to Pepper (2010: 148), the ambivalence and internal division of hard-boiled protagonists closely reflects the macro-political structures of power, like the state and the law. Moreover, the critic points out that the hard-boiled detective fiction does not necessarily promote a masculinist worldview but rather mirrors male insecurity, one of the pivotal subjects in the metaphysical detective fiction. Pepper accentuates the genre’s flexibility and elasticity which allows its appropriation by female writers (Sara Paretsky, Sue Grafton) as well as by non-white (John E. Bruce) and gay writers (Joseph Hansen) (Pepper 2010: 151). In this regard, one may notice the critical shift from perceiving the hard-boiled fiction as a prevalingly masculine genre, highlighting male hegemony, misogyny and violence into a complex, conflicting genre that presents male identity crisis and insecurity. Thus, one cannot deny the problem of violence, female victimisation and anonymous murders in almost all kinds of detective fiction, especially, its 19th-century and early 20th-century types. At the same time, we may observe that in the modern and postmodern variants of the genre, like the above-mentioned hard-boiled fiction and, most notably, the metaphysical detective story, a depiction of female victimisation and objectification in the male hegemonic world is an ambivalent and ironic way of illustrating male insecurity and identity crisis in the female dominated world.

As Charles Rzepka, Lee Horsley (2010), Martin Priestman (2003) and other critics indicated in their books and collections of essays, the surge of multiracial detective fiction addressing such issues as race, class, and postcolonialism become increasingly popular, yet still not widely known and investigated. The influx of this fiction directs critical attention to myriad ways

in which the genre concerns what Pepper refers to as “the existential realities of pain, anger, and resentment in contemporary culture” (Pepper 2000: 7). According to current research, the genre faces ongoing racial, ethnic, class and gender conflicts, failing to provide clear answers.

Finally, from an academic perspective, it is worth encapsulating the critical analysis of detective fiction which accurately reflects the contemporary investigation of all forms of the narrative, the extending, or even blurring the boundaries between “high” and “low” literatures, and, most importantly, the inclusion of detective and crime genres in the accepted academic subjects of study. The examination includes the whodunnit, the hard-boiled private eye narrative as well as a postmodern variant of the genre which emerged as a reaction to the dominant generic forms of its two predecessors. Detective fiction plays a special role in the investigation of critics and scholars of the narrative who claim that the genre exemplifies the general characteristics of all narratives. It reflects its own narrativity in a series of narrative levels and embedded texts of which narratives are formed. Hence, an analysis of detective literature is unavoidably self-reflexive, analogously to the locked-room mystery itself, or its mythical counterpart, the Gordian knot, which, according to Miller (1976: 73), constitutes a self-reflexive analogy for the relationship between a text and the theory that could disentangle it. In “Ariadne’s Thread” (1976), the critic claims that it is utterly impossible to isolate the criticism of a narrative text from the text itself, and from its components and properties: “Such a knot may be in one region untied, made unperplexed, but only at the expense of making an inextricable tangle of knotted crossings at some other point on the loop” (Miller 1976: 73).

With reference to Miller’s statement, Sweeney (1990: 14) accurately observes that metaphysical detective stories create even greater difficulty depicted by Miller since they represent that difficulty within their own narrative. An illustration of it could be the fact that in such texts the detective fails to provide a solution to the mystery, or else he discovers his own culpability (Robbe-Grillet’s *Les Gommages*), his own incarceration (Borges’s “Death and the Compass”), or that he manages to solve the criminal puzzle by accident (Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* and partly Berry’s *The Manual of Detection*). In this regard metaphysical detective stories highlight the intrinsic subjectivity of interpretation – within the text itself and the manner in which it is read.

Next to reflecting its own narrativity, detective fiction, and metaphysical detective stories in particular, exemplify the indispensability of generic structures that fulfil readers' expectations and fall short of the same expectations (Sweeney 1990: 6). Moreover, detectives are depicted as textually embedded readers whose actions reflect those of their audience (Pyrhönnen 2010: 49). Their inspection of manifold data echoes the general criteria of reading that necessitates exploring diverse frames of reference, and altering and reinterpreting one's inferences (Hühn 1987: 452). In the metaphysical detective story where self-reflexive narrativity is effectively illustrated the detective hero becomes "by chance", or "by destiny", the murderer he has been searching for (Merivale 1967: 210). Since this genre is distinguished by comprising such narrative devices as *mise en abyme*, the detective's revelation of his/her own subjectivity mirrors an analogous exposure on the reader's part.

From the above observation it emerges that the metaphysical detective story reflects upon language functioning, the structure of narrative, genre restraints, the significance of prior texts, and the nature of reading. The act of reading is one of the crucial components of the genre, systematically analysed by critics like Sweeney, Holquist, Tani, and, above all, by eminent semioticians, such as Eco. Eco's (1979) distinction of a dual readership for detective fiction deserves special attention. The critic envisions two individual reading strategies, based on distinct features of the text, the first one being an average reading, which corresponds to "low-brow" readership, whilst the second one is called a sophisticated reading and is associated with "high-brow" readership. Eco characterises the average reading strategy as an escapist consumption style which accounts for the mass readership of detective fiction and entails a low level of abstraction and a high level of emotional engagement. Contrastingly, Eco's notion of the sophisticated reading strategy encompasses an ability to recognise the devices and the targets of textual manipulation, thanks to readers' acquaintance with generic conventions. Compared with the average reading strategy which relies on codes and narrative conventions of detective stories, the sophisticated strategy consists in a rereading approach. It involves regarding the genre as a self-reflexive textual enigma which poses the questions about readability and intelligibility and is therefore related to hermeneutic activity.

An exemplification of the second type of the reading strategy, constituting an intellectual hide-and-seek game between the author and the reader, is

The Sign of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce (1984) edited by Umberto Eco and Thomas A. Sebeok. This book presents “a semiotic approach to abduction” (Kennedy 1986: 122) and the majority of the essays scrutinise relationships between the methods of Sherlock Holmes and the theory of hypothesis advanced by Charles Sanders Peirce. In fact, one fails to notice any direct impact, and the contributors show how the sign-reading of Holmes depends upon acts of abduction corresponding to the process marked in Peirce’s famous “beanbag” syllogism (Kennedy 1986: 122). The essay by Thomas Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok announces the book’s thesis: “Holmes’s powers of observation... and of deduction are in most cases built upon a complicated series of what Peirce would have called guesses” (Sebeok, Umiker-Sebeok 2009). While reading the text, one realises that shrewd abduction necessitates considerable knowledge; signs become decipherable only when one recognizes the system to which they belong.

Considering the acts of reading and semiotics of detective fiction, examined with reference to *The Sign of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce*, one cannot fail to mention other crucial essays providing the readers with the insight into the critical approaches to the genre’s interpretation. One of them is undoubtedly Carlo Ginzberg’s “Clues: Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes” which unfolds an eclectic notion of evidence as unconscious disclosure. Analogously, Gain Paolo Caprettini’s “Pierce, Holmes and Popper” discusses the way in which detectives and readers both interpret symbols, decipher clues and traces, attempting to discover links between single facts and global questions. Another yet illustration is the essay by Jaakko and Merrill B. Hintikka which speculates on the analogy between observations, enquiries, and tacit information, because they define the process of interference, nonetheless, when the debate leads to question-answer series in game theory, the reader is cast into the technical realm of formal logic.

There is no denying that the above critical essays offer intriguing theory and a novel approach to the reading strategies, mainly the sophisticated type. Nevertheless, for readers of detective fiction, the metaphysical detective story in particular, as well as semioticians, this insight may not be regarded as a crucial breakthrough. As M. Calinescu (1993) argues, rereading requires a retrospective logic which incorporates an effort to pattern the work under scrutiny, perceiving it as a framework. Such reading process necessitates intensified attention alongside intense intellectual activity since they thoroughly examine the composition of given narratives. Considering

popular literature, such rereading reflects the repetition of a preceding act of reading in order to rediscover and define it from a different perspective, yet it may additionally imply a decision to view the text as an illustration of its kind, so that reading entails a continual comparison between this specific text and similar texts recollected by the reader. Moreover, assuming that detective fiction relies on modification of generic structures, it requires an aesthetic appraisal of an author's performance. Rereading detective fiction incorporates the reading public's attempts to figure out the construction of a book combined with a postulate of intertextual comparison. Furthermore, a rereading strategy involves readers' acquaintance with generic motifs, and their knowledge of these motifs generates during the process of rereading symbolic profundity characteristic of "serious" literature. This strategy, Pyrhönnen (2010: 54) maintains, enables Irwin (2006) to perceive Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939) as a book of psychological depth and dramatic moral complexity related to a literary novel, yet, the critic simultaneously remarks that the consecutive symbolic dimension demands generic expertness from readers.

Pyrhönnen's reference to Irwin's interpretation of Chandler's text is accurate, however, as previously pointed out, the sophisticated reading strategy is more faithfully reflected in the metaphysical detective story alongside other postmodern variants of this genre. This "provocative" and experimental type of detective fiction speculates about the structure of narrative, its language, the nature of reading and readers' estimation of the text, and thus closely mirrors the rereading process which encompasses an aesthetic evaluation of the work and its author. Moreover, as stated before, the metaphysical detective fiction is a self-reflexive textual mystery which is frequently used by theorists to depict the hermeneutic code, and therefore requires the sophisticated reading strategy which combines a self-referential textual enigma with hermeneutic activity.

The analysis of the two reading strategies and tendencies, reflecting the nature of interpreting detective fiction, particularly the metaphysical detective story, led other critics' to a more profound debate on this genre in the context of further hypotheses put forward by such scholars as Norman N. Holland in *Death at a Delphi Seminar: A Postmodern Mystery* (1995). In this regard, postmodern detective fiction constitutes considerable challenges to literary critics and academic scholars. According to Richard, H. Rodino (1990: 7), critics ought to attempt to combine the smooth relations,

risk-taking, unflagging energies, and nonpositivistic hermeneutics of metaphysical detective fiction with exegetical undertaking that is both energetic and scrupulous and that are involved in dialogical relations with the fresh orthodoxies disseminated by these works. For that reason, contemporary theorists, among others Merivale, Sweeney, Dechêne, Irwin, or Ewert, implemented eclectic approaches in order to analyse the already self-analytical genre of metaphysical detective fiction, such as literary history and the influence of the genre; genre theory; reader-response and reception theory; deconstruction, hermeneutics, intertextuality and narratology; phenomenology; cultural studies, and, finally, philosophical inquiries of Blanchot, Foucault, Heidegger, and other critics (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 7).

Furthermore, current critical studies of the detective genre include Jacques Lacan's renowned interpretation of Poe's story in "The Seminar on «The Purloined Letter»" (1956, trans. 1972), which led to acrimonious discussions among such critics as Jacques Derrida, Barbara Johnson and John T. Irwin, and, most importantly, signalled new critical approaches to deconstruction, intertextuality, and psychoanalytic criticism (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 6). Other theorists have referred to detective fiction to exemplify the "hermeneutic code" (Barthes 1970: 75-77, 84-88), the significance of closure in Western culture (Kermode 1967: 19-21), the process in which narratives tell stories (Brooks 1984: 23-27), and the way in which readers understand and interpret them (Prince 1980: 238). It is also worth mentioning Most and Stowe's *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory* (1983) and Walker and Frazer's *The Cunning Craft: Original Essays on Detective Fiction and Contemporary Literary Theory* (1990) which have corroborated the view according to which traditional detective stories and literary theories illuminate each other to a significant extent.

It is worth stressing that the aforementioned approaches help to situate the metaphysical detective story in the context of the insightful discussion about postmodernity. Although the roots and evolution of the genre date back to the 19th century, its most significant flourishing coincides with the expansion of postmodernism, and therefore it offers an effective way to comprehend and interpret postmodernism as a theory, practice and a cultural phenomenon. Holquist argues that the aesthetics of postmodernism militantly anti-psychological and anti-mythical brings into focus things, or objects, in lieu of people. In contrast to Modernism which accentuated the "polar opposition" between the high art of the novel and its predilection in

favour of myth and depth psychology and the popular art of the detective fiction marked by its flat characterisation of protagonists and setting, postmodernism advocates disestablishing the mythic and psychological tendencies of the tradition by using of what had already become “the polar opposite of that tradition in its own time” (Holquist 1971: 148). Since detective stories had been predominantly regarded as escape literature, as genre escaping mainly from “*literature itself*”, writers such as Borges, Robbe-Grillet, Perec or Modiano turned to the detective novel as a way of overcoming the tradition of the novel (1971: 148; original emphasis). Thus, myth constituted an integral part of the experimental fiction before World War II whilst detective fiction has been used as a regular narrative subtext, a substantial part of postmodernist avant-garde prose after 1945.

In the light of the above statement it is interesting to observe that the authors who are mostly associated with postmodernism’s formal attributes, undoubtedly helped to shape the metaphysical detective story. These writers also include such eminent novelists and short story writers like Borges and Nabokov who launched their literary works when modernism thrived. In fact, the genre illustrates postmodernism’s concern with intertextuality, pop culture, pastiche, metafiction, as well as what John Barth coined as “the literature of exhaustion” (Barth 1967: 29). The metaphysical detective story’s link with self-reflexive hermeneutics, its “auto-referential” and “auto-representational” statuses, could be also considered postmodernist (Hutcheon 1985: 81-82, 1980: 1). Furthermore, it is worth mentioning William V. Spanos who labels this genre “the paradigmatic archetype of the postmodern literary imagination (1972: 154). Ultimately, Tani remarks that because the metaphysical detective story, or an anti-detective story, being an “inverted form of the detective novel”... “frustrates the expectations of the reader, transforms a mass-media genre into a sophisticated expression of avant-garde sensibility, and substitutes for the detective as central and ordering character the decentering and chaotic admission of mystery, of nonsolution”, it is “the ideal medium of postmodernism” (Tani 1984: 40).

1.4. A critical reflection on the concept of the labyrinth in the metaphysical detective story

As previously remarked, the metaphysical detective story parodies or challenges classical detective-story conventions, such as clear-cut divisions between the detective, the murderer and the victim, linear progression and narrative closure, which reflect hermeneutical assurance and teleological structure, thus intending, or at the least resulting in asking questions about being, knowing that transcend the mere machinations of the enigma plot (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 24-25). Such a text, implying the difficulty or even impossibility of identifying any order, cohesion or intelligibility in the universe, proves to be a model medium for exploring the notion of labyrinth, its heterogeneity, in particular, the concept of the rhizome, its structure and significance in shaping the metaphysical detective story's narrative.

In opposition to the traditional detective stories mirroring the liminal process of the detective's intuition that operates in the investigation, metaphysical detective fiction illustrates the detective's operating in a subliminal state, failing to control the events and to notice that the carefully laid clues turn out to be entrapment (Cook 2011: 161-162). Similarly to the detective, falling prey to the sadistic manipulations of the author who imprisons or annihilates him in the narrative confines of his text (most visibly in Borges's "Death and the Compass"), the reader, interpreting such a book according to the conventional rules of fair play, ratiocination and order, becomes ineluctably entrapped in the structural and thematic labyrinth of the text. Hence, in an attempt to explore the crucial elements of the metaphysical detective story and proceed to the scrutiny of the labyrinth and its components, one ought to focus on the very process of reading detective fiction, both its classical pattern and its postmodern model.

George N. Dove (1990: 25-26) stresses the significance of the act of reading, observing that in the analysis of the conventions of detective fiction, mainly its classic type, most critics have been exclusively text-oriented. The author refers to the reader-reception theory of Wolfgang Iser (1978) as a solid theoretical base for the scrutiny of the nature of reading detective fiction, and as an invaluable contribution to the reader-oriented theory. Dove claims that the reading process is an active experience which encompasses the interaction between reader and text. Using Iser's *The Act of Reading*

(1978), the critic highlights the importance of the process of transaction between reader and text. He refers to Iser's theory of gaps and blanks, the "areas of indeterminacy" that lead to communication between author and reader, constituting the core of experience of the text (Dove 1990: 26-27, Iser 1990: 92). Nonetheless, at this point Dove's in-depth analysis of the reader-response criticism ought to be indubitably extended into the examination of Roman Ingarden's phenomenology of reading experience whose tenets were formulated by the Polish critic in *The Literary Work of Art* (1973a) and the *Cognition of the Literary Work of Art* (1973b). In fact, both Ingarden and Iser depict the fundamental constraints and conditions to which reading of fictional works is submitted. The gaps and blanks create in the reader the process of ideation and consecutively interpretation, the creation of the aesthetic object, that is, the meaning of the text which does not exist prior to the text but is produced during the process of reading. According to Ingarden, the specificity of the reading experience is closely related to an ontological distinction between real objects and fictional objects represented in literary works. His famous postulate is illustrated as follows:

It is impossible to establish clearly and exhaustively the infinite multiplicity of determinacies of the individual objects portrayed in the work with a finite number of words or sentences... We find such a [spot] of indeterminacy wherever it is impossible, on the basis of the sentences in the work, to say whether a certain object or objective situation has a certain attribute. (Ingarden 1973b: 50)

From the above citation it transpires that, in contrast to objects in the real world possessing an infinite number of properties and perceptual attributes, which are a priori accessible for experience and investigation, fictional or intentional objects are endowed only with those properties that are explicitly introduced in the text. This implies that since a fictional text incorporates a finite number of sentences which express such properties, the number of their properties is finite as well. This, in turn, means that objects represented in literary works are definitely incomplete, being endowed with blanks or ontologically irremovable "places of indeterminacy", as Ingarden put it (Bundgaard 2013: 171-172). Hence, this ontological distinction has immediate phenomenological ("experiential") consequences: whatever is not stated in a text ought to be filled out by the

reader (for instance, if the motive of the crime is never mentioned in the text, we still make the default assumption that the culprit had a motive for committing a crime).

As Ingarden and Iser show, the role of the reader is a pivotal element of detective fiction, both its classical and postmodern kinds. Undoubtedly, one of the most vital aspects of any detective fiction has been a contested intellectual game played between author and reader. Nevertheless, the nature and objectives of the game have considerably changed with the shift from the classic to metaphysical or anti-detective story (Ewert 1999: 185). The reader of the classic detective novel entirely relies on his/her assumption that every mystery will be explained by the adept detective, each apparently irrelevant clue will become crucial to the final solution, and each character introduced by the author will be significant for the events of the story. The reader's positivistic assumption is based on reading the detective novel which proposes "the *expectation* of a solution" (Ewert 1990: 166; original emphasis) and whose structure depends (as it does) upon sequence, causality, and the possibility of inductive solutions in a positivistic universe. Ewert stresses that the structure of the classic detective story closely reflects the "hermeneutic code", delineated by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*. Referring to Barthes's description, Ewert states that the "hermeneutic code" is defined by numerous designations by which an enigma can be singled out, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and ultimately unravelled (Barthes 1970: 19), and adds that this process corresponds to the unveiling and solving of a mystery in a classic detective story (Ewert 1990: 166).

In contrast, the essence of the metaphysical detective story or postmodern anti-detective fiction lies in its denial of a coded and complete universe, and of the linear/teleological construction of traditional detective stories. According to Spanos, the linear/teleological structure of traditional literature is a self-deceptive effort, an endeavour to abscond in the face of the menacing absurd and by "*coercively imposing a distancing and tranquilizing ending or telos from the beginning on the invading contingencies of existence*" (Spanos 1972: 22; original emphasis). Thus, metaphysical detective stories and postmodern anti-detective novels vividly show a breakdown of the hermeneutic code by undermining causality, induction and identity (Ewert 1990: 167). In this respect, the readers feel deceived by the trappings of conventional fiction and find in its place a bifurcated labyrinth, a kind of Barthian funhouse, equipped with trick mirrors. They become thwarted in

their attempts to find order in the universes they are exploring and to seek any plausible explanation to the criminal riddle. Being forced to cease to rely on a traditional detective story conventions, such as solution to the mystery and climactic closure which reflects restoration of order and social hierarchy, the reading public is confronted with the unbalanced, disharmonious world, vague reality and a universe destined to frustrate them.

Numerous postmodern anti-detective and metaphysical detective stories, such as the works of Borges, Eco, Auster, Pynchon, Robbe-Grillet, Modiano, Perec or Butor deftly manipulate the readers by undermining the hermeneutical assurance and the epistemological assumption that any mystery could be uncovered and any criminal riddle be solved. At the core of the process of detection and investigation revealed in their texts lies a highly complex and ambiguous aspect of the labyrinth, being infinitely open, dynamic and inscrutable. The works of each of these authors are distinguished by picturing diverse, ambivalent facets of the maze. However, it is Borges's texts, particularly "Death and the Compass", "The Garden of Forking Paths" and "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth", next to Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, that become pioneers in displaying and developing the concept of postmodern labyrinth. These works bring into prominence the labyrinth's complex, polyvalent structure which is closely linked to the enigmatic nature of the investigative process highlighted in metaphysical and anti-detective novels.

Prior to the exploration of the labyrinth and its structure in the metaphysical detective story, it is worth stressing at the outset that the very concept of the labyrinth mirrors the idea of detective fiction which comprises enclosed narrative, meandering search, central mystery and locked rooms. As a metaphor for the locked room, it is quite crucial because in the conventional locked room story the enclosed physical architecture plays a vital role in highlighting the closed narrative itself. Although the locked room appears a space that is impenetrable, the text always suggests a way in, correspondingly to an entrance in the labyrinth (Cook 2011: 116). Nonetheless, in Borges's stories, the more ambivalent space of the maze is more evidently open at one end, and while this coincides with his altered state of the closed narrative, it indeed illustrates the idea of the conventional locked room. Significantly, this permits to view not just one solution to a mystery, but actually an infinite number of possibilities.

The three labyrinths emerging in Borges's detective stories are all subtle modifications of the original metaphor. In "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth", the labyrinth is an allegory of a locked room, in "The Garden of Forking Paths", it indicates the vision of the timeless library, whilst in "Death and the Compass", it represents the progress of investigation resulting in only the infinity of time and space. Apart from the presence of the labyrinth theme and its potentially open-ended form, the protagonists in these stories are constantly imprisoned in the more distinguishable locked room. This arises exactly due to the fact that the physical enclosure is substituted by a metaphysical version which is interminable (Cook 2011: 117). Thus, in spite of the fact that Borges burlesques the genre's rules, he still identifies the connection that exists between structure and thematic content in every detective story. As regards the physical appearance of the labyrinth, Irwin (1991: 45) accentuates Borges's reflection on Poe which is anchored in structural and architectural resemblances:

What seems clear is that Borges's antithetical reading/rewriting of the Dupin stories registers not only the resemblance between the mystery of a locked room and the puzzle of a labyrinth, but also the resemblance between these two structures and the purloined letter. The basic similarity of the three turns upon each figure's problematic representation of the relationship between inner and outer.

It ought to be emphasised that both Poe and Borges use the ratiocinative detective story as the form that encourages hermeneutics and the ultimate resolution of an apparently insoluble mystery. Both authors consider this heuristic approach contributing to the restoration of order as a highly desirable goal. Nevertheless, Borges contradicts Poe in that his character-detective Lönnrot in "Death and the Compass", indubitably modelled on Dupin, is lured into the labyrinth that Red Scharlach has created to meet his fate. Paradoxically enough, Lönnrot's intellectual powers entrap him in Scharlach's labyrinth, and it is Inspector Treviranus's more monotonous investigative methods that turn out to be correct. In this respect, Borges confirms and at the same time negates his link with Poe's detective.

Another crucial facet of the labyrinth's structural relationship with detective fiction emerges from the conjunction of inner and outer: while engaging with the generic narrative structure, the Argentinian writer does so

constantly from a detached position (Cook 2011: 118). Thus, Irwin's concept of rewriting provokes the idea that to some extent Borges's detective stories are forms of translation, largely, from one version of the structure to another. Furthermore, the relationship between inner and outer, paramount in the locked room mystery, has physical analogies with the architectural references, as well as being integral to the detective story's structure. Considering the journey through the labyrinth as a metaphor of a perpetual quest for resolution, the detective story proves to be an aimless inquiry. Hence, in Borges's world, the journey through the labyrinth centres on the process of epistemics, a quest for the answer not to a specific problem but how we theorise the gaining and gathering of knowledge. Consequently, the labyrinth as a model is a way in which Borges is capable of pointing out the idea of inquiry. In "Unreading Borges's Labyrinth", Lawrence, R. Schehr (1986: 178) puts forward a juxtaposition of the thematization of the labyrinth figure in Borges's detective texts with that delineated by Irwin:

In general critics have opted for a point of view that is normative, be it psychoanalytical, metaphysical or even structuralist. That is to say; the questions of labyrinth and text are first thematized and then through this thematization of the figure, brought back from their ex-centric position, returned to the fold, and explained as components of a normative structure.

From the above citation it transpires that the critic is not prone to thematize writing itself as metaphysical, or psychoanalytical, and proposes to regard the questions of labyrinth and text as "fundamental disruptions of and within narrative as the trace of the irreducible paradox of representation in narrative" (Schehr 1986: 178). Cook (2011: 118) argues that the notion of Borges's labyrinths, viewed as a disturbance of narrative, is quintessentially thematic since they affect the writer's work by heightening the impression of indeterminate locus, a place where all truths are elusive and ambiguous. As a writer heralding the emergence of the postmodern or anti-detective fiction, Borges challenges the idea of the pure storytelling narrative by indicating that investigation is likely to end in continual, unresolved closure. Thus, the labyrinth motif in Borges is a tool that mitigates against the pursuit of final teleological reduction.

This aspect of textual disturbance is further scrutinised by Fraser (1989: 179) who perceives the labyrinth in Borges's texts as giving rise to "endlessly

opening vistas of knowledge beyond knowledge, the relentless epistemological questionings, the apparent subverting of every commonsense and common-knowledge certainty". As an illustration of his statement, the critic refers to "The Garden of Forking Paths", and argues that Borges draws the attention to the fact that the genre's narrative potency, resolution and reestablishment of order are not absolutes. According to Fraser (1989: 184): "Its Chestertonian, Father Brownish aspects remind us that every detective story or novel, even the most mystifying ones by John Dickson Carr... ultimately ends with the assented-to solving of a mystery or mysteries, and the arrival of not at "truth" but at specific, limited truths". In fact, the Argentinian writer points to these "specific, limited truths" which are in the background of the ambivalent endings to his detective stories. By indicating at the closing of "Death and the Compass" the possibility of a multitude of alternative solutions, next to the "dizzying web of divergent, convergent and parallel times" in "The Garden of Forking Paths" (Borges 1962: 145), Borges discloses the limitations of the strictly formulaic confines of the detective story.

Fraser's interpretation of the labyrinth motif in many respects parallels that of Schehr – both critics read it as distortion of narrative continuity (Cook 2011: 119). As a conclusion of his examination, Fraser (1989: 190) once again refers to "The Garden of Forking Paths" and its status in *Ficciones*, pointing out that: "Useful as the metaphor of a labyrinth is, it misrepresents *Ficciones* – and Borges – in so far as it implies a construction with a static centre and a solution. Like other major works, *Ficciones* is heuristic, an exploring". From this citation it transpires that Fraser negates, in fact, the theory of labyrinth, assuming Borges's stories' static centre and solution. However, his encapsulating remark reflects the point achieved by the Borges trilogy of detective stories: the distortion that the labyrinth produces converts the narrative into an extended, endless investigation resulting in either implied, manifold or absent solutions.

The equivocal space of Borges's labyrinth, reflecting its heterogeneous nature and endless possibilities, is a point of departure for the definition, representation and categorisation of the maze in the context of the metaphysical detective story as evidenced in postmodern novels and critical essays, most notably, in Eco's *Postscript to The Name of the Rose* and Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). As for Eco's novel, one may initially have some reservations about classifying this text as "typically"

postmodern detective fiction due to its apparently close ending providing a solution to the murder mystery. Nevertheless, it is principally the tension between two alternative interpretations of the murder cases, the ambivalent relation between the author, narrator, characters and the reader, next to an enigmatic character of signs and clues in the investigation process which places Eco's novel in the context of postmodernist crime studies. In *The Name of The Rose*, regarded as one of the most illuminating examples of the metaphysical detective story and the reaction of the reader of classic detection when first encountering metaphysical detection, one witnesses William of Baskerville and a monk novice Adso in a desperate search for empirical truth and a fundamental order in the universe (Ewert 1999: 185). However, Eco's book thwarts the expectations of such readers as Adso owing to the fact that it strikingly illustrates a universe alternative to the one that could be found in traditional detective stories, the world that is unsettling and disorientating both for the readers and the protagonists. In his *Postscript* the novelist reveals to the readers the nature of the universe delineated in the story referring to the metaphor of a net, a theory of conjectural thinking and an elucidation of three types of labyrinth. Eco's study of the universe in terms of diverse faces of the labyrinth very accurately reflects the very maze-like nature of the metaphysical detective story. At this point it is worth quoting Eco's illustration of a concept of conjecturality and elaborate on the idea of three kinds of labyrinths which was mentioned in the Introduction. The author's classification pertinently reflects two distinct types of the detective story, its classical model and its metaphysical or anti-detective variant. As the critic remarks:

At this point it is clear why my basic story (whodunit) ramifies into so many other stories, all stories of other conjectures, all linked with the structure of conjecture as such.

An abstract model of conjecturality is the labyrinth. But there are three kinds of labyrinth. One is the Greek, the labyrinth of Theseus. This kind does not allow anyone to get lost: you go in, arrive at the center, and then from the center you reach the exit...

[The second is the mannerist maze; if you unravel it, you find in your hands a kind of tree, a structure with roots, with many blind alleys. There is only one exit, but you can get it wrong. You need an Ariadne's-thread to keep from getting lost. This labyrinth is a model of the trial-and-error process.] (Eco 1984: 57)

Eco's metaphor of the mannerist maze is applicable to the problem-solving techniques used in various classic detective fiction. Detectives in late 19th-century and early 20th-century British detective novels (Doyle's Holmes, Christie's Poirot, Marple or Sayers's Wimsey) and private eyes in American hard-boiled crime stories (Hammett's Opp or Chandler's Marlowe) encounter a number of obstacles, at times deadly traps, follow a series of misleading paths and dead-end clues before they ultimately take the right direction in their investigation (Ewert 1999: 187). These novels closely reflect the mannerist maze, the labyrinth in which the trial-and-error process finally leads to the solution of the crime. In contrast, the failure to solve a criminal case and a lack of rational elucidation of the crime mystery in *The Name of the Rose* is based on a third type of labyrinth, depicted by the Italian novelist as follows:

And finally there is the net, or, rather, what Deleuze and Guattari call "rhizome". The rhizome is so constructed that every path can be connected with every other one. It has no center, no periphery, no exit, because it is potentially infinite. The pace of conjecture is a rhizome space. The labyrinth of my library is still a mannerist labyrinth, but the world in which William realizes he is living already has a rhizome structure: that is, it can be structured, but is never structured definitively. (Eco 1984: 57-58)

The above definition of the rhizome accurately illustrates the labyrinthine structure of the metaphysical detective story, as inaugurated by Borges's texts and exemplified by Eco's novel. Among numerous characteristics of the rhizome which Eco refers to in the above excerpt and which are outlined by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 6-7), such as connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, or asignifying rupture, it is worth highlighting those features which closely mirror the structure and thematic content of the metaphysical detective story as opposed to the classic detective fiction situated in the context of the mannerist maze.

Firstly, from the critics' depiction it transpires that in the rhizome construction every single path is linked to another, yet in contrast to a bifurcated tree which arranges a point and fixes an order (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7), the rhizome is "surface extension in all directions" in which each node or junction constitutes a singularity, not a level of hierarchical development. Merivale and Sweeney (1999: 9) claim that the rhizome

structure is indeed a paradigm of postmodernist detection; as opposed to the traditional detective fiction founded on structural and thematic order, hierarchy and stability, which inevitably leads to the resolution of the mystery, the rhizome framework, being an unendingly interlaced network, without centre, periphery or exit, mirrors a disordered, fortuitous dimension of investigation and the universe governed by contingency.

The principle of connection which the rhizome is determined by is closely related to a rule of multiplicity. As we read in Eco's foregoing statement, rhizome is potentially infinite, and, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 8) emphasise, it is a point-less incessantly emergent novelty. Significantly enough, when set beside the mannerist maze's model of the trial-and-error process which eventually leads to the exit and the story's ending, the rhizome is a net never structured definitely but limitlessly, invariably changing in nature and expanding its connections. In contrast to the mannerist maze, reflecting the closed, stable narrative and a confined space of the classic detective text, the rhizome mirrors an infinitely open, dynamic and constantly expanding character of the metaphysical detective story narrative. Due to its heterogeneous, multiplicitous, invariably emergent nature, the rhizome labyrinth directs to endless exists and thus reflects the story's infinite endings and interpretations. This kind of labyrinth creates confusion and bewilderment among both the characters and the readers accustomed to the error-and-trial process of deciphering the criminal enigma and ratiocinative solutions. On the other hand, owing to its de-centring, shifting dimension, the rhizome mirrors the un-hierarchical, experimental, a constantly developmental model of the universe, and the empirical experience of the narrative world. Consequently, in the metaphysical detective story illustrating the rhizome structural and thematic pattern, the investigative process of the narrative world is not determined by any absolute, ultimate truth which monopolises traditional detection and mirrors social progress but instead is governed by contingency and alternative solutions, frequently inaccessible to the characters and produced to a substantial degree by the very readers.

As observed in the foregoing excerpt of Eco's *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, the world in which William of Baskerville realises he is living has a rhizome structure though, as he notices, the labyrinth of his library is of the mannerist type, to which both Adso and the reader are accustomed. This clash of labyrinths creates the impression of incertitude and hallucination. With

reference to the investigative work delineated in the Italian text, one is prepared to concede that Adso finds it exceedingly difficult to reconcile the evidence of the world in which he lives with the world in which he thought he was living (Ewert 1999: 188). It is William that ultimately recognises the world modelled on a third kind of labyrinth, its rhizome structure: “I behaved stubbornly, pursuing a semblance of order, when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe” (Eco 1984: 599). In view of this, as Ewert asserts, the reader of metaphysical detection ought to identify with William, following his investigative path, rather than Adso’s.

Borges’s, Eco’s and above all Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical approaches to the classical, modern and above all postmodern concepts of the labyrinth as the pivotal constituents of the traditional and avant-garde, experimental detective fiction paved the way for shaping a postmodern notion of the map and mapping which highlighted on the one hand, a problematic spatial representation of the city/town (topography, architecture of the place), and the mathematical shapes attributed to the narratives along with the linearity and circularity of the text on the other hand. The studies on spatial metaphors of the texts, accentuated by a spinoff of the experimental Oulipo (*Ouvrir de littérature potentielle*) group dedicated to the detective genre, the Oulipopo (*Ouvrir de la littérature policière potentielle*), in their literary atlas comprising a collection of maps and diagrams that had originally emerged in detective novels ranging from Agatha Christie’s books to Gaston Leroux’s *Rouletabille* stories and others by novelists like Willis Kent, Ellery Queen, and C. Daly King, significantly helped to situate the analysis of the modern and especially postmodern dimensions of the maze in the context of the city, narration and text.

The idea of a map and mapping the city is by no means new, dating back to the Antiquity. However, Oulipian exploration of “impossible sites”, uncharted territories, their depiction of the representational perils of crime and detective fiction maps which are used for “the interplay of textual topography and visual topology” (Goulet 2015: 209) has indubitably reflected a new chapter in the history of the detective fiction with respect to the spatial representation of the city and text as labyrinth, raising questions of textual referentiality and generic convention. Early *nouveau roman* detective novels, such as Robbe-Grillet’s *Les Gommages*, Ollier’s *La Mise en scène* and Butor’s *L’Emploi du temps* constitute counter-detective narratives which expose a playfully subversive spatiality calling into question classic expectations of

detection and investigative closure as well as accentuating the limits of social order (Goulet 2015: 209).

In *L'Emploi du temps* (1956) urban and textual labyrinth epitomises the rhizome of unhierarchical structure and infinite possibilities. Albeit Butor's pointing to mythic details like Ariadne's thread, epitomising the mannerist maze with numerous blind alleys and only one exit and allowing the story's fictional city to be considered as symbolic of a modern urbanity, his novel mostly mirrors a rhizome structure of the text and the city, with its timelessness, endless exists and multiple interpretations.

In fact, two approaches to the concept of mapping and labyrinth in this French novel are worth highlighting. On the one hand, in the discussion of Butor's book, analogously to the works of other post-war French authors such as Léo Malet or Didier Daeninckx, critics like Goulet (2015) explore predominantly social-historical and political faces of urban experience within an "objective" model of realism. Being referred to as an amalgamation of *roman policier* and *neo-polar*, *L'Emploi du temps*, it is argued, reveals the features of modernist crime fiction which brings into prominence the process of urban mapping in the context of the real social space of criminal justice and violence. In this respect, the notion of the map in Butor's novel is tantamount to the idea of the mannerist maze, with its complex, multi-layered yet predictable structure which, despite numerous roots and booby-traps, ultimately points to the exit. Hence, *L'Emploi du temps* may mirror some British whodunnits on the one hand, and, more noticeably, the American hard-boiled crime novels, on the other hand. Nonetheless, in my opinion, the scrutiny of the urban and textual mapping in Butor's story in the context of a more fictionalised, experimental and symbolic spatial structure as evidenced in postmodern metaphysical and anti-detective novels is more pertinent. As a blending of early *nouveau-roman*, a *neo-noir* novel, an anti-detective story and a postmodern mystery, Butor's map-plus-narrative text underlines an ambiguous relation between textual reference and urban representation. Furthermore, similarly to the works of French and American novelists, most notably, Robbe-Grillet, Ollier, Modiano, Auster, Pynchon, Berry and Sorrentino, Butor's book reflects the anxiety of urban experience in the modern and simultaneously timeless city-universe mapped by unhierarchical, heterogeneous, indefinite structure of the maze and governed by contingency and chance.

The above approaches and texts' analyses reflect profound alterations in the nature of the game of the detective genre. As seen in the above essays and selected novels, a familiar labyrinth (the Greek or the mannerist one) and a city map becomes substituted by a rhizome of indefinite possibility and unpredictability, according to the ontologies of unfamiliar universes with overlapping boundaries.

1.5. On the trail of spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths: an introductory analysis

A key to an understanding of the essence of metaphysical detective novels lies in the analysis which excludes relying on the traditional detective's investigation but which instead suggests reading in a world that offers conjectures, hypotheses and structuring systems, or a plurality of systems which are devoid of any single overriding structure (Ewert 1999: 188). In such texts, a universe, built on a rhizome net of hypotheses and theories which fail to offer any resolution in the investigative process, is radically different from the one pictured in the classic detective fiction. Metaphysical detection undermines the structures acknowledged by classic detective story writers, like the hermeneutic strategies of rendering meaningful those signs which are unaccountable to others, and of predicting the mind of an opponent – the epistemological process of revealing truth by calling into questions sources of knowledge, and finally, the adept detective's victory over the threatening Other.

It transpires from the above that the structure of the metaphysical detective story, as evidenced in the examination of Borges's trilogy of detective stories and Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, accurately reflects the rhizome, which, being devoid of centre, periphery and exit, is composed of potential infinities. Thus, the world depicted in these stories is never definitely structured, neatly organised, stable and harmonious human actions are barely predicted and comprehended, and the universe in which characters reside is governed by contingency. The structure of the rhizome, or the net, is ubiquitous in metaphysical detective stories whose elements faithfully reflect the essence of this type of labyrinth. In an attempt to thoroughly explore the rhizome construction of metaphysical detective

stories, it is worth considering its salient characteristic themes, delineated by Merivale and Sweeney (1999: 8):

(1) the defeated sleuth, whether he be an armchair detective or a private eye; (2) the world, city, or text as labyrinth; (3) the purloined letter, embedded text, *mise en abyme*, textual constraint, or text as object; (4) the ambiguity, ubiquity, eerie meaningfulness, or sheer meaninglessness of clues and evidence; (5) the missing person, the “man of the crowd”, the double, and the lost, stolen, or exchanged identity; and (6) the absence, falseness, circularity, or self-defeating nature of any kind of closure to the investigation.

From the above list, one ought to distinguish four crucial constituents, such as: identity, space, text as object and lack of closure to the investigation. Taking into account the first component, one ought to remark that in the metaphysical detective story it is difficult to detect a singular identity. In such texts, in fact, detectives, criminals or culprits and victims frequently stand for one person (or one consciousness), and a detective’s or a private eye’s search for another (a culprit) which turns out to be a quest for his/her own identity is a recurrent theme in these novels (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 10). Moreover, critics such as Ramsay (1999: 199-214) link the issue of identity and subjectivity to the relationships among author, narrator, detective and fictitious detective novelist to show how author, investigator, and criminal are merged.

The two subsequent motifs which refer to space, either a place (the world or city), a text, or a character’s mind (the locked room), closely reflect a labyrinthine structure. As previously pointed out, in metaphysical detective fiction, the mystery constitutes a maze without an exit, a centre or a periphery, in which a detective or a private eye faces a convoluted entanglement of streets, an endlessly interlaced network of roads, canals and houses (Auster’s, Modiano’s, Robbe-Grillet’s and Berry’s novels). As highlighted by Mark Brown (2007), Elena Brândușa-Steiciuc (2015: 133-138), Anna Botta (1999: 217-230), or Gérard Durozoi (1973), in the postmodernist detective literature, especially in the metaphysical detective story, the protagonists’ existential anxiety or void and a sense of temporal incertitude are invariably countered by the equally powerful obsession with spatial precision and an insistence on geometrical and architectural arrangements. This process is conspicuous in particular in Auster’s,

Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's novels in which metropolitan and urban experience governs and determines the characters' actions, especially their investigative work. Space is frequently evoked and traversed: its mazes are those of coincidence, wanderings and travelling, and an acquaintance with them turns out to be crucial to those who are forced to escape, hide (as in Patrick Modiano's, Georges Perec's and Antonio Tabucchi's books) or those who frantically search for their "other" selves or their own identity (as visible in Paul Auster's and Alain Robbe-Grillet's novels). For the characters and narrators of these novelists' works, a momentarily stable spatial orientation apparently compensates them for the angst of a mystifying temporal detection.

A spatial maze quite often mirrors a textual labyrinth, the form in which the metaphysical detective story is designed (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 9). Thus, the genre focusses on textual restraint, embedded texts which are incomplete or indiscernible, purloined, missing or oddly shaped documents which mislead their would-be readers (Poe's "The Purloined Letter", Chesterton's "The Wrong Shape"). Moreover, in miscellaneous metaphysical detective stories, letters, words and documents fail to symbolise the objects they are supposed to represent, instead, these texts prove to be impenetrable objects in their own right. Such a world composed of such unnamed, replaceable "things" claim the ordered interpretation that it at the same time declares to be impossible. This problem is neatly presented by Robbe-Grillet who explains why his deeply psychological novels are preoccupied with surfaces, objects and artifacts. According to the critic:

The world itself resembles a detective story in which you have to keep coming back to the recorded evidence: the exact position of a piece of furniture, the shape and frequency of a fingerprint, a word written in a message. The impression grows on you that nothing else is *true*. Whether they conceal or reveal a mystery, these elements that defy all systems have only one serious, obvious quality – that of being *there*". (Robbe-Grillet 1963: 56, trans. Howard; original emphasis).

Robbe-Grillet's rumination on the unalterable "thing-ness of things" (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 10) is illustrated in a number of metaphysical detective stories, such as nameless artefacts littering the streets of Auster's city in *The New York Trilogy*, or various passports, name tags and

photographs that are supposed to identify their owners in Modiano's, Robbe-Grillet's or Tabucchi's novels.

Ultimately, spatial labyrinth recurrently exemplifies the locked room, emerging as an impenetrable place which symbolises the writer's as well as the reader's isolating experience. The idea of the locked room as the writer's alienating experience but also authorial power is closely illustrated in Poe's, Modiano's and especially Auster's works. In Poe's texts, the action of writing is inextricably linked with numerous images of death, enclosure and entropy that saturate his oeuvre. The act of writing invokes the notion of the locked room of the writer's psyche, which is the struggle situated within the author's mind in the exercise of writing as a creative power (Cook 2011: 13). This idea is confirmed by Fredman (1996: 1) who claims that Auster's texts mostly deal with the confining nature of writing, and they use the metaphoric possibilities of the room as the mind, "the room of the book", an area where life and writing meet in an unstable, creative and at times perilous encounter. On the other hand, the locked room, embodying spatial labyrinth, also illustrates a complex, strenuous, frequently ambiguous process of the text's interpretation, and an alienating experience of the reader.

As indicated in one of the previous paragraphs, spatial maze is closely related to a problematic of time, playing a crucial role in detective literature, in particular, in the metaphysical detective story. Shifts of time produce shifts of space which is mirrored in Bakhtin's theory about chronotope, as a unity of time and space. As the critic underlines, the concept of chronotope, literally "time-space" refers to "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature". Bakhtin's remarks that the meaning of the term "space-time", employed in mathematics, and introduced as part of Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity, is pivotal as long as it is used "for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely)". The critic concludes stating that: "What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)" (Bakhtin 1981: 84-85; trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist, 2008). Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope thus closely mirrors an inextricable link between spatial and temporal labyrinths, specifically, temporal distortion, fragmentariness and chaos in the metaphysical detective fiction. A number of works by O'Brien, Auster, Robbe-Grillet, Modiano, Eco, Tabucchi, Calvino, King, Pynchon, Sorrentino or Berry express temporal uncertainty by outlining nostalgias, memory gaps, blurred images and

transitional phases, which are closely connected with an accurate depiction of the maze. In metaphysical detective stories, as in the majority of postmodernist novels, temporal and spatial labyrinths are interrelated. On closer inspection, however, one cannot fail to notice that the novels by Auster, Modiano and Sorrentino, despite reflecting a close liaison of space and time, from the perspective of the detective formula, are still permeated by the tension between a traditional hermeneutics of time and a more modern hermeneutics of spatial detection. Following Foucault (1986: 22) who asserts that the present epoch is determined by space, Botta (1999: 218) rightly argues that the anxiety of our era is related to a greater extent to space rather than time. Nonetheless, postmodern literature abounds with the exploration of the concept of time, predominantly its chaotic, fragmented, disordered, non-linear nature.

Metaphysical detective story authors place special emphasis on individual perception of time, its relativity, temporal flux and shifts. Since their novels reflect the illusory nature of reality, one may assume that every person has his/her own reality and everything which is accepted for reality is only a representation of it, and language does not solely express reality but creates it as well (Brockmeier 1994: 104). Analogously, time represents a certain construct which is shaped by a personality. Hence, it is viewed differently by different people. Writers accentuate the personal treatment of time, depicting miscellaneous temporal experiences. Novelists like Modiano (*Quartier perdu, Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*) and Auster (*The Book of Illusions*), present their narrators' temporal personal experience and time understanding determined by geographical location as well as highlighting temporal shifts and circularity against the background of the fragmented nature of human existence. Others depict the process of travelling back in time which creates a possibility that one can encounter oneself (Borges's *The Other*, 1967), present stories without endings in which the beginning starts in denouement, with alternative endings, or with non-linear progression (Nabokov's *The Circle*, 1936). The authors frequently alter the events' order, moving from the end to the beginning, stepping over some temporal breaks and phases, stopping, freezing, stretching or compressing, as seen in Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* (Fedosova 2015: 81). Yet, other novelists, such as John Updike, illustrate the interlacing of the real and imaginary, myth and autobiography in which the author uses original ways of the story

structure, like mythological allusions, passing from one literary world to another, reminiscences, internal monologues and polyphony, as visible in *The Centaur* (1991).

When set beside traditional detective fiction, highlighting repetitive and predetermined time, whose present is used to explain the past, and delineating the logical sequence of time/space and cause/effect relationships in the story, the metaphysical detective story foregrounds non-repetitive and open time, frequently cyclical or spiral, in which linear progression is replaced by a nihilistic post-historical present (Fedosova 2015: 77). Metaphysical detective fiction rejects the linear/teleological structures of classic detective stories built on causality and induction, thus it exemplifies the breakdown of the hermeneutic code. Owing to the dissolution of time/space links, and the treatment of time as the fourth dimension of space in which past, present and future are interwoven, the effect of time chaos and temporal achronology has been created in the novelists' metaphysical or anti-detective works which reflect their individual style and novel approach to temporal-spatial relations. In the majority of the metaphysical detective stories, like in Bakhtin's chronotope, spatial and temporal categories are merged into one concrete entirety.

Robbe-Grillet's fiction is a vivid illustration of the spatial-temporal interrelatedness. Nevertheless, his novels bring into prominence temporal distortions and the literal disruptions of the flow of time which produces a reversed, achronological order, and varies its course. In *Les Gommages*, *Le Voyeur*, *Dans le labyrinthe* or *La Reprise*, the temporal labyrinth takes the form of a circle which creates its doubles constituting a unique set of challenges and puzzles both for the protagonist and the reader. This becomes especially conspicuous in his first novel where the narrator finds himself in a universe governed by an extra twenty-four hours, an incomprehensible and fateful day, out of place in time, in which he is bound to fire a bullet into a man who should have been dead the previous night. In terms of the detection process, the circular movement induces no evident change in position, reflecting instead standing still, therefore it contradicts the idea of progression and teleological orientation, the key factors in the process of detection and investigation.

The effect of time chaos and disruption of chronology is particularly visible in O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* (1967), Sorrentino's *Odd Number* (1985) and Berry's *The Manual of Detection* (2009). These novels powerfully

illustrate the transition from the familiar labyrinth of the classic detective stories to a rhizome of infinite possibilities and incertitude, in line with the ontologies of unfamiliar universes with unnervingly porous boundaries (Merivale, Sweeney 1999:15). Moreover, they display a continuous proliferation of worlds and characters, mirroring an unceasing struggle between centripetal forces which aspire to restore a standard, unitary language, an official canon and therefore enhance the process of social and cultural coalescence, whereas centrifugal forces bring into focus diversity, resistance and disintegration (Gregoriou 2007: 27) in the carnivalesque structure. These texts, especially Sorrentino's *Odd Number*, reflect these two struggling energies constituting the essence of Bakhtin's carnivalesque imagery which denotes "any demotic heteroglossic or "multi-voiced" counter-culture in comic or exuberant opposition to a hegemonic official culture: a kind of subversive anti-culture, often with its own anti-language" (Wales 2001: 48). As seen below, all these novels show, to a various degree, the process of overthrowing the dominating canon of the British classic detective fiction or American hard-boiled crime literature, especially by lampooning its prevailing ideas and values such as causality, hermeneutical certitude, linear progression and closure.

The first of the aforementioned works, constituting a fine example of this unfamiliar realm, delineates time as an hallucinatory journey the narrator undertakes to find himself in a strange universe when he dies without being aware of his own death. *The Third Policeman* closely examines temporal circularity of the character's journey from earthly life to some extraterrestrial time-space and his posthumous lifetime in which he becomes pursued by his resurrected victim, suffers remorse, undergoes existential and metaphysical torments at the police station, in order to ultimately return to life to chase his murderer and simultaneously accomplice (Stolarek 2013: 293-294). The circular path the protagonist travels, symbolising his hell, could be also called the "strange loop" of the text (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 189-190). In this metaphysical detective story, the hell or temporal "strange loop" is the quintessence of human life governed by bedlam, delusion and "an hallucination containing in itself the secondary hallucination of day and night" (O'Brien 1967:5). In O'Brien's work, temporal-spatial chaos determines and shapes life as delirium and illusion, which is compared to death, referred to as "the supreme hallucination" (O'Brien 1967:5).

In the second of the above-mentioned texts, *Odd Number*, temporal distortion takes the form of fractured narratives and mirrors the ontological conventions of alternative histories. Each of the sections of the book offers a different and unique history of murder relation and crime investigation. In fact, the witnesses' accounts are so conflicting and irrelevant that the reader gradually realises that the truth must be even odder than they. The novel resembles the various firsthand relations the detective ought to catalogue and systematise, as in the classic detective story. Nevertheless, the detective is mired in the witnesses' competing histories and becomes lost in negotiating the maze that they create when added together. Similarly to the previously discussed novels, this work outlines a circular plot and an individual, obviously contradictory perception of time. Sorrentino's novel actually illustrates the anti-investigative process in which the witnesses' testimony builds a net of hypotheses and theories through which both the detective and the reader are struggling without arriving at any conclusion. By undermining the conventions of traditional detection, especially causality and linear progression, as well as by undercutting the conventional boundaries between fact and fiction, *Odd Number* exposes the problematical character of representation, mainly time and plot constructions.

The Manual of Detection by Berry is another novel, next to Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages*, Sorrentino's *Odd Number* and especially O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*, which powerfully illustrates temporal chaos, bordering with hallucination and delusion. In Berry's book, considerably influenced by O'Brien's work, temporal anomaly reflected in the absence of precise time in favour of its illusory timeline is marked, for instance, by the fact that all the protagonists have been robbed of their alarm clocks. The American author undoubtedly imitates the Irish writer by using a peculiar sense of humour as well as stressing the imaginative, fantastical, inexplicable and labyrinthine aspect of the detective process. Furthermore, the illusory time highlights the oneiric, surreal atmosphere of the storytelling process, in particular, proliferating mysteries and a complex, ambiguous process of investigation undertaken by the main character who constantly receives contradictory or absurd instructions. In this respect Berry appears more aligned with Franz Kafka and Jorge Luis Borges than with Raymond Chandler and Agatha Christie. In fact, the procedures the Agency complies with turn unintelligible and excessively bureaucratic, analogously to the legal processes in *The Trial*, and the protagonist is less involved in solving the very criminal case than in

metaphysical search for its rules. Interestingly enough, despite the fact that the crime and investigation are depicted in stark detail, they escape any concrete categorisation. Although, in contrast to the preceding texts, *The Manual of Detection* offers a final revelation of the novel's enigma, in fact the hallucinatory ambience of the plot, the detectives' and the criminals' metaphysical struggle for dominance as well as blurring the boundaries between realism and dream states, emphasised by temporal anomaly, make Berry's book a singular creation, confidently constructed in its genre-synthesizing originality (Meisner 2009). *The Manual of Detection* exemplifies a metaphysical mystery novel which, albeit being part of the detective story tradition, subverts its crucial elements, such as linear narrative time, causality and teleological orientation.

The above scrutiny of spatial-temporal labyrinthine relations in the metaphysical detective story leads to the analysis of identity quest which takes a variety of forms, such as search for one's lost identity, chasing the missing person, pursuing one's double, identity's guise or exchange. A maze-like dimension of identity quest is conspicuous in every single detective story, both its classical and postmodern variants. Nonetheless, it is the metaphysical or anti-detective story that introduces postmodernist concepts of subjectivity. Metaphysical detective stories dramatically illustrate the characters' endeavours to establish their identities and show how their efforts are impeded by solipsism, self-projection, and the inability to position oneself in time or space or even one's own narrative (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 16). Identity quest and its defining come to the fore with regard to determining the roles ascribed to the detective, the murderer and the victim, all of them being intertwined in the metaphysical detective story. More importantly, the metaphysical detective story places emphasis on the contested, ambivalent intellectual game between the author, the reader and the characters in which the first participant attains the status of the criminal, the second one functions as a detective, whilst the last one plays the role of the victim. Needless to say, just as the story's rhizome, infinite construction invites manifold structural and thematic possibilities, so the roles of the author, the reader and the characters are not fixed but subject to reversal and continuous exchange.

In American postmodernist detective fiction, these reversals of roles, the destabilising of identities and their quest are probably the most dramatically illustrated in Auster's oeuvre. All of his novels outline the protagonists'

existential quest for identity or another “self”, or their struggle for authentic experience in the face of random workings of the universe. However, it is worth remarking that the writer’s attitude towards his literary subjects is ambiguous, varying from one book to another. On the one hand, in the novels like *The New York Trilogy* (1987) and *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2007), Auster brings into prominence metafictional playfulness which mirrors the burden of representation and seems to enjoy postmodernist intertextual game at the cost of the characters’ striving to free themselves from the oppressive, de-humanizing structure of the narrative text. The metafictional intrusions of authorial figures underline a self-reflexive nature of the texts and the characters’ subordination to the narrative rules imposed by the very author. On the other hand, the novels such as *The Book of Illusions* (2002) and *Oracle Night* (2003), focus on the protagonists’ identity quest, their sense of alienation and vacuity as well as metaphysical distress in confrontation with the world’s randomness and chaos. Auster’s blending of metafictional game and intertextual labyrinth, alongside metaphysical and existential dimensions of the detection and identity search make his works unique examples of postmodernist detective fiction.

In metaphysical detective stories, a frantic search for identity is frequently linked with a pursuit of one’s double, which is aptly described in Robbe-Grillet’s works, specifically in *La Reprise* (2001). Similarly to Auster’s world of lost and exchanged selves, doubles and parallels, the French author’s narrative universe abounds in duplicitous identities, like double narrators and at the same time twin characters embodying double agents, suspects and victims. This novel by Robbe-Grillet, next to *Les Gommages*, accurately illustrates the process of destabilising, forging and disguising identities, yet here, special accent is put on the idea of the double and duplicity. *La Reprise*, showing a correspondence between the acts of espionage, counter-espionage and the hunting of one’s double which takes the form of identification, or repetition between the agent, his twin brother and the intruding author, is one of the most in-depth studies on doubleness and mirroring in postmodernist crime fiction as well as the analysis of the double roles of the narrator and the author, and the double process of reading/investigation.

The concepts of the double and twin realities, next to the struggle between the author and the narrator for narrative domination, permeate the novels of Stephen King. Although this author has been often pushed to the fringes of academic discourse, mostly due to his employment of the elements

of horror fiction in his writing, the writer has made a valuable contribution to postmodernist detective literature. Among his works depicting multiplicity of layers embedded within the metafictional aspects of the story and addressing ambiguous relations between the author, narrator, characters and the reader, “Umney’s Last Case” (*Nightmares and Dreamscapes*, 1993) merits special attention. In his story, constituting a pastiche of the hard-boiled crime fiction, King excels at presenting author-narrator power relations and their incessant contest to control and have mastery over the narrative. Critics such as Buday (2014: 39) stress the fact that “Umney’s Last Case” reflects the alteration of the status and degree of power of its characters: unlike in the classic literature, including the classic detective fiction, where the characters are under control of their godlike authors, here, the author who exorcized his power as the God of this respective universe, swaps place with the narrator, thus he automatically and consciously renounces the power and transfers it to the protagonist. In this respect, King’s postmodernist detective story deconstructs the classical model of the detective genre as well as the hard-boiled crime fiction, both of which place emphasis on narrative order, stability and rigidly hierarchical relations between the author, narrator and the protagonists. Moreover, it reflects the novelist’s playing with his literary conceptions by reversing the roles of both characters (fictional author and narrator), and therefore showing the theory of multiple realities implied by metafiction within the fiction itself.

The ambivalent hide-and-seek game between the narrator (detective), the author and the reader becomes even more menacing in Perec’s *La Disparition* (1969, trans. *A Void*, 1995). This French detective novel, outlining a mystifying vanishing of *e*, the most common letter in the French language, which contributes to the disappearance of the main character, Anton Voyl, and a building up of a hole in the logic of the universe, exemplifies a metaphysical detective story in which quest for truth and knowledge inexorably leads to destruction (Ewert 1999: 182). *La Disparition* constitutes a lipogrammatic text where the protagonists are aware of an unspeakable loss or an absence (“an omission, a blank, a void”) (Perec 1969: 13), creating havoc in the story: murder, violence, infanticide, fratricide and the disappearance of all those who become marked with the fatal letter. Anton Voyl, whose own name highlights the lost letter (“voyelle” without “e”) and puns on “hidden” (“voile” signifies “veil”), incarnates a classical detective who acts in accordance with traditional procedures of investigation while searching for

the missing element in the first four chapters of the novel. Nonetheless, similarly to Borges's *Lönnrot*, Voyl soon painfully experiences the fruitlessness of classic hermeneutic reasoning. Having pursued his own mystery, the main character falls into the hole of chapter 5 and disappears, being ultimately followed by his friends who succumb while looking into the abyss and endeavouring to find the missing letter.

When set beside other metaphysical detective novels which provide a more subtle illustration of the detective's failure and personal catastrophe, Perec's text stands out by showing that classical epistemological methods prove to be fatal to the detective and therefore it accentuates a more hazardous nature of the game played between author and characters as well as author and reader. The lipogramatic "void" exemplifies a universe produced by textual constraint which turns out to be merciless to the truth seekers who gain knowledge at the cost of their lives (Ewert 1999: 190). In fact, the loss of the vowel *e* regulates all levels of the text. The missing signifier de-structures – by its absence – the work of the investigator: if the key to interpretation is infinitely missing, the interpretation is unlikely to (re)find it. Textual constraints control the lives of the protagonists who feel being confined in some bizarre novel space, in which "an author's imagination runs so wild, in which his writing is so stylistically outlandish, his plotting so absurd" (Perec 1969: 198) that he would be considered insane. Regarding the reading public, the use of textual constraint draws their attention to the artificiality of the very text, and to the ontological dimension of the narrative it represents. On the other hand, according to Ewert (1999: 191), that unreal, fantastic structure of the narrative may, in fact, conceal fictional representations of historical crimes, like, most notably, the Holocaust, which undoubtedly raises fundamental metaphysical questions.

The above works of the American, French, Italian and Irish novelists reflect a shifting perspective of the process of detection and investigation in the metaphysical detective fiction, mainly in the context of the ontological status of the narrative and the questioning of the hermeneutical assurance saturating the classical model of the genre. The study of the books by Robbe-Grillet, O'Brien, Eco, Sorrentino, Berry, King and Perec has underlined an ambiguous, multidimensional character of spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths created by the authors and reinterpreted by the readers. The examination of the concepts of space, time and identity as integral elements of the rhizome structure of the labyrinth has revealed their complex, tense,

ambivalent relations, as evidenced in the discussed works. Moreover, the study of these notions and the process of their interlacing and infinite networking invites further debates on the nature and function of the labyrinth in the metaphysical detective story. The above authors, predominantly American and French novelists, and their selected works, are part and parcel of the discussion about spatial, temporal and identity mazes. However, the topic by no means has been exhausted in their novels and critical texts, thus remaining a still unexplored territory to be mapped out by other writers and critics. Nonetheless, a specific problematisation of the thematic and structural aspects of spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths by American and French writers helps the critics and the reading public to see a correspondence between their works and theoretical approaches or situate them in comparative critical configurations.

The following three chapters are devoted to eight novels by three authors, Paul Auster, Patrick Modiano and Alain Robbe-Grillet, analysed in the context of spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths. The scrutiny of Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, *The Book of Illusions*, *Travels in the Scriptorium*, Modiano's *Rue des boutiques obscures*, *Quartier perdu*, *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages* and *La Reprise* demonstrates the novelists' different and unique treatments of these notions yet simultaneously exposes some clear parallels and analogies between their texts.

1.6. Conclusion

The first chapter has demonstrated how in the 20th and 21st centuries the metaphysical detective story has been the subject of spirited discussions and has undergone an in-depth analysis of literary critics, theorists, psychologists and philosophers. It is worth emphasising, however, that the theme and structure of this genre and its perception, similarly to the classic detective story, hard-boiled crime fiction and horror, have altered throughout the last decades – in place of its popular, non-serious, entertaining facet in the early decades, mostly in the 1940s and early 1950s, this variant of detective fiction gradually entered the canon of serious literature, specifically postmodernist fiction, and became more and more closely scrutinised by prominent scholars, reviewers and literary critics.

Needless to say, in contrast to the classic detective fiction, especially the whodunnit and the thriller, as well as gothic fiction and horror, the metaphysical detective story has received little critical attention, remaining still obscure, vague and unexplored genre. Among the story's various elements and aspects, I brought into focus the concept of the labyrinth, particularly its rhizome structure, as opposed to the mannerist maze, featuring the classic detective fiction. The study of the rhizome became enriched and completed by the examination of the map-plus-narrative text as a pivotal element of the postmodern detective genre. With reference to the rhizome or the net and the map, I undertook an examination of complex and ambiguous spatial, temporal and identity relations, discussed by selected American, French and Irish novelists. This analysis serves as a prelude to a more intense study of the three types of labyrinths that will be investigated in the following chapters.

Chapter Two

Exploratory spaces in Paul Auster's and Patrick Modiano's novels

You mentioned... one of the two great labyrinths into which the mind is drawn. What is the other? The other is the composition of the continuum, or what is space?

(Neal Stephenson, *Quicksilver* 2003)

2.1. Introduction

Paul Auster and Patrick Modiano are those postmodern novelists whose works abound with metaphysical and existential concerns, especially those related to spatial and temporal relations as well as an individual's identity quest. Both writers present the narrators and the main characters as amateur detectives and detective story writers who, having embarked on the labyrinthine spatial-temporal investigative journeys, fail to solve enigmas of the alleged crimes, particularly, of people's unexplained disappearances, and uncover and redefine their own identities. Auster and Modiano are American and French novelists of the Jewish origins²⁷ whose

²⁷ Paul Auster was born in 1947, in Newark, New Jersey, to Jewish middle-class parents of Polish descent, Queenie (née Bogat) and Samuel Auster. Patrick Modiano, born in 1945, in Paris, was descended on his maternal side from the Belgian (Flemish) family and on his paternal side from the well known Italo-Jewish Modiano family of Thessaloniki, Greece. Nonetheless, when set beside Modiano's frequent reference to the theme of Occupation and Holocaust in the majority his novels, most notably *Dora Bruder* (1997), Holocaust is not the topic Auster obsessively returns to in his texts, perhaps except in *Timbuktu* (1999) and *Oracle Night* (2003). For more information see: Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, Lucyna. (2015). "Paul Auster's Poland-

works recurrently evoke imminent fear, an acute sense of anxiety, loss, memory lacunae, frequently, yet not exclusively related to the Holocaust. In fact, the works of the two novelists constitute enigmatic melanges of hard-boiled fiction and existential *neo-noir* novels as well as blends of postmodernism and autobiography.

The texts to be scrutinised in this chapter, *The New York Trilogy* (1987) and *Rues des boutiques obscures* (1978), highlight the spatial maze and urban experience of the narrators-protagonists striving to find the keys to their investigative search. It is worth remarking that both novels which were highly internationally acclaimed and opened a new chapter in the authors' literary outputs ²⁸ are apolitical and non-ideological, bringing into focus an existential, almost claustrophobic detective journey into the depth of a spatial maze of the metropolitan city and intertextual playfulness on the one hand and an enigmatic investigation of an amnesiac private eye in search for his roots and his lost identity on the other hand. In this sense, Auster's and Modiano's texts are prime examples of such metaphysical or anti-detective novels which particularly challenge hard-boiled and *noir* novels, often regarded as socially and politically engaged crime genre, centring instead on the classic problems of post-modernist criticism: What is the relationship of a text to reality? Is writing a sacred responsibility or a metafictional game? Do we write and read to engage with the world or to escape from it? Although *The New York Trilogy* and *Rue des boutiques obscures* mirror these issues to a varying degree, they both accentuate an alienating, at times hallucinatory spatial experience of tormented protagonists and readers who, overwhelmed by an urban and textual maze, face nothing but non-solution and an inconclusive, ambiguous ending.

-Related Constructs of Death in *Timbuktu* and *Oracle Night*". *The Polish Review* Vol. 60, No. 1 (2015), 63-72.

²⁸ Both of the novelists became recognised and widely studied since the publication of their works: Patrick Modiano was awarded for the first time a prestigious Prix Goncourt in 1978 for *Rue des boutiques obscures*. Correspondingly, Paul Auster received for the first time Prix France Culture de Littérature Étrangère for *The New York Trilogy* in 1989.

2.2. Textual and spatial labyrinths in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*

In the space between chaos and shape there was another chance.

(Jeanette Winterson, *The World and Other Places: Stories* 1998)

Spatial maze, next to, circular time and a labyrinthine quest for identity, is one of the central features of *The New York Trilogy* (1987). The novel, constituting a postmodern reworking of detective fiction, highlights various components of spatial labyrinth, such as the city representing the labyrinthine ambience, the writing and reading experience, the world and universe as a maze, textual constraint and self-reflexive nature of the narrative text. Auster's canonical book is undoubtedly a lasting tribute paid to the American city, an emblem of postmodern complexity and ambivalence, and to the locked room as the symbol of the writer's alienating experience. Furthermore, *The New York Trilogy* reflects a postmodern revision of the classic detective fiction, enhancing in particular an ambiguous affinity and disjunction between modernism and postmodernism.

2.2.1. (Un)locking the room? Mediating metropolitan experience through the act of writing

The New York Trilogy is considered Auster's most exemplary detective novel, a postmodern interpretation of detective and mystery fiction which explores miscellaneous philosophical themes. The majority of the writer's criticism is focused on his detective plots and the manner in which he reverses all the fictional conventions of the genre. Thus, the American novelist is regarded as the writer of the metaphysical detective story, or, of anti-detective fiction, though the latter term is not an accurate determiner of Auster's work because, as emphasised in the preceding chapter of this monograph, such fiction purposefully negates the entire detective genre (Tani 1984: 24), whilst the metaphysical detective story challenges a classical model of detective fiction, but it applies "the detective process to that genre's own assumptions about detection" (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 3). Still the same critics recurrently use this designation while simultaneously referring to

metaphysical and existential concerns raised by the author. Analysts such as Sorapure (1995:72), define the novel as a “meta-anti-detective story”, while others such as Russell, maintain that “the detective searches for ‘presence’: an ultimate referent or foundation outside the play of language itself” (quoted in Bloom 2004: 98). Russell adds that this quest for correlation between signifier and signified is inexplicably linked to each protagonist’s search for origin and identity, “for the self only exists insofar as language grants existence to it” (Russell 1990: 72). Ultimately, critics like Holzapfel scrutinise *The New York Trilogy* as a postmodern deconstruction of the detective genre,²⁹ whereas in *Understanding Paul Auster* (2010), Jim Peacock still considers *The New York Trilogy* as antidetective fiction: “where the focus of the traditional detective novel might be said to be knowledge, meaning, or comprehension, the emphasis here is on the existential questions of identity and one’s relation to the world” (Peacock 2010: 43-44).

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned critics’ recurrent defining Auster’s novel as an anti-detective novel, it is more pertinent to examine the book with regard to its most crucial issues, such as existential angst of an individual, identity crisis in relation to the urban space, and, above all, a metaphysical aspect of the mystery in the urban labyrinth. In this respect, *The New York Trilogy* is frequently referred to as “the self-reflexive metaphysical detective fiction” (Pinder 2001: 6), a “metaphysical mystery tour”, “a seamless little detective story”, or a trilogy of “exquisitely bleak literary games” (Holmes 2005). As mentioned before, Auster’s text is a postmodern deconstruction of the classic detective story, and, more noticeably, of the American modernist crime fiction subgenre, the hard-boiled detective fiction. Auster’s text, featuring a postmodern urban labyrinth, echoes classic British, and especially American, detective fiction genre which has always been preoccupied with space in general and the city in particular, ranging from Poe’s Inspector Dupin to Chandler’s private eye Marlowe (Lehman 1999: 58).

Critics like Pinder note that the figure of the detective has been regarded as an inherent part of the complex modern urban ambience. The detective “rests on the idea of confronting the city’s apparent unknowability in its infinite spread and diversity, and of following clues to tame and make

²⁹ Holzapfel, Anne, K. (1996). *The New York Trilogy: Whodunit? Tracking the Structure of Paul Auster’s Anti-Detective Novels*. New York: Peter Lang.

intelligible its secrets and scrambled paths" (Pinder 2001: 6). At this point the scholar refers to the realist reading of the city and the detective's possibility of controlling it and unravelling its impenetrable mysteries: "it embodies a realist epistemological claim about the potential of knowing the city and of mastering a labyrinthine urban reality" (Pinder 2001: 6). Afterwards, however, the critic remarks that in certain other texts, particularly in modernist detective fiction writing, the detective's presence comes to speak of reading and examining the city (Pinder 2001: 6). This could be exemplified in Hammett's and Chandler's novels where the city's legibility and representability have raised doubts, reflecting the detective's disquiet. Nevertheless, in the hard-boiled fiction detectives cross the city and finally find answer to both cases they are working on and the cities themselves (Holmes 2005). Contrastively, in Auster's novel the city's inexhaustibility becomes "the paranoiac web of connections" (Pinder 2001: 6) and insoluble mysteries. When set beside modernist detective fiction in which the detective closely inspects and "deciphers the signifiers of the labyrinth of populated spaces and buildings which forms the modern metropolis" (Willet 1996: 3), in *The New York Trilogy* the investigator is unable to decode the signifiers of the postmodern urban maze which he finds overwhelming, disorientating, at once compelling and menacing.

A postmodern city becomes another crucial character in Auster's novel and the compelling urban maze is the pivotal component of the existential search for identity his protagonists undergo. Critics like Andrews and Shiloh highlight the relationship between Auster's metaphysical detective story, or postmodern "subversive" detective genre and the existential search of the protagonists, and imply that while reversing the detective genre, the novelist transforms the detective quest for the existential one. Andrews stresses that in this quest the figure of the detective is closely related to the city: "The task of the detective then, involves the threading together of a broken whole – and by extension, the reconstruction of a fragmented subjectivity (Andrews 1997: 64). Here, a parallelism is drawn between the resolution of a detective case and the regaining of the protagonist's identity. Ultimately, an existential dimension of Auster's text is accentuated by Shiloh who concludes that the author's mystery "has nothing to do with crime, it has everything to do with the nature of the self and the existence of the Other" (Shiloh 2002: 39). Hence, the space becomes crucial for the existence of the Other and for his existential quest.

From the above examination it transpires that the urban space plays a fundamental role in *The New York Trilogy*, both in the process of detection and an existential search for identity. The American author skilfully subverts the conventional notions of urban space as a rationally ordered ambience which, alongside the concepts of identity and language, forms the core of the traditional detective's logic (Kongsak 2015: 162). The urban alienation of modernist detective fiction, best exemplified in American hard-boiled crime fiction, escalates into mounting frustration, spiritual claustrophobia and consecutively insanity in the postmodern city. In Auster's novel, particularly in the first part of his *Trilogy*, "The City of Glass", amidst the urban maze mirroring the labyrinth of his own mind, Quinn, assuming initially the role of the detective, becomes at the end the missing person. Quinn's fortuitous identity transformation is recapitulated by the protagonist himself who, while writing his reflections on Baudelaire into his red notebook, states: "Wherever I am not is the place where I am myself. [...] Anywhere out of the world". (Auster 1987: 108). As Kongsak (2015: 162) astutely observes, Quinn's dislocation could be visible in various levels simultaneously. Referring to Jameson, it can be remarked that the "alienated city" changes into a "space in which people are unable to map in their minds either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves" (Jameson: 1991: 51).

Quinn is not the sole protagonist suffering from social dislocation and urban totality. In "City of Glass" the urban maze and the perilous situation in which Quinn finds himself disorientate the character, and simultaneously the narrator, to such an extent that he is unable to recognize Stillman Senior's true identity. In the atmosphere of urban alienation, spatial and mental oppression, both the narrator and the reader realise only at the end of the story that Stillman became a victim, not a murderer of his son, as was initially yet mistakenly assumed. Urban labyrinth and the city's disorientating ambience also reflect identity shift in "Ghosts" in which the statuses of Blue, assuming the role of a detective, and Black, being at first the suspect, are transformed and exchanged. Identity transformation, or rather its quest, with reference to a detective story convention, could be observed in the final part of *New York Trilogy*, "The Locked Room", where the main character and at the same time the narrator changes from the detective into, indirectly, the missing person. Thus, it can be concluded that city alienation and the urban maze constitute Auster's dexterous manipulative tools aiming at controlling

entirely his protagonists and frustrating the readers who seek rational explanation of the crime mystery.

As previously pointed out, in contrast to the modernist detective story where the protagonist, albeit experiencing the urban alienation, succeeds in resolving a criminal case, and therefore restores order in urban environment, *The New York Trilogy* exemplifies questioning the idea of urban space as a rationally ordered milieu. Unlike Hammett's Op or Chandler's Marlowe, Auster's detective endeavours to "seek spatial solutions, or a rationally ordered social space in which he may still have a place", to avoid the impending "loss of both a coherent identity and a determinate language", which is bound to fail (Swope 2002: 207). The urban space, alongside the figure of the detective in Auster's book undermines the paradigm of both classic detective fiction ratiocination and that of modernist rationality. The city's intricate maze, overwhelming the protagonists of the novel, is illustrated in the following extracts:

New York was an inexhaustible place, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighbourhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city but within himself as well. Each time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind... reducing himself to a seeing eye... and this brought him a measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within... On his best walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere. New York was the nowhere he had built around himself. (Auster 1987: 3-4)

Summer came, and the streets grew hot and humid, intolerable in the way that only New York can be. (Auster 1987: 250)

This was an old-world city, and it had nothing to do with New York – with its low skies and chaotic streets, its bland clouds and aggressive buildings. (Auster 1987: 289)

The above quotations vividly show a menacing vastness and infinite emptiness of the urban maze. The protagonists are overwhelmed by the complexity and intensity of their metropolitan experiences, and their alienation is augmented by the feelings of insignificance. Their urban peregrinations mirror the scale of their dislocation from the texture of ordinary life. This is mostly applicable to Quinn who, next to Blue and the narrator of "The Locked Room", experiences the streets of New York as a

chain of indiscernible spaces. His pointless roam predictably depicts him within a cityscape that is a nowhere but which could be also an anywhere.

Furthermore, the city's estrangement and physical confusion reflect the protagonists' spiritual labyrinth and mental chaos. New York increasingly becomes "a projection of the mind, a mirror of epistemological uncertainty, and an image of alienation" (Varvogli 2001: 31). This urban instability exemplifies a postmodern experience of metropolitan insecurity as well as the subversion of modernist novelistic conventions, especially those concerning the position of a detective as a reliable writer-onlooker (Kongsak 2015). Auster challenges the traditional role of the detective as urban writer-observer by shifting the focus on detection itself so that the object of the detective's quest becomes his own identity (Brown 2007: 50).

All in all, *The New York Trilogy* exemplifies postmodern urban labyrinth which highlights the singularity of detective fiction and brings into prominence epistemological quandary (Kongsak 2015). Creating an entirely new literary figure, depicted by Drabelle as "post-existential private-eye" (1986: 9), Auster's book deconstructs the urban reality presented by classic and modernist detective stories and illustrates the ways in which our lives are challenged and redefined in the ambivalent postmodern world. Furthermore, the novelist invites his readers to reflect on the questions of ontology and epistemology, the limits of human knowledge and perception of the postmodern city's immensity, ambivalent nature, especially as revealed by the detective story conventions. Whilst in classic detective fiction the city is the place in which the detective searches for truth, Auster's postmodernist novel accentuates the evident absence and lack of truth in the city and the world. This point is summarized by Little who states that: "While Auster's texts appear to follow the redemptive-bound script of the traditional detective novel, they are nevertheless errant versions stressing that subjects and signs are never single, straightforward, or self-evident but rather are always duplicitous,... double and deceptive" (Little 1997: 137). Auster's self-reflexive metaphysical text depicts ambivalent and deceptive subjects, being either labyrinthine space, or deceitful identity. Nevertheless, it is the novelist's writing that mediates an overwhelming metropolitan experience and urban predicament.

The New York Trilogy is an in-depth study of the compelling nature of New York City which encapsulates two major themes in Auster's book. Since contemporary literature is frequently preoccupied with representations of

the complexity and scale of living in the era of capitalism and global culture, it mirrors the processes that allow New York to be separated from the world and simultaneously linked to it (Brown 2007:1). Similarly, Auster's work illustrates the way in which individuals live collectively, which is both an issue concerning society in general and metropolitan living in particular. In the majority of the novelists' texts, *The New York Trilogy* in particular, the questions related to living in the metropolis, anonymity, alienation and displacement come to the fore (Brown 2007: 1). Critics such as Shiloh draw the attention to the figure of the "other" in his existential quest in Auster's novel. She remarks that the American novelist focusses on the way in which the individual locates himself in the world and claims that Auster's protagonists ought to "be situated themselves in the world through a matrix of situated and relational coordinates" prior to continuing establishing "stable relations with others and a coherent sense of themselves" (Brown 2007: 2). Thus, the space is a key component of the characters' existential quest, and the urban space, particularly that of the city of New York, plays the pivotal role in the novel.

As remarked in the preceding section, Auster's self-reflexive metaphysical detective fiction emphasizes a correspondence between the city, the world, and the main characters' lives, predominantly those of the detective's and the narrator's, or, in a global sense, between the place and identity. It is the metropolitan conditions that the American writer presents as indispensable for the founding and shaping of an "I" for his protagonists. These requirements comprise a close connection between characters' subjective "inner terrain" and their physical unchangingly metropolitan "outer territory" (Brown 2007: 3). As the writer demonstrates, social ties and coherent identity could be possible in the metropolis provided that there is a considerable degree of conjunction between the self and the physical ambience. Correspondingly, where the "outer terrain" of the physical metropolis is variable and complex, the chance for creating and preserving harmony between individual and environment becomes diminished (Brown 2007: 3). Accordingly, any equilibrium that Auster represents for his protagonists remains impermanent and transitory, constantly contingent on the flexibility of the urban subject along with his ability to adapt to the labyrinthine and invariably changing metropolis. While living in a constantly shifting metropolis, Auster's characters assume dual, multiple and alternative roles, being unable to retain stable identities. This is particularly striking in

The New York Trilogy where the protagonists, contrary to detective fiction conventions, do not assume and retain distinct roles of a detective, a criminal and a culprit. In a disorientating, continually changing “outer terrain” of the physical metropolis, the so-far solid, distinct identities of the main characters become shifted, disguised or lost.

The American novelist recurrently demonstrates that writing is a way of mediating metropolitan experiences and has the potential to surmount, or mitigate urban predicaments. He shows that when the metropolis is encountered as only a physical and social realm, it turns into an overpowering and hallucinatory environment (Brown 2007: 3). Nevertheless, as soon as that physical reality is depicted by a writer, or a poet, the city is endowed with symbolic qualities able to “disalienate” it. On an individual level, Auster depicts characters negotiating between the reality of their physical milieu (“outer territory”) and the metropolis of their imagination (their “inner terrain”). Only a great sense of harmony between place and self guarantees that the characters form secure social bounds and thus achieve a coherent sense of identity (Brown 2007: 4). Even a maze-like, overwhelming metropolis can attain a “disalienating”, “re-enchanting” character while being overlaid with a writing dimension. Auster’s perception and depiction of the postmodern city is illustrative of this process.

It is also worth emphasizing that when set beside other postmodern writers experimenting with detective fiction conventions, such as Sorrentino, Barth, Pynchon, or DeLillo, Auster is much less subversive, metafictional, more classical and aesthetically philosophical (Merivale, 1997: 189). Hence, his text, albeit dealing with an overwhelming, labyrinthine dimension of the metropolis and a relentless search for identity, still offers moderate human optimism visible in the protagonists’ continual moral, or even religious quest for values in the world’s chaos compared with Sorrentino’s, Barth’s or Pynchon’s metafictional labyrinth, disharmony, proliferation of worlds and characters in the carnivalesque structure, along with the writers’ distance and disengagement.

Critics such as Brown notice that Auster’s novels, particularly *The New York Trilogy*, centre on characters who move through space. In this regard the “spatial turn” of the new cultural geography offers a crucial analytical approach to his work. Moreover, it shows how the writer’s fiction: “is able to imagine beyond the limits of empirical social science to encounter spaces and places of the metropolis at its extremes, and how cultural geography too is

beginning to use the imaginary as a way of interrogating its own practices" (Brown 2007: 5). In *The New York Trilogy*, space plays a crucial role in defining the characters' identity. The spatial turn also determines the protagonists' identity transformation. This process is illustrated particularly well in "The Locked Room" where the main character and simultaneously the narrator, while searching for his missing friend Fanshawe, embarks on journeys to various cities, mostly Paris and Boston, each of them changing him significantly. In contrast to the two preceding sections of *The Trilogy*, picturing the characters within the limits of New York, the third part depicts the protagonist's moving through cities, though being based in New York. Nonetheless, it is in Paris that he unexpectedly undergoes a startling transformation from an amateur detective into a victim. It is also in Paris that the protagonist realizes his alienation and displacement, having failed to trace Fanshawe, and, more importantly, having been physically and mentally defeated supposedly by his friend. Needless to say, prior to his unfortunate encounter with the presumed Fanshawe, his mental breakdown and consecutive recovery, the main character feels anxious about the French metropolis at the initial stage of his stay in Paris, repeatedly juxtaposing it with New York. His inner turmoil, quest for his friend's identity, and, above all, his own self, in the face of the vastness of the foreign metropolis, is exemplified at the beginning of chapter 8 of "The Locked Room":

The Paris sky has its own laws, and they function independently of the city below. If the buildings appear solid, anchored in the earth, indestructible, the sky is vast and amorphous, subject to constant turmoil. For the first week, I felt as though I had been turned upside-down. This was an old-world city, and it had nothing to do with New York – with its low skies and chaotic streets, its bland clouds and aggressive buildings. I had been displaced, and it made me suddenly unsure of myself. [...] at least once an hour I had to remind myself why I was there. (Auster 1987: 287)

The above quotation mirrors the protagonist's alienation and unease with the unpredictable, labyrinthine character of the French metropolis. It is there that he reflects upon New York, the city he also perceives as chaotic, maze-like, yet still close to him. Whereas New York marks the beginning of his physical and spiritual voyage, and Boston indicates the end of his search for and confrontation with Fanshawe, Paris becomes the turning point in his quest. In this sense, Paris is the most striking example of the metropolitan at

its extremes Auster's novel shows, since the city depicts the narrator's fundamental inner transformation, whilst New York and Boston are crucial indicators of this process.

The New York Trilogy vividly illustrates the correspondence between the character's subjective inner terrain and his physical outer territory, as well as the relation between space and the protagonist identity's shift, specifically Brown's notion of characters' movement through space. Additionally, the novel mirrors Brown's concept of the metropolis at its extremes and the idea of the subjective perception of the place beyond the limits of empirical social science. With regard to the "spatial turn" in Auster's texts, Brown offers an extensive analysis of this notion, accentuating the shift from the writer's room, through uninhabited streets of New York, the social spaces of downtown, cities and spaces beyond New York, and finally, entering the domain of the imagination, discussing the spaces of dystopia and utopia, alongside the function of the symbolic in spatial construction of the place (Brown 2007: 5).

In his examination the critic shows how Auster's essential themes of identity, loss and disconnection, language and storytelling, are influenced by place. Interestingly enough, the American novelist moves from urban nihilism to qualified optimism in his work as he seeks forms of social life and community in the contemporaneous metropolis (Brown 2007: 5-6). In the analysis of *The New York Trilogy* the idea of wring is scrutinised, however, in contrast to Auster's other books, such as *The Music of Chance* (1990), *The Invention of Solitude* (1982) and *The Book of Illusions* (2002), this text reflects the instability of literary form. This novel, taking the form of the metaphysical detective story, subverts the conventions of the classic detective fiction to illustrate and strengthen the destabilizing nature of the urban experience. Nonetheless, we may observe that simultaneously the author turns the process of detection on itself so that the object of the detective's investigation becomes his own identity (Brown 2007: 50). Thus, *The New York Trilogy* symbolizes the half-way between urban nihilism and provisory optimism. On the one hand, it emphasises the characters' urban instability and disorientation, but on the other hand, it delineates characters who, albeit displaced and disorientated in the overwhelming labyrinthine city, desperately attempt to search for meaning and truth in the ambivalent world reality. Although their endeavours frequently end up in failure, they are deprived of all their comfort, complacency and pride, lose their true identities

and are reluctant to assume new ones, which is most conspicuous in the case of the doomed detective, they still remain humans in their titanic efforts to find and give the meaning to the world they live in.

In the conversation with McCaffery and Gregory (1992: 1-23), Auster showed the process in which *The New York Trilogy* detects a causal path from disorientation, through self-examination, including the stage of solitude during which external contact is lost, to final alienation. This is exemplified in Quinn's loneliness, Blue's disconnection from the social world and the self-imposed exile of the narrator of "The Locked Room". In "City of Glass" Quinn's solitude, precipitated by the demise of his wife and son, impels him to leave the room and wander in the city. However, walking in the streets of New York deepens the protagonist's alienation, leading him to abandon the other people from his social world. By depriving himself of any social contacts, and by retreating from his former life, Quinn builds a self-imposed exile in the heart of Manhattan (Brown 2007: 34). Similarly, in "Ghosts" Blue is disconnected from the social world. While confining himself to his room and observing Black, he feels content but his position in the world becomes increasingly wavering. In the whole story Blue who never seizes the opportunity to abandon the investigation and to return to his previous life, accepts his solitude which determines his sense of life and mirrors his double search for Black's and his own identities. The experience of the self-imposed metropolitan exile undergone by Quinn and Blue is invoked in "The Locked Room" as a part of the writing process and its conditions. It is illustrated by the example of Fanshawe whose personality has distinguished him as a writer and who, since adolescence experienced a "kind of internal exile" that gave rise to his "stubborn marginality" (Auster 1987: 216), whereas in adulthood, the "severity of his inwardness" appeared to mark him as a writer (Auster 1987: 214). Similarly, the narrator's existence in New York reflects his living in a social and familial vacuum since between his childhood contacts with Fanshawe and his successive relationship with Fanshawe's spouse, Sophie, there is no trace of a family or a group of friends.

It transpires from the above that the three main characters of this novel gain the statuses of outcasts who, while pertinaciously performing their mission irrespective of the repercussions, occupy a physically and socially marginalised space. The insignificance of the human subject is exemplified in the selected fragments of *The New York Trilogy* quoted in the preceding

section of the chapter as well as in the excerpt of Auster's unpublished story, "Invasion":

New York, a city of impenetrable facades... I move through it like a somnambulist. Faces might appear, large crowds might grow, but they cannot alter or penetrate the facades that surround them. The city... reduces its inhabitants to objects. Each person, entitled to just a single perspective, creates a city which is merely a function of his imagination... New York does not exist. (Auster, undated b 7-8)

The above fragment vividly illustrates the physical and fragmentary realities of New York that accentuates radical social and neurotic subjectivity. The buildings' exteriors constitute inaccessible urban forces, the sequestration of their "secret knowledge" denies explication, and the rational logic of its street network comprises the imagination, confining personal agency. This leads to the creation of an alienated and disorientated individual, reduced to the position of an "object" in the city's immense constitution (Brown 2007: 36). On the example of Quinn, Blue and partly the narrator of the ultimate part of *The Trilogy*, one may observe how the city makes the human being inept and void, and the characters of the novel experience a subjective sense of the city that intensifies their feelings of anonymity. Their New York represents an impenetrable maze where individual spaces are indistinct, failing to offer any form of coordination for individuals who thus become disorientated in its momentariness. This process is conspicuous especially with regard to Quinn who, while searching for the outcome of this peregrination, in the end evacuates his sense of self, and by substituting the inwardness of self for the outwardness of the city, builds a distance between his corporeal and spiritual selves. The "beneficial vacuum" left by the city's movement enables the individual to become just a reflection of the metropolitan process, and the ensuing emptiness of selfhood could be seized by the city's heterogeneity (Brown 2007: 36).

Quinn, next to Blue from "Ghosts" and the narrator from "The Locked Room", exists in the city that besets his consciousness and usurps the authority of his inner self. He exemplifies a failure to find one's place and way of existing in the world. According to Jameson, Quinn's relationship to his metropolitan milieu mirrors a failure to "cognitively... map [his] position in a mappable external world" (Jameson 1991: 44). In view of this critics such as Alford perceive Quinn's roaming as an endeavour to map a spatial

relationship between the self and the metropolis. Needless to say, all the main characters in *The New York Trilogy* cannot manage to establish a stable connection with the metropolis (Brown 2007: 37). Yet, it ought to be remarked that Quinn's attempt to abandon his self in the streets of Manhattan refers to a figure who experiences a veritable misunderstanding of his place in the world, and together with Blue and the narrator, he suffers from "a lack of understanding that space and the self are coeval" (Alford 1995b: 631).

Since Quinn's self and the space he inhabits are not coeval, his interior self must be found elsewhere. While demonstrating how Auster delineates his protagonist's withdrawing his self in favour of impersonal narratives of the city, it is worth mentioning the author's citation from Baudelaire to depict Quinn's relationship to the urban milieu. Baudelaire who profoundly influenced Auster in his description of an individual's existential quest in the urban space is not quoted by the American writer accidentally. Baudelaire's name is tantamount to *flâneur*, the urban wanderer-observer (Brown 2007: 37), a condition that connects the text with the character. Thus, it is appropriate that Quinn, a contemporary *flâneur*, ought to record the words in his notebook: "Baudelaire: Il me semble que je serais toujours bien là où je ne sais pas. In other words: It seems to me that I will always be happy in the place where I am not. Or, more bluntly: Wherever I am not is the place where I am myself. Or else, taking the bull by the horns: Anywhere out of the world" (Auster 1987: 110). This excerpt closely reflects Quinn's desire to escape himself, and therefore his sense of self and the space in which his physical self resides are not "coeval". The alienation he experiences from this moment on in the book until his ultimate effacement from it stems partly from his inability to establish a meaningful connection between his inner self and the external world, and in this way securing his place as an integrated self within it (Brown 2007: 37).

In *The New York Trilogy* Quinn's, Blue's and the narrator's painfully facing their inability to form a clear connection between their inner selves and the outer world is expressed in the recording of their experiences in the notebooks. Auster's characters assume the roles of the urban observer-recorders who reflect on the impact of the environment on their inner selves. Through his protagonists, the American novelist, referring to Baudelaire, ponders on the presence of the poet-recorder within the urban text, and the influence of the social milieu on the recorder's physical and mental coherence. Auster's characters represent a poetic paradox of effacement as

well as mirroring Knut Hamsun's and Franz Kafka's aesthetic propositions of starvation, suffocation and seclusion, and anonymous brutality (Brown 2007: 50). It is via their writing that Quinn, Blue and the narrator of "The Locked Room" can fully express their disorientating experience in the city. By wandering the streets and recording the sights and sensations of the alienating metropolitan environment, they find some relative stability in their solitary, chaotic world.

With regard to the author's contemplation of the existence of the characters-recorders within the urban text and the impact of the metropolitan environment on their stability, it is worth noticing that the way in which the protagonists experience New York is further shown in the representation of that experience through the subversion of a number of pivotal literary conventions. Auster underlines the characters' urban instability by bewildering the reader through destabilising constituents of the novelistic convention. The integral elements of the detective form, such as authorship, narration and genre, are disrupted and inverted to complicate the harmonious relationship between the reader and the text (Brown 2007: 50). By using the form of the metaphysical detective story, the American author subverts the conventions of the classic detective fiction to illustrate and accentuate the destabilising dimension of the urban experience. Simultaneously, one may notice that the process of detection is targeted on itself, therefore the object of the detective's search becomes his own identity. By failing to provide a resolution, being a crucial element of the classic detective fiction, Auster directs attention to the manner in which he manipulates the form, and the way in which he contributes to the new metaphysical detective story, which creates more mystery than it solves.

The New York Trilogy faithfully mirrors a story which subverts a number of the conventions which had in previous decades the detective form stable, credible and foreseeable, to the extent that "instead of reassuring, they disturb" (Holquist 1971: 155). Furthermore, Russell remarks that Auster's novel, along with his other books, like *The Music of Chance* or *Squeeze Play*, analogously uses and deconstructs the conventional constituents of the classic detective story, engendering "a recursive linguistic investigation of the nature, function and meaning of language" rather than the traditional solution to a criminal case (Russell 1990: 71).

As regards a representation of the city, the American author highlights in his novel a labyrinthine aspect of New York, its postmodern urban

complexity, a claustrophobic web of connections and impenetrable mysteries. Regardless of its alienating dimension, the city constitutes a turning point in the lives of the characters, and creates a distance between the protagonists' inner selves and the outer world. Space plays a fundamental role in Auster's novel since it marks the physical and spiritual itinerary of each of the characters-investigators in their existential quest for identity. Nevertheless, the scrutiny of the postmodern urban maze and its impact on the protagonist-wanderer-investigator as exemplified in this metaphysical detective story could be only completed by the analysis of Auster's metafiction being a fundamental part of his postmodernist project. Here, emphasis ought to be placed on the role of the text, the function of the writer, being closely related to the role of the detective, and the way in which this writer produces different narrative levels.

2.2.2. *The New York Trilogy* as a postmodern detective intertext and metafictional maze – an interpretative anxiety

In *The New York Trilogy* postmodernist maze is accentuated by the urban labyrinthine environment as well as by the novel's textual constraint, intertextuality, self-reflexive nature of the narrative text, and the theme of the locked room symbolizing the writer's isolation and alienating experience. Auster's trilogy of metaphysical detective stories encompasses Jameson's definition of those "postmodernisms" that are captivated by this entire "'degraded' landscape of schlock and kitsch... of so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery...: materials they no longer simply 'quote'... but incorporate into their very substance" (Jameson 1984: 55). This fascination ultimately corroborates Tzvetan Todorov stating that at some point "detective fiction experiences as an unjustified burden the constraints of this or that genre and gets rid of them in order to constitute a new code" (Todorov 1977: 52). Accordingly, in various ways Auster's book endeavours to break its ties with practically the "exoskeletal" form of detective fiction (Bernstein 1999: 134). This is vividly illustrated in the writer's disposal of clausal epistemological certainty that long typified the genre, both in the British Golden Age detective novel and the American hard-boiled school of crime fiction. Lack of closure to the investigation places *The New York Trilogy* within other significant textual traditions, most notably the metaphysical

detective story, as well as the existential mystery tour, or a meta-anti-detective story, as was mentioned in the preceding part of this section. It is the apt combination of the American Renaissance's literature of darkness and the postmodern fluctuation and fragmentation of Beckett's trilogy *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1951), and *The Unnamable* (1953) that raises Auster's detective novel to the metaphysical level (Bernstein 1999: 134-135).

Auster's manipulation of intertextuality is twofold. From the compositional standpoint, intertextuality is a way of creating new texts, which is exemplified by the statement of Quinn, the mystery writer of "City of Glass": "Whatever he knew about [crimes], he had learned from books, films, and newspapers... What interested him about the stories he wrote was not their relation to the world but their relation to other stories" (Auster 1987: 7). From the psychological viewpoint, the American novelist foregrounds intertextuality as a factor determining existence and experience, as visible in "Ghosts", where Blue observes: "This is strange enough – to be only half alive at best, seeing the world only through words, living only through the lives of others" (Auster 1987: 202).

This dual sense of intertextuality signals the trilogy's version of detection, which attracts the detective's attention to the complex nature of unitary subjectivity. Simultaneously, Auster poses such a slippage as the condition of the novel itself, so that the three parts of the trilogy turn into works of literary criticism rather than fictional descriptions of crime and detection (Bernstein 1999: 135). Thus, one cannot fail to notice the metafictional intrusions of authorial figures or his alter-egos in the novel, most visibly the emergence of Paul Auster the writer in "City of Glass", the narrator in "The Locked Room" who presents himself as the author as well as Fanshawe who dexterously manipulates the narrator into first living his life and subsequently losing it to obsessively search for him. Hence, one may assume that Auster filters his authorial presence through the existence of these characters he invented, yet the real Auster detaches himself as author of *The Trilogy* through the nameless narrator, creating thus the distance between himself and the reading public. The encroachment of Auster's fictional intrusions reflects indeed an exploding system of *doppelgänger*s which ultimately falls into a lot of closural arenas of reading, including reader-writer confrontations that demonstrate textual instability. *The New York Trilogy* finally dramatizes detection as an unrealisable conflict with a reality whose tentative meaning cannot be credibly deciphered.

Interestingly enough, Auster shapes the novel using comments that make the project of detection highly doubtful. The opening paragraph of "City of Glass" offers warning: "The question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell" (Auster 1987: 3), whilst in one of the concluding chapters of "The Locked Room" the anonymous narrator remarks:

The entire story comes down to what happened at the end, and without that end inside me now, I could not have started this book. The same holds for the two books that come before it, *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*. These three stories are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about. I don't claim to have solved any problems... If words followed, it was only I had no choice but to accept them, to take them upon myself and go where they wanted me to go. But that does not necessarily make the words important. I have been struggling to say goodbye to something for a long time now, and this struggle is all that really matters. The story is not in the words; it's in the struggle. (Auster 1987: 294)

The above statements pose the book's essential question: whether meaning exists essentially in the details and facts traditional to the detective genre, or whether meaning is itself a quixotic illusion corresponding to the novels' other references to Miguel de Cervantes (Bernstein 1999: 135-136). The first citation warns the reader that this story shoulders no responsibility for decoding the message, whereas the second openly asserts that whatever story exists is more torturous than linguistic since the narrator yields to his struggle instead of creating and clarifying the meaning of his texts. More importantly, the author, via his unnamed narrator, strives to "say goodbye" to the classical formula of detection and investigation which always or almost always brings solution and revelation. In his postmodern narrative, the author's focus is on his struggle to mystify and disorient the reader by making them being aware of the writer's grave difficulty, all the more, his linguistic inability to penetrate, scrutinise and present some crucial facts and clues leading to the mystery resolution. In this respect, the role of Auster's reader is tantamount to classical detectives since both of them seek clues or evidence to some pattern of meaning. However, *The New York Trilogy* defies "any such hermeneutic recuperation" (Bernstein 1999: 136). *The Trilogy*, at this point being referred to as meta-detective fiction, offers the reader the case dissimilar from the investigations of its individual novels mirroring their

collective culmination in equivocality and instability. In an ironic way the novelist aims at the fragmentation of the subject through an apparently cohesive book. In order to understand how Auster's commentary is constructed and how his textual and intertextual labyrinths are built, it is worth analysing the way in which the author makes postmodern experience a textual matter. Subsequently, the study comprises probing the interrelationships of Auster's metafictionality with the classic texts of the American Renaissance and Beckett, the emphasis being placed on the concept of the locked rooms and thresholds which mirror the writer's and the reader's experiences and their psychic isolation. Ultimately, the examination will point to the novelist's goal which reflects "the refutation of meaning through meaning" (Bernstein 1999: 136).

Since the surface of reality defies elucidation, it is figured in the book through references to glass and mirrors. This is exemplified in "Ghosts" where the narrator calls attention to Blue's habit of speculation: "To speculate, from the Latin *speculatus*, meaning *to spy out, to observe*, and linked to the word *speculum*, meaning *mirror or looking glass*". (Auster 1987: 171-172). Blue's observation and method of investigation correspond to the trilogy's picturing detection as a look in the mirror in which any gaze outward turns into a focalized inwardness (Bernstein 1999: 136). The "looking glass" simultaneously calls to mind Lewis Carroll's *Alice through the Looking Glass* (1871) as well as setting the stage for the book's mirror acts and logic puzzles. It is New York, referred to as the city of glass, that depicts numerous reflections and dramatizes the meaning of abyss; similarly to Carroll's Alice, Auster's characters are uncertain whether anything truly exists behind the mirror, through the looking glass.

In the first part of the trilogy Quinn devotes much of his time to studying the glass door of the hotel in which Peter Stillman Sr. is dwelling, however, his investigation remains unsolved and soon becomes unexpectedly closed. Stillman's disappearance, his consecutive decease and the lack of resolution of the mystery result in the protagonist's mental breakdown who, having seen his reflection in a storefront, opines: "He had no feeling about it at all, for the fact was that he did not recognize the person he saw there as himself" (Auster 1987: 142). This excerpt closely illustrates the defeat of detection and simultaneously its menace in the novel, the assurance that too long a rigorous inspection of empty clues and too painstaking a search for an impossible coherence, lead ultimately to spiritual disharmony and the loss of the stability

of personality. This process becomes analogous to the situation of Blue, the only true detective in the trilogy: "They have trapped Blue into doing nothing, into being so inactive as to reduce his life to almost no life at all. Yes, says Blue to himself, that's what it feels like: like nothing at all (Auster 1987: 171-172)... I'm changing... Little by little I'm no longer the same" (173-174). This accent on the metaphysical repercussions of detection emphasises the complexity of postmodern subjectivity wherein "the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold, and to organize its past and future into coherent experience" (Jameson 1984: 71). Similarly, *The New York Trilogy's* detectives plunge into fragmentation and lunacy exactly because they are unable to bring holistic response to a reality that is deprived of coherent structure (Bernstein 1999: 137).

Glass and mirrors play a pivotal role in the study of the detection process, the examination of subjectivity problems, as well as the inner and outer spaces in Auster's novel. Nonetheless, the process of reflection, speculation and observation that Auster's characters undergo closely corresponds to the language which the characters use or which surrounds them. It is through reports and diaries that detectives respond in the trilogy, therefore speech and writing are crucial to *The New York Trilogy*, particularly to "City of Glass"'s surface and subjectivity issues. According to Russell (1990: 72), the book's quest is a "search for transparent language". Furthermore, when Quinn reflects on Stillman and his vanishing, it is remarked that: "[he] was gone now. The old man had become part of the city. He was a speck, a punctuation mark" (Auster 1987: 109). This may indicate that the city is a text. In this respect Auster's subject could be tantamount to the "city of words", a term which Tanner coined to depict a place populated by "a general self-consciousness about the strange relationship between the provinces of words and things, and the problematical position of man, who participates in both" (Tanner 1971: 21).

The space Auster's protagonists-writers occupy graphically illustrates the place described by Tanner. Apparently, all the three main characters endeavour to reach linguistic mastery in their writing by accurately reconstructing facts, meticulously recording their observations, perceptions and relations with others, describing in detail significant daily events. The first of them, Quinn, comes to a point in which he can "divide his attention almost equally between Stillman and his writing, glancing up now at the one, now down at the other, seeing the thing and writing about it in the same fluid

gesture" (Auster 1987: 76-77). Blue, on the other hand, spends his entire time and energy on preparing reports which "stick to outward facts" and depicts events "as though each word tallied exactly with the thing described" (Auster 1987: 174), whilst Fanshawe attains a level of artistic expertise distinguished by "a new availability of words inside him, as though the distance between seeing and writing had been narrowed, the two acts now almost identical, part of a single, unbroken gesture" (Auster 1987: 326). Despite the protagonists' endeavours, however, such correspondence ultimately yields to a considerable subject confusion (Bernstein 1999: 137). The three stories of the trilogy vividly show that language no longer describes outer reality which turns into a battleground of miscellaneous interpretations, whereas freedom is an illusory idea, like any other concepts occluded in the linguistic expression.

The New York Trilogy, exemplifying a metaphysical detective story, clearly expresses such interpretative angst. Analogously to detective fiction, the novel is an arena for interpretative disquiet, as it proffers an assumption that patterns indeed provide a coherence behind an ambiguous surface of reality which could be deciphered exclusively by a specialized group, detectives. A detective, or a sleuth "expresses a wish fulfilment shared by all of us, to be able to know or to read just a few things very well, like clues, but through reading them very well to penetrate the deepest mysteries of life" (Brantlinger 1982: 17). A similar belief is shared by the protagonist of "City of Glass" who "always imagined that the key to good detective work was a close observation of details... The implication was that human behavior could be understood, that beneath the infinite facade of gestures, tics, and silences, there was finally a coherence, an order, a source of motivation" (Auster 1987: 80). Nevertheless, Auster's detectives soon realise the futility of their investigation. They ultimately understand that the observation of clues and details does not make them approach the truth, find coherence and order, and penetrate the mysteries of human behaviour, source of their motivation, and the meaning of life.

Reading and observing social detail have constituted fundamental elements of detective fiction since the time of enormous urban growth in the nineteenth century. As Benjamin (1973: 43) notices, "The original content of the detective story was the obliteration of the individual's traces in the big-city crowd". The title and the beginning of Auster's novel corroborate his following the urban-detective generic tradition, especially hard-boiled fiction.

Nonetheless, the entry challenges, in fact, urban-detective fiction since the trilogy invariably falls short of the readers' expectations, deluding them that the city can be read, or the individual found and identified in the crowd. In view of Hurstfield, Auster is particularly concerned about "that staple of detective fiction, the missing person", yet, he adds that the novelist's "narrators and his detectives do not discover very much, except how little they know about themselves" (Hurstfield 1990: 176). Auster's New York is an oppressive and labyrinthine milieu where the detectives become disorientated and no longer able to control their investigation. Moreover, the trilogy's urban milieu echoes Jameson's notion of "postmodern hyperspace", that site which illustrates: "the incapacity of our minds, [...], to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (Jameson 1984: 84). From this citation it transpires that a meaningful totality, either urban or global, is unattainable and elusive. An exemplification of this process is a series of scenes in "City of Glass" in which Quinn assumes that Stillman's walking routes through New York could form a pattern according to letters of the alphabet, whereas, in fact, they appear to spell out "THE TOWER OF BABEL" (Auster 1987: 85), which indicates the fragmentation, the unrecoverability, of reality as text (Bernstein 1999: 138).

As observed in the above, *The New York Trilogy* reflects a textual subversion of the classic detective story, a disintegration of traditional forms of reasoning and narrative modes, emphasizing the un-readability, or the impossibility of the logical interpretation of clues and evidence. More importantly, by frequently alluding to other books, particularly to the texts of his literary forebears, such as Poe's "William Wilson" or Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, the author of the trilogy makes postmodern experience a textual matter. Using William Wilson as Daniel Quinn's pen name in "City of Glass", Auster refers to the title of the 1839 story by Poe about a case of double identity. Needless to say, it is Cervantes' *Don Quixote* that functions as a central metafictional intertext in the trilogy, predominantly its first part. In "City of Glass" a strong link exists between the fictional protagonist, who shares the initials with the Spanish knight, and the author of fiction. During a chance encounter between Quinn and Auster the writer, Auster becomes thoroughly engrossed in the protagonist's work on an article regarding the authorship of *Don Quixote*. With reference to the Spanish text, Auster the writer endeavours to convince the readers that the book authorship is

attributed neither to himself nor to Quinn but to a third unnamed writer. Hence, we are presented with the author's quest for his own self, which undermines his authority as the author being simultaneously a character in the text (Kongsak 2015). Furthermore, all the main characters of the novel lose and exchange their identities through their own labyrinthine interrelationships, falling, finally, into numerous images of the author himself. Thus, the interior space of the three stories becomes the locked room of the psyche which ought to be regarded as the epistemological and textual terminus of the city presented in the trilogy.

The locked room is the most prominent intertextual representation of spatial labyrinth in *The New York Trilogy*. It reflects, on the one hand, the characters' psychic isolation, their anonymity and alienation in relation to the city, but it mirrors, on the other hand, the city as a textual constraint. The locked room represents an alienating space for the writer, yet it is also a way of mediating metropolitan experience and urban perplexity. While scrutinising the concept of the room as a model for the mind, Auster refers to the classic works of the 19th-century American writers, like Thoreau's *Walden*, Poe's "William Wilson" and Hawthorne's "Wakefield", *Fanshawe*, as well as to Beckett's trilogy.

In *The New York Trilogy* Auster uses as his first intertext Thoreau's *Walden* (1985) where the cabin, exemplifying the locked room, is compared to the self which demonstrates how psychic transformations can be reflected through setting. Exile, or isolation is an integral and necessary part of human experience, and the only way to find oneself in the world, as Thoreau observes: "Though the view from my door was still more contracted I did not feel crowded or confined in the least. There was pasture enough for my imagination... I dwelt nearer to those parts of the universe and to those eras in history which had most attracted me" (Thoreau 1985: 392). It is Blue that commences reading *Walden*, however, he fails, or resists accurately interpreting the text, as the narrator remarks: "What he does not know is that were he to find the patience to read the book in the spirit in which it asks to be read, his entire life would begin to change, and little by little he would come to a full understanding of his situation – that is to say, of Black, of White, of the case, of everything that concerns him" (Auster 1987: 194). Blue is not determined enough to carefully read Thoreau's text, and therefore misinterprets the underlying meaning of the locked room and fails to notice the significance of "exile". In Auster's trilogy the locked room is a place in

which one can achieve a fundamental understanding of the self but in which one may also easily “slip beyond unitary subjectivity entirely” (Bernstein 1999: 143-144).

The last of the aforementioned remarks brings into mind an excerpt from Hawthorne’s “Wakefield”, the text Black alludes to in “Ghosts”: “Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and system to one another, and to a whole, that, by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever” (Hawthorne 1982: 290-298). “Wakefield” implies that resigning from the reliable quotidian systems of life can make an individual “the Outcast of the Universe” (1982: 298), which happens with a few protagonists of the trilogy, but it also indicates the impossibility of crossing established thresholds, as exemplified in Black’s relation of the tale in a conversation with Blue:

And, so, without giving it any more thought than that, he walks up the steps of the house and knocks on the door.

And then?

That’s it. That’s the end of the story. The last thing we see is the door opening and Wakefield going inside with a crafty smile on his face.

And we never know what he says to his wife?

No, that’s the end. Not another word. But he moved in again, we know that much, and remained a loving spouse until death. (Hawthorne 1982: 209-210)

The above account of Hawthorne’s ending illustrates the closure of each part of the trilogy. “City of Glass” concludes with Quinn abandoning Stillman’s old apartment, having traversed a threshold beyond which he cannot be met; “Ghosts” ends with Blue who, through his case, has effectuated a Wakefield-like disappearance of his fiancée, leaving Black’s apartment; whilst “The Locked Room” brings into focus its eponymous milieu, one to which the narrator is denied access.

Significantly enough, in his debate on “Wakefield” as a model for Auster’s novel, Tanner remarks that they are both “profoundly American. The feeling that society is an arbitrary system of fiction which one might simply step out of is one which still motivates a large number of American heroes. Outside all systems and fictions, freedom and reality may yet be found” (Tanner 1971: 30). Nevertheless, he adds that simultaneously, “there has always been the concomitant dread that ‘by stepping aside for a moment,’ one might simply step into a void” (30). Analogously to Tanner, Auster interprets “Wakefield”

as a master narrative for the experience of solitude and gloominess circumscribing individual subjectivity (Bernstein 1999: 145). As Hawthorne's narrator states: "We are free to shape out our own idea, and call it by his name" (Hawthorne 1982: 291). This liberty to rewrite what the narrator relates as a story from "some old magazine or newspaper... told as truth" (Hawthorne 1982: 290) permeates Auster's narrative, encompassing its problematizing of the relationships among fictional texts and between fiction and reality.

The idea of the locked room as a spatial and textual maze, as well as a representation of psychic isolation, is further examined by Auster when the author refers to Hawthorne's early novel *Fanshawe* (1828). The American writer juxtaposes the fate of the central yet unseen protagonist of "The Locked Room" with the lot of Hawthorne's eponymous character. Similarly to Hawthorne's enigmatic hero, featuring prominently the locked room at the centre of his existence, Auster's *Fanshawe* is a solitary individual living in psychic isolation whose chief aim is to find a pretext for other character's operations. Thus, Hawthorne's "Wakefield" and *Fanshawe* influence Auster's text to the degree that they shape character and plot, directing Auster's attention to the concerns similarly expressed by the representative of Dark Romanticism. It is the blackness that pervades Hawthorne's works and that invades *The New York Trilogy's* locked rooms, being never purely architectural facts, but first and foremost "psychological oubliettes" (Bernstein 1999: 146), labyrinths and prisons of metaphysical darkness.

The locked rooms in Auster's trilogy are the sources of anxiety for the characters experiencing the *frisson* of occlusion and isolation. Unlike Thoreau's narrator, Auster's protagonists-detectives are unable to perceive seclusion as a necessary state in a route to self-knowledge. Although seclusion turns into "a passageway into the self, an instrument of discovery" (Auster 1987: 327) for every one of them, it is not this discovery, or self-discovery that they wish, salute and which can liberate them. The emerging problem is as follows: "How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room?" (Auster 1987: 202).

In Auster's novel, the "inexhaustible space" of New York City (Auster 1987: 4), depicted in each part of the trilogy as a place where characters like Blue can regard themselves as totally free, disintegrates, such as a number of the other standard categories of realistic fiction, into the confined space of the individual mind (Bernstein 1999: 146). As observed by Lyotard, in postmodernism "the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of

what mode of unification it uses" (Lyotard 1984: 37). Lyotard's underlying assumption that these novels could be perceived as versions of the author is in tune with Russell's observation who defines *The New York Trilogy* as "the selves of Paul Auster" (Russell 1990: 79). In view of the critic, Auster's reader, similarly to his detectives, ultimately enters the locked room of the writer's mind, an area in which the author, like Blue, has realized that "making up stories can be a pleasure in itself" (Auster 1987: 172). When the novel draws to its close, the reader, analogously to the narrator, is outside the writer's locked room which allows no passage over its threshold.

Contrary to the classic "locked-room detective story" which brings its focus to "the puzzle of a dead body found in a room which seems to be effectively sealed" (Symons 1985: 36), Auster expresses no interest in the riddles and solutions to mysteries. Instead, *The New York Trilogy* reflects, on the one hand, its self-conscious engrossment in 19th-century American literature, literary theory, and, on the other hand, a close link with its postmodernist literary predecessor, Beckett's trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*. According to various critics, most notably, Saltzman, Auster's novel parallels Beckett's trilogy, particularly "the absurd dance of detective and detected in *City of Glass*" (Saltzman 1990: 59) corresponds with the absurd game in *Molloy*. More importantly, the American author models his text on Beckett's novel which exemplifies the wandering meditations on the tightly limited psyche. In view of this, Auster blends his American tradition with a distinctly European anxiety, however, its outcome is his clear allusions to 19th-century towering forerunners like Poe or Hawthorne (Bernstein 1999: 148). The novelist iterates the metaphysical gloominess that these writers firmly corroborate at the heart of subjectivity, yet he makes it darker by modelling it on Beckett's incessant portrayal of the lone psyche, secluded in the darkness, recounting itself stories because narration is everything that is left and because the denial of narrating a story would be unbearable. When set beside Thoreau's seclusion which helps to locate the individual in Auster's work, the inclusion of Beckett demonstrates that such lively, individualist self-improvement cannot be achieved, and that this location, this locked room, is the terrain of an impenetrable interiority.

In *The New York Trilogy* the detection process, through the book's exceptionally intertextual indebtedness, is devoid of hermeneutic promise. The trilogy's detectives endeavour in vain to ratiocinate like Poe's Dupin, yet they contest the effectiveness of such a strategy (Bernstein 1999: 149-150).

These protagonists intuit the book's urgent premises that in contrast to literature, reality is not the storehouse of meaning, that consistent patterns of signification do not emerge from beneath quotidian surfaces, and that too persistent a quest for such patterns terminates in the disintegration of a centred, socially vulnerable, "logical" personality. Nonetheless, one cannot fail to notice that *The New York Trilogy* is literary, so that as a writer Auster can ultimately use the repository of hermeneutic plenitude that he frequently shows as unfeasible. The search for intertextual hints woven into the fabric of the trilogy indeed produces a coherent pattern, even if this pattern insists, through its unique blending of a meditative 19th-century American pessimism and a reflective postmodernist French solipsism, that quest for meanings is futile. Analogously to Beckett, Auster emerges as a master ironist, a practitioner in the absurd who endeavours to communicate nothing to such a degree that that communication becomes preposterous (Bernstein 1999: 150). Notwithstanding this, in response to White's (1985: 282) questions: "(And) why should literature be accorded a privileged position among all the things created by man? Why should reading matter?", the novelist answers that reading is significant since reading is about other reading, writing is about other writing, and that even very formulaic genres could be revived in order to give distinctive new voice to the postmodern condition.

On the whole, *The New York Trilogy* constitutes one of the most vivid illustrations of the metaphysical detective story which is marked by metafictional playfulness, self-reflexivity, fragmentation and the characters' existential search for identity and authentic experience. In Auster's novel, identity quest and the fragmentary nature of the narrative world are inextricably linked to the urban experience, particularly to the postmodern metropolitan experience of detection and writing. It is the labyrinthine aspect of New York that becomes the quintessential medium of this experience and the mirror of the protagonists' internal world: the city's urban maze shapes the protagonists' lives, defining their decisions and controlling their actions. Nonetheless, as evidenced above, space in *The New York Trilogy* functions as a city, the writer's room as well as the text itself. In its entirety, labyrinthine space isolates and disorients the protagonists, embodying amateur detectives and detective story writers who, in their frantic attempts to solve the criminal case, uncover and reconstruct their identity, and are finally doomed to failure. Such an alienating dimension of the city, yet presented in the context of personal history, also saturates Modiano's novels.

2.3. Detecting identity through space and time in Patrick Modiano's *Rue des boutiques obscures*

Self-identity is inextricably bound up with the identity of the surroundings.

(Lars Fr. H. Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom* 1999)

Paris plays a fundamental role in all Modiano's works. When set beside Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, the writer's only novel entirely devoted to this American city, every single work of the French novelist brings Paris into focus. Modiano frequently remarks that in each of his books he depicts the same place and that he has the impression that he has been writing the same book in a discontinuous manner (Modiano 2014b). Remarkable as it may seem, while the novelist's books are undoubtedly repetitive, it is Modiano's gift to turn this repetitiveness into a virtue: it is cumulative reading that makes his novels hypnotic and captivating.

The French capital city plays a pivotal role in his novels, being as crucial as the main characters of his texts, not merely a background to his stories. The French author depicts with geometric precision all the spatial details, such as the city's arrondissements, squares, boulevards, monuments, buildings, cafés, bookstores or restaurants, being producers of meaning. Paris emerges in Modiano's oeuvre as a space of identification, a *locus amoenus* (Brândușa – Steiciuc 2015: 136) with which the self ultimately mingles, as it befalls such characters as Guy Roland in *Rue des boutiques obscures* (1978), and Ambrose Guise in *Quartier perdu* (1984). Of all urban areas depicted in his fiction – in which cosmopolitan characters frequently live clandestinely and spend luxurious holidays on the Côte d'Azur or other glamorous resorts on the Atlantic shore – Paris recurrently appears as a self-matrix space (Brândușa–Steiciuc 2015: 133), a place of the protagonists' origins and their final journey.

In Modiano's works the spatial aspect of the city is inextricably linked with its temporal dimension, both of which shape the novels' troubled narrators and characters. This intersection of spatial and temporal categories, characterising the artistic chronotope, closely mirrors the space-time continuum in the texts by the French author. In *Poétique de la ville* (2004), Sansot encapsulates the essence of the French author's relation to the Parisian space: "The real urban space is the one that changes us, we will not

be the same when leaving it" (Sansot 2004: 52; trans. Brândușa-Steiciuc). This spatial-temporal facet of the city, its oneiric character and a metaphysical dimension of crime bear strong resemblance to Auster's novels, most notably *The New York Trilogy*. Both the novelists accentuate labyrinthine aspects of New York and Paris which encompass spatial ambiguity, time circularity and non-linearity as well as their characters' existential quest for identity. Similarly to Auster's oeuvre, Modiano's novels show the city as a trap universe in which the central points are objects with special significance, like old photographs, newspaper clippings, obsolete directories or posters, from which the search commences without knowing precisely its destination (Brândușa-Steiciuc 2015: 134). Paradoxically enough, both authors excel at presenting space details which are mingled with vague atmosphere. It is particularly visible in Modiano's works where mathematical accuracy with which the writer describes concrete objects is combined with an unclear, ambiguous ambience.

Like Auster's novel, Modiano's text constitutes a postmodern reworking of detective fiction, emphasising the metaphysical dimension of crime and highlighting several crucial elements of spatial labyrinth such as the city, world and universe as maze, the locked room writing and reading experience as well as the self-reflexive nature of the narrative text. Modiano's Paris emerges as an oneiric, highly metaphysical city, a landmark of identity and a self-forming space. The city's vague, dreamlike atmosphere is linked with postmodern complexity and ambiguity reflected in the unsettling experience of a contemporary writer. Nevertheless, when set beside the alienating experience of Auster's protagonists-writers which reflects the existential angst of the contemporary world, in Modiano's novels the writer's locked room's experience is constantly marked by the trauma of World War II. In this respect the books of the French novelist have a distinct spatial-temporal dimension, unlike the work of the American author.

Modiano's obsessive reference to the Paris during the Occupation, post-war memory and identity crisis in France's contemporary capital city could be traced in the vast majority of his works. An hallucinatory internal world of the protagonists and the external maze-like environment of the city evoke the poignant memory of the Holocaust, and the problematic history of the occupied France under the Vichy government. Remarkably, Modiano's obsession with Paris's traumatic war past is omnipresent in his characters' individual narratives which while pointing to specific references in a real past

create a general impression of unreality and hallucination. It is visible especially in such novels as *Rue des boutiques obscures* (1978), *Quartier Perdu* (1984), *Voyage de Noces* (1990) or *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* (2014). These novels reflect the unreal atmosphere of the "effet d'irréel" which offers a selection of accurate and alarming facts whose referential power is not lessened by the fact that they are not embedded in an openly referential narrative (Kawakami 2000: 74-75). This unusual combination of a historian's precision of fact with the evocation of a vague ambience is elucidated by Boideffre: "il évoque ce passé avec une précision qui n'est pas celle de l'historien... non plus celle d'un témoin, mais comme un rêveur... comme un somnambule" / "he evokes this past with a precision that is not that of the historian... no longer that of a witness, but that of a dreamer... a somnambulist" (Boisdeffre 1980: 243; translation mine).

Paris and its painful past come into focus in the majority of Modiano's novels, most notably in *Rue des boutiques obscures* (1978), *Voyage de Noces* (1990) and *Dora Bruder* (1997). Nonetheless, in some of his books the theme of the Occupation fades into the background or gives way to mysterious post-war crimes and enigmas, like in *Quartier perdu* and *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*. Similarly to Auster's novels, particularly *The New York Trilogy*, Modiano's books reflect the postmodern rejection of the classic detective story conventions, most of all, the idea of a coded and complete universe. Instead, they bring into focus a labyrinthine dimension of the city, temporal circularity, a de-centred self and a fragmented consciousness. Among all his books it is *Rue des boutiques obscures*, one of Modiano's best known novels, the one that earned him the Prix Goncourt, that is exemplary in its exploration of a spatial-temporal enigma of the French capital city, related particularly to the times of the Occupation, as well as mirroring the process of detection and writing in the Parisian urban maze.

2.3.1. Breakdown of the hermeneutic code in *Rue des boutiques obscures*

Rue des boutiques obscures is one of the most illustrative examples of the French metaphysical detective story which problematizes the process of detection and quest for identity in the spatial-temporal labyrinth of Paris. The novel illustrates a powerful combination of an urban maze depicted with spatial precision, geometrical and architectural configurations,

temporal incertitude and search for irretrievable identities. Modiano's book reflects the breakdown of the hermeneutic code, namely, the postmodern rejection of the idea of a coded and complete universe which features the classic detective story. *Rue des boutiques obscures*, with its postwar setting and implicit reference to the Occupied Paris, centres on the narrator who, similarly to Modiano's other works, is an outsider, presumably Jewish, seeking his true or another identity and roaming the borders of society without finding a niche (Ewert 1990: 168). According to Martinoir, such a world depicted by the French author is "the world of the fissure" [fêlure]" and in this particular novel, whose narrator is first and foremost a detective, certain evident fissures are in the hermeneutic code (Martinoir 1978: 106).

First of all, Modiano's book, analogously to Auster's novel, brings into focus a detective on the trail of his own identity who, while seeking countless information and tracing missing witnesses, follows in fact false leads, irrelevant clues as well as witnessing "significant" coincidences directing him to another turn of the maze and bringing about unforeseen circumstances. Guy Roland, the protagonist of this book, similarly to all main characters of Modiano's other novels, is a detective-philosopher in constant search for existential and metaphysical riddles. Like Ambrose Guise from *Quartier perdu* and Jean Daragane from *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, Roland embodies "a new Sherlock Holmes who has turned the magnifying lens on himself" (Botta 1999: 217). Nevertheless, in contrast to both Auster's characters and Modiano's other detective figures, this protagonist is the victim of total amnesia whose only goal is to search for his true identity and reconstruct his past. During his quest for metaphysical conundrums, Roland gets entangled in a spatial-temporal net of impenetrable enigmas leading invariably to his mysterious past. Being unsuccessful during his investigation, he becomes lost in a world of distorted identities, trick corridors and illusory scenes. Guy claims that he is incessantly "sur une piste (plus précise)" (Modiano 1978: 41), but this trail emerges from nowhere and leads nowhere. Thus, the reader habituated to the classic detective story becomes tantalised by mysterious coincidences, useless clues and their irrelevant appearance and reappearance in the plot. Furthermore, some clues turn out to be unreal, whereas other "real clues" never reach Roland (Ewert 1990: 169). The protagonist admits that on particular occasions people say something significant to him but he fails to hear it: "j'étais sûr à ce moment-là qu'il me disait encore quelque chose mais que le brouillard étouffait le son de sa

voix”./“I was sure at that moment that he told me something else, but the fog muffled the sound of his voice” (Modiano 1978: 50; translation mine). Additionally, his contacts happen to know something important but he does not ask them: “Quel accident? Je n’osais pas le lui demander”./ “What accident? I didn’t dare ask him” (Modiano 1978: 194; translation mine). Finally, the culminating scene in the novel featuring the narrator’s arrival in the mountains near the Swiss border which appears to be the scene of the crime leaves the reader crestfallen and frustrated. In contrast to the scene of the crime delineated in the classic detective story as the place where every mystery is unveiled, in the final scene in Modiano’s book the narrator leaves without any explanation and further investigation. In this regard *Rue des boutiques obscures* is a postmodern detective story which offers no closure, calling causality, induction and identity into question. It illustrates a solipsistic story in which any investigation breaks into endless self-questioning and internal probing.

In *Rue des boutiques obscures* the narrative universe is saturated with nostalgias, memory lacunae, fuzzy images and transitional phases. It reflects temporal uncertainty and alienation in the urban maze created with utmost mathematical precision. In fact, the author’s obsession with spatial accuracy is to counterbalance the angst of an inscrutable temporal detection. As Prince remarks of Modiano: “Time is dilated, bloated, difficult, imprecise (that year, that winter, that day...). Space obsessively evoked and traversed: its mazes are those of accident and wandering, and a familiarity with them proves necessary to those who must escape or hide” (Prince 1986: 40). Prince’s citation, while juxtaposing temporal vagueness and spatial precision in Modiano’s text, accentuates, in fact, an indispensable link between memory and space – the protagonist’s desperate efforts to capture every single detail of the urban labyrinth reflect his struggle to uncover his identity and therefore unveil his misty past. In *Rue des boutiques obscures* temporal blurriness symbolises oblivion of the past which could be only regained through a lengthy process of self-discovery and detection in the urban maze of unfamiliar buildings, objects and images evoking some traces of memory.

In her examination of *Rue des boutiques obscures*, Botta rightly observes that the book problematizes the relation between a hermeneutics of time and space (Botta 1999: 218). According to Botta, Modiano’s novel corroborates Foucault’s hypothesis that: “the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time. Time probably appears

to us only as one of the various distributive operations that are possible for the elements that are spread out in space" (Foucault 1986: 23). *Rue des boutiques obscures* closely mirrors the continuous tension between a traditional hermeneutics of time and a more modern hermeneutics of spatial detection. The investigation of identity via "traditional" temporality (temporal chronology and linearity) which reflects the epistemological strategy originally employed by the main character is overthrown by a hermeneutics of space which is confirmed, mostly within the domain of writing, as a textual response to the defeat of the first methodology (Botta 1999: 218). I would agree with Foucault's statement advocated by Botta, yet with the stipulation that spatial detection that prevails in Modiano's text aims at regaining the protagonist's memory and the past mystery which cannot be solved by means of traditional chronological reconstruction of events. The French novelist accentuates the narrator's obsession with spatial accuracy by means of which he hopes to throw some light on his enigmatic past. This, in fact, mirrors the space-time interrelation.

Rue des boutiques obscures shares affinity with the detective fiction which narrativizes hermeneutic structuration on the one hand, yet it subverts the conventions of the detective genre by parodying them and playing them off against a narrative structure that thwarts any attempt at closure and reflects invariable inscrutability of the story's initial enigma on the other hand. Modiano's novel adopts and dexterously manipulates detective-story codes and its crucial constituents by bringing into focus a world of distorted identities, trick corridors, and illusory scenes. Although the book offers pivotal elements of the classic detective story, like investigation and a criminal intrigue, it leaves the reading public with a sense of the circularity of the text (Ewert 1990: 168).

In Modiano's novel, analogously to Auster's book, it is the identity, not the crime, that is to be investigated. Guy Roland, the first-person amnesiac narrator is a private detective in quest of his own identity, yet while searching for information, witnesses and clues, he unceasingly ends up following false leads. The opening chapter of *Rue des boutiques obscures* sets a philosophical quest, emphasising the instability and uncertainty of the main character: "Je ne suis rien. Rien qu'une silhouette claire, ce soir-là, à la terrasse d'un café"./"I am nothing. Nothing but a pale shape, silhouetted that evening against the café terrace" (Modiano 1978: 7; translation mine). In fact, the amnesiac Guy plays a double role: that of the detective and of the victim which

means that he simultaneously advances and retards the story. Gradually, the narrator manages to reconstruct some crucial fragments of his past, however, even they are unable to bridge numerous remaining gaps. The consequence of such lacunae is to put in doubt the significance of the several clues the protagonist endeavours to gain. The final chapter of the novel illustrates Guy's departing on a new path and his persistent yet bitter refusal to renounce his search. Nonetheless, the book's end provides no elucidation of the narrator's true identity.

On another level, the opening of *Rue des boutiques obscures* reflects the confession of a marginalised figure embodying every Jew living in France during the Occupation and every individual who was forced to choose between flight and the concentration camp. Modiano's reference to the situation of Jews, including his father, in the occupied Paris, visible in the vast majority of his novels, highlights a haunting atmosphere of the French city affecting an internal hallucinatory world of the main character. In fact, Guy Roland represents a mixture of the Jew, the detective, and the amnesiac who eventually becomes the blending of one marginalised figure into another, until all gradually merge into a metaphor for postmodern man (Ewert 1990: 171). Hence, "I am nothing" reflects the fear of being lost in the maze created by the breakdown of the hermeneutic code as a result of which Roland discovers that there is no true identity, that the story lacks a proper ending, and that one labyrinthine corridor leads inexorably to another, like in Deleuze's rhizome.

Despite his extensive investigation, the protagonist fails to shed light on his past and discover his true destiny. In this respect *Rue des boutiques obscures* echoes *The New York Trilogy* which visibly illustrates the three narrators' crushing defeat in solving the enigmas of their lost suspects. Both novels mirror the lack of denouement, a final reconstruction of events narrated into an established pattern of meaning (Botta 1999: 221). Such a resolution, or a closure distinguishes the classic detective story, as remarked by Robbe-Grillet: "Traditionally, this is what a good detective novel looks like: there are disorderly pieces with a few gaps; somebody, a policeman, must order them and fill in the gaps; once the novel ends, there is no obscurity left. In other words, the detective novel is a novel highly charged with the ideology of realism; everything has a meaning, *one* meaning" (Robbe-Grillet 1983: 16; trans Botta). Taking into account both Robbe-Grillet's statement and generic codes one can easily observe that in the detective story genre the meaning

(*sens*) ought to be a single meaning, and, more importantly, should be interpreted with regard to its etymological root of “direction” (Botta 1999: 221). Correspondingly, the role of the detective is to assemble the selected components into causal relationships grouped on a continuous and vectored temporal line. The detective genre applies to what Roland Barthes calls “the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy” (Barthes 1977: 22) which actually constitutes the genre’s *raison d’être* (Botta 1999: 221). With regard to it, in the final stage of the narration, clues are found in the diegetic series, whilst false leads become discarded as digressions or elements of “the disnarrated” (Prince 1988: 2, 5). Accordingly, the story of the crime is finally reconstituted by the story of the investigation, which works in reverse chronological order, from homicide to motive, from results to causes.

In *Rue des boutiques obscures* the narrator endeavours to carry out his investigation in accordance with the above-mentioned patterns of the classic detective fiction. Roland intends to construe his story in a linear temporal sequence, endeavouring to interpret perturbing events and therefore dispose of dread feelings of suffocation (“le brouillard étouffait le son de sa voix”/“the fog choked the sound of his voice”) (Modiano 1978: 32; translation mine) and fatigue. For him, amnesia precludes such ordering of the past. The “Ariadne’s thread” of memory, instead of providing meaning to be reconstituted backwards, incessantly disintegrates into the lacunae of enigma (Modiano 1978: 133). Instead of forming a meaningful chain, marks of the past fail to become visible (“il n’y prêt aucune attention”/“But nothing caught my eye”) (Modiano 1978: 78; translation mine), or evaporates like fog on window panes (“Le brouillard s’était levé, un brouillard à la fois tendre et glacé”/“The fog had risen, a fog at once soft and icy”) (Modiano 1978: 32; translation mine). According to Ewert, Guy Roland is, as he repeatedly states, “sur une piste”, yet, due to his amnesia, this trail emerges from nowhere and leads in no direction (Ewert 1990: 168): “Vous ne pouvez pas me mettre sur la piste? Non. Pourquoi? Je n’ai aucune mémoire, monsieur”./ You cannot put me on the track? No. Why? I have no memory, sir” (Modiano 1978: 9; translation mine).

Modiano’s novel challenges the conventions of the classic detective story by providing no closure to the investigation and by bringing into focus a doomed detective who, in lieu of pursuing a culprit or searching for the missing person, becomes the missing person, and a victim himself. While frequently referring to, and simultaneously violating, the generic codes of

detective fiction, *Rue des boutiques obscures* succeeds in revealing the critical impasse of a hermeneutic project based on the traditional concept of time. The novel places a hermeneutical "suspension" of closure in lieu of the "suspense" rule of detective fiction (Botta 1999: 222). On that account the protagonist epitomises not a mere detective but a detective-philosopher involved in investigative reflection. In his depiction of Roland's desperate search for truth, Modiano alludes to Baruch Spinoza, especially the philosopher's concept of the subject as the base of his quest for truth (Collinson 1987: 119, trans Wyrzykowska 1997). In fact, the mystery Guy is to unravel is the question of identity: the relation of the subject to itself and to the phenomenological world. Needless to say, identity for these subjects defies objectification: it cannot be manipulated a posteriori into narrative form. Since no ultimate solution to the mystery is provided, the subject cannot be manifested as a being whose nature is elucidated through "history/story". Accordingly, Modiano's narrator apparently endorses a hermeneutics of suspicion, or hermeneutics of "critical openness" (Robinson 1995: 12), the fallacy of attributing self-identity to certitude and stability.

The protagonist's lack of certainty and narrative poise is evident at the very beginning of the novel which accurately reflects his philosophical quest. One of the first steps in his search for identity is to find a name, a legible and permanent trace left in official documents. Nevertheless, such search turns out to be futile since names prove to be dubious or fortuitous, like the names "Pedro McEvoy" and "Jimmy Pedro Stein" which in fact are as borrowed as the name "Guy Roland" (Botta 1999: 223). Warehime maintains that such names "as fragments of chronology, suggest a linear narrative by locating an individual in a place at a certain period of time" (Warehime 1987: 339). Interestingly enough, it is exactly this methodological error that Guy commits while endeavouring to use names as reference points in the process of reconstituting a biographical history. Unreliable evidence in the form of objects and photographs which circulate widely, turning to almost free-floating signifiers, mislead or obstruct the investigation. The ubiquity, ambiguity and meaninglessness of clues and evidence correspond to the dubiousness of the protagonist's identity. Roland undoubtedly lacks a hermeneutics that would reproduce connections between isolated fragments, like names, objects or photographs, and create them as events in a consecutive, causative chain (Botta 1999: 223).

Guy Roland erroneously depends upon interpretations based on the traditional concept of time. From his standpoint, consciousness is a cognitive process that determines entities as objects susceptible of narration, having beginnings and endings. Nevertheless, the time the protagonist uses while narrating his story is unclear and as distorted as identity in his world. The illustration of this process is Roland's confusing mixture of present and past tenses that disorientate the reader, preventing them from determining the precise time of narration. The book commences in the present tense and then shifts promptly to the past: "Je ne suis rien... J'attendais que la pluie s'arrêtât /"I am nothing... I was waiting for the rain to stop" (Modiano 1978: 11; translation mine).

In the light of the above it can be observed that in *Rue des boutiques obscures* temporality is not organised according to plot and chronology. Hence, a hermeneutics of linear time ought to be excluded in Modiano's text. As a response to this unsuccessful strategy, the novel offers a hermeneutics of spatial detection undoubtedly influenced by Heideggerian philosophy. According to Heidegger, "placement" is a crucial idea in reading the condition of *Daisen*. In view of the philosopher, *Daisen* is a situation in which we exist not only as parts of the society but also as isolated individuals (Collinson 1987: 291, trans Wyrzykowska 1997). Correspondingly, Ricoeur notices that, *Daisen* is "not a subject for which there is an object, but rather a being within Being (Ricoeur 1981: 56). Ultimately, Heidegger's key concept is scrutinised by Rapaport who states that "*Daisen*, (in other words,) is proximate, attitudinal, attentive to worldly clues through which is achieved both a sense of clarification and occultation... [what] Heidegger calls 'tuned correspondence'" (Rapaport 1986: 48). In *Rue des boutiques obscures* Modiano also implies "tuned correspondence" as a response to the main character's supposition that there is a subject who can fully know (Botta 1999: 224). The initial notion of "identity" as an object accessible to both cognition and narration is systematically substituted in the novel by an idea of identity as a plurality of momentary, alternating, phenomenological horizons. The concept of identity as a multitude of instantaneous, shifting states graphically illustrates the changing statuses of the protagonists in the metaphysical detective story. Similarly to Auster's three main characters of *The New York Trilogy* who perform simultaneously the roles of detectives, victims and missing people, or alleged culprits, the protagonist of *Rue des boutiques obscures* apparently acts as a detective while being in fact the

missing person, therefore he assumes a dual identity, that of the pursuer and that of the pursued.

Guy Roland's relentless quest for identity and simultaneously his need to determine his spatial coordinate reflects the Heideggerian imperative of "placement" (Botta 1999: 224). From Warehime's point of view, the protagonist's sense of self does not mirror only identity, but above all "an itinerary where names and streets and places figure prominently (Warehime 1987: 340). The above statement exemplifies the character of Guy's investigation. The narrator's search for identity actually shows his metonymic relationship with the toponymy of Paris: "Je cite fréquemment des bars ou des restaurants mais s'il n'y avait pas, de temps en temps, une plaque de rue ou une enseigne lumineuse, comment pourrais-je me guider?" / "I often mention bars or restaurants, but if it were not for a street or café sign from time to time, how would I ever find my way?" (Modiano 1978: 115; translation mine).

Paradoxically enough, these itineraries which are supposed to guide the protagonist in his investigation prove to be intricate labyrinths whose walls form threatening, insurmountable barriers, mazes of stairways, escalators, and gardens ("dans ce dédale d'escaliers et d'ascenseurs, parmi ces centaines d'alvéoles" / "in this maze of stairs and elevators, among these hundreds of cells" (Modiano 1978: 30); "Nous pénétrâmes dans le «labyrinthe» par une de ses entrées latérales" / "We entered the labyrinth by one of its side entrances" (61); "J'ai longé un jardin public enclos de ces mêmes barrières" / "I walked along a public garden enclosed by the same concrete barriers" (56; translation mine). Furthermore, these labyrinthine itineraries echo vague yet haunting memories, especially those evoking Roland's enigmatic past. Modiano vividly depicts the correspondence between the narrator's state of mind and Paris architecture. One of the graphic exemplifications of this process is the parallel the author draws between lost memories and walled passageways: "Pourquoi vouloir renouer des liens qui avaient été sectionnés et chercher des passages murés depuis longtemps? / "Why not trying to renew ties that had been broken and looking for passageways that had been walled off long ago?" (Modiano 1978: 42; translation mine), "Je cherchai au plafond, aux murs et du côté de la porte, un indice, une trace quelconque sans savoir très bien quoi. Mais rien n'accrochait mon regard. Je me suis levé et j'ai marché jusqu'à la fenêtre" / "I searched for the ceiling, the walls and the side of the door, a clue, a trace of some sort without knowing very well what. But nothing caught my eye. I got up and walked to the window". (1978: 86; translation mine).

Apparently, the past is as sealed off (“sous scellés”/ “under seal” (1978: 64; translation mine) as the upper floors of one character’s country mansion, and people’s identities correspond to non-interactive rooms: “Les gens ont, décidément, des vies compartimentées et leurs amis ne se connaissent pas entre eux”/“People certainly lead compartmentalised lives and their friends do not know each other” (Modiano 1978: 80; translation mine).

Modiano’s emphasis on architectural and geometrical imagery results in an inordinate determination of exterior space. According to Foucault, the opening of a “site” ensues from such delineation:

The space in which we live, which draws us to ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another. (Foucault 1986: 23)

In accordance with Foucault’s description, the heterogeneous space occupied by Modiano’s protagonist reflects a series of relations that outlines sites, being “irreducible” and non overlapping. The multiplicity and irreducibility of the space inhabited by the character of *Rue des boutiques obscures* closely reflects potential infiniteness of the rhizome, the third kind of labyrinth (Eco 1984: 57) which aptly illustrates the complex, ambiguous process of the investigation and the multiple meaning of the novel’s ending, its openness to infinite interpretation. The labyrinth in Modiano’s book, analogously to Auster’s novel, is a rhizome space which is devoid of centre, periphery and exit. This kind of maze, clearly visible in Modiano’s text, mirrors a highly ambiguous, enigmatic and hallucinatory dimension of the detective process when set beside the ratiocination and pure reasoning distinguishing classic detective stories.

Taking into account Foucault’s viewpoints, one may also notice that in Modiano’s novel the exterior heterogeneous space tallies with the main character’s internal world. Botta (1999: 225) argues that Foucault’s essay, though maintaining the distinction between these two spheres, in fact combines them. The critic states that if placement is an essential condition of *Daisen*, then exterior and interior spaces are identical. Thus, for Modiano’s protagonist, scattered fragments of identity could be read as positional sites,

horizons of being, situated in a network linking points in transient relations (Botta 1999: 225-226).

With regard to Heidegger's and Foucault's hermeneutics of space, however, it ought to be highlighted that none of the philosophers negated time. In fact, neither of them perceived time and history exclusively in terms of linear sequence on a temporal axis. As for the first philosopher's view whose hermeneutics is grounded in "tuned correspondence", time is a variety of temporal moments that exclude chronological closure. According to the second critic, time constitutes an entirety of relations, in which events may appear juxtaposed or spread in a spatial configuration. Such a viewpoint reflects the essence of Modiano's text and partly negates the opinion according to which spatial detection is to be the only possible interpretative strategy, with time losing its dominant position and becoming solely "one of the various distributive operations that are possible for the elements that are spread out in time" (Foucault 1986: 21).

Modiano's text confirms a hermeneutics of spatial detection albeit his protagonist's endeavours to investigate identity via traditional temporal parameters. Guy places himself at the intersections of a web of constantly altering relations. He therefore perceives identity as a heterogeneous space traversed by a grid, in which the only possible hermeneutic activity is to establish tentative relations, of propinquity rather than continuity. In view of this, memory gaps and lacunae of meaning cannot be bridged but can be shifted in distinct spatial constellations (Botta 1999: 226). The illustration of this process in Modiano's novel is the author's image of erroneous voices on abandoned telephone lines read as a metaphor for such spatial hermeneutics. Reaffirming the isolation and fragmentation of identity, this metaphor still countenances the possibility of contact, or even communication: "Des dialogues s'ébauchaient, des voix se cherchaient les unes les autres en dépit des sonneries qui les étouffaient régulièrement. Et tous ces êtres sans visages tentaient d'échanger entre eux un numéro de téléphone, un mot de passe dans l'espoir de quelque rencontre" / "Skeletal conversations, voices seeking each other out, in spite of the ringing which obliterated them at regular intervals. And all these faceless beings trying to exchange telephone numbers, passwords, in the hope of some rendez-vous" (Modiano 1978: 102; translation mine).

When set beside a traditional hermeneutics of time penetrating classic detective stories, a hermeneutics of spatial detection permeates Modiano's

and Auster's metaphysical detective novels. Similarly to *The New York Trilogy* in which labyrinthine roads, fortuitous events and chance meetings influence the relationship between the three protagonists-narrators and other characters, in *Rue des boutiques obscures* intersecting networks and chance encounters affect Guy Roland's relations with other protagonists. Needless to say, unlike Auster's novel which does not make any specific reference to the protagonists' past, Modiano's book invites a critical reflection on how intricate networks and serendipitous encounters determine the relationship of past and present for the main character, which may be exemplified by the following extract: "Curieusement, il m'arrive de rencontrer au détour d'une rue telle personne que je n'avais pas vue depuis trente ans, ou telle autre que je croyais morte. Nous nous effrayons entre nous"./"Curiously, I happen to meet at the corner of a street a person that I have not seen for thirty years and another person that I thought was dead. We are afraid of each other (Modiano 1980: 102; translation mine).

As seen in the above, the narrator's chance meetings with anonymous people from his past fail to unveil his true identity and throw some light on the process of his investigation. Even his encounter with Denise Coudreuse in the impenetrable maze of Parisian streets does not help him to resolve the mystery and successfully confront his enigmatic past:

Dans ce dédale de rues et de boulevards, nous nous étions rencontrés un jour, Denise Coudreuse et moi. Itinéraires qui se croisent, parmi ceux que suivent des milliers et des milliers de gens à travers Paris, comme mille et mille petites boules d'un gigantesque billard électrique, qui se cognent parfois l'une à l'autre. Et de cela, il ne restait rien, pas même la traînée lumineuse que fait le passage d'une luciole.

[Denise Coudreuse and I had met one day in this maze of roads and boulevards. Paths that cross, among those of thousands and thousands of people all over Paris, like countless little balls on a gigantic, electric billiard table, which occasionally bump into each other. And nothing remained of this, not even the luminous trail a firefly leaves behind it.] (Modiano 1978: 103; translation mine)

Remarkably, chance encounters profoundly affect Roland who desperately attempts to connect fortuitous events and the people he accidentally meets with the haunting memories of his lost past. Needless to say, all his endeavours bring an utter disappointment. Guy's frustration stems from his inability to reconstruct that vast pinball machine's myriads of paths into one

distinct line, to release from his positional being an identity that can be recognised as an object, distinct from the investigating subject and receptive to a linear narration.

In their examinations of *Rue des boutiques obscures*, Botta (1999), Prince (1988) and Martinoir (1978) emphasise the correspondence between the impossibility of Roland's narrating his past and Modiano's inability to consolidate the story's diverse components into a single narrative line (Botta 1999: 228). As the third of the above-mentioned authors states:

Patrick Modiano's world is made up of pieces [or, more literally, "is the world of the fissure"]. For his heroes, narration is no longer possible. One can understand how, for this writer more than any other, it could be said that after Auschwitz it was difficult, if not impossible, to write as if nothing had happened. The narrative is shattered and writing sketches a discontinuous world. (Martinoir 1978: 106-107; trans Botta)

It appears that in *Rue des boutiques obscures* Modiano purposefully created an amnesiac narrator in order to highlight the inability to narrate the story, particularly a personal story related to the trauma of World War II in a rational way via continuous, sequential, linear pattern. The writer is acutely aware of the impossibility, or insurmountable difficulty of referring directly to the Holocaust. For him the only possible way to describe the War trauma is to narrate the story through the prism of an unreliable, disempowered narrator who, while feeling alienated, perceives the world as chaotic, split and fissured.

In *Rue des boutiques obscures* as well as in Modiano's other novels, the narrators and main characters desperately endeavour to search for their identity and spiritual harmony in the face of the world's bedlam and discontinuity. Nonetheless, despite their relentless efforts to determine their identity by grounding it in a chronological axis, identity defies organisation and representation in the text. Still, the French author is continuous in his indubitably incomplete project of writing (Botta 1999: 228). In this respect, he follows Auster's assertion that writing matters since it is about other writing, and that even very formulaic genres could be restored to give individual voice to the postmodern condition. In Modiano's incomplete project of writing the original "fracture" in the world, being both a historical and a biographical break, allows him to retrieve solely scattered fragments of the past which, similarly to beauty queens and butterflies, spring out of

nothing one day and return, having sparkled awhile (Botta 1999: 228). Analogously to hermeneutical horizons, such sparks could be perceptible only as relations which alter through time. Modiano's writing invariably delineates and simultaneously obliterates this network of relations:

De nouveau, je me suis posté devant l'église russe mais sur le trottoir opposé. Personne. Peut-être étaient-ils déjà tous partis? Alors je n'avais aucune chance de retrouver la trace de Stioppa de Djagoriew, car ce nom ne figurait pas dans le Bottin de Paris. Les cierges brûlaient toujours derrière les fenêtres à vitraux, du côté de l'allée.

[Again, I stood in front of the Russian church but on the opposite sidewalk. Nobody. Maybe they were all gone already? So I had no chance to find the trace of Stioppa de Djagoriew because that name did not appear in the Bottin de Paris. The candles still burned behind the stained-glass windows on the side of the driveway]. (Modiano 1978: 20; translation mine)

The above excerpt illustrates two fragments mirroring the past, the first of which reflects the narrator's fruitless attempt to find Stioppa who disappeared without a trace, whilst the second one displays the narrator's still expecting his friend the recollection of whose presence is retained in the burning candles. Furthermore, like his character, Hutte, the author realises that: "au fond, nous sommes tous des «hommes des plages»" / "in the end we were all "beach men" and that: "le sable – je cite ses propre termes – ne garde que quelques secondes l'empreinte de nos pas" / "the sand – I quote his own words – keeps the traces of our footsteps only a few moments" (Modiano 1978: 49; translation mine). Such instability, however, is a prerequisite for a hermeneutics of spatial detection.

This tension between a traditional hermeneutics of time and a more modern hermeneutics of space places Modiano at the centre of the ideological discussion that, in Foucault's view, marks our era: "One could perhaps say that certain ideological conflicts animating present-day polemics oppose the pious descendants of time and the determined inhabitants of space" (Foucault 1986: 22). In *Rue des boutiques obscures* space is given priority over time and therefore the text closely reflects the author's belonging to "the determined inhabitants of space". Needless to say, one ought to distinguish the ways in which space itself has altered. In Modiano's novel, space is constituted through a flexible structure of relations that rejects stable determinations and necessitates continuous repositioning (Botta 1999: 229). While carrying out

his project of detection, the French writer does not renounce the representational accuracy of geometry. Instead, he resumes a more precarious and hazardous role – that of the role of the geometer of the horizon. Thus, the novelist is held accountable for deciding how precise his spatial horizon is supposed to be, and determining which fragments of his landscape ought to be accurately and profoundly delineated and which deliberately erased. The elements which are not represented on the page, being displaced and marginalised, constitute in fact the essence of Modiano's fictional landscape.

2.3.2. Space as a textual realm – travels through heterotopia in *Rue des boutiques obscures*

As pointed out in the preceding sections of this chapter, in *Rue des boutiques obscures* Paris constitutes an impenetrable maze of intricate, conflicting spatial-temporal relations which are governed and carefully arranged by the author. Modiano's construction of spatial horizon, its labyrinthine structure, distinguished by its geometrical precision on the one hand, and its vague, dream-like, ambivalent ambience on the other hand, shapes the characters and the plot of the novel along with its narration. Similarly to the intertextual dimension of Auster's novel, the textual realm of Modiano's *Rue des boutiques obscures* plays a pivotal role in forming the setting and the protagonists of the novel as well as closely reflecting a postmodern facet of detective fiction.

In view of the plurality, indeterminacy and discordance in the narration, along with the ethnic and geographical heterogeneity of the subject (search for one's roots in a cosmopolitan Paris, populated mostly by expatriates of diverse origins), and finally, the text's temporal, spatial and even grammatical ambivalence, Modiano's novel is frequently referred to as textual heterotopia. As Chernetsky (1998: 255, 257) remarks, the writing of the French novelist provides an illustrative example of a heterotopic text since it mirrors the concept of the plurality of spatial ontological possibilities, and puts a pronounced accent on otherness that Foucault's idea of heterotopia shares with the heterotopics of semiotics. *Rue des boutiques obscures* which is distinguished by fragmented, discordant narration and which reflects Modiano's inability to integrate the story's different elements into a single coherent narrative line parallels Foucault's notion of the heteroclite designating grammatical or geometrical anomalies. In *The Order of Things*

(1973), the French critic states that heterotopias which stem from the heteroclite are “disturbing... because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things... to ‘hold together’” (Foucault 1973: xviii).

Although this lexical or syntactic disturbance linked to linguistic experimentation could be traced predominantly in postmodern science fiction and the maximalist metaphysical detective fiction represented by Robbe-Grillet (*La Maison de rendez vous*, *Projet pour une révolution à New York*), Eco (*Foucault's Pendulum*), Sorrentino (*Odd Number*) or Pynchon (*Gravity's Rainbow*), Modiano's novel undoubtedly reflects grammatical and geometrical incongruities attributed to the heteroclite. In *Rue des boutiques obscures* geometrical anomaly is characterised by a glaring contradiction between the author's mathematical precision in depicting Paris, together with the wide orchestration of spatial and temporal details related to his life, and a nebulous, hallucinatory atmosphere of the city. This geometrical ambiguity in depicting the spatial and temporal setting which reinforces an unsettling experience of the characters of the novel makes *Rue des boutiques obscures* a heterotopic text. On the other hand, the narrative construction of textual heterotopia is reflected in an apparently simple, coherent narrative of the amnesiac detective placed in a concrete, known setting (post-war Paris) which is shattered and “cracked”, leaving space only for delineating dispersed fragments of the past and creating a mesmeric atmosphere of the world's chaotic realities.

With regard to the delineation of the plurality of spatial ontological possibilities, fragmentary world realities and the emphasis laid on the displaced amnesiac character-detective narrating the events as if from a marginal position, Modiano's novel also echoes the notion of heterotopia formulated by Greimas, McHale, next to Deleuze and Guattari, and Hutcheon. The first of the aforementioned critics relates heterotopics and heterotopic space to a semiotic concept. In *Narrative Semiotics* (1990), Greimas argues that space, as a signifying form, can exist only as an outcome of the projection of organising human activity into expanse, taken in its continuity and fullness. Thus, heterotopics is the requisite for any knowledge and anxiety of space: it is impossible to talk about this topos without postulating the existence of

other topoi. Only on this condition, claims Greimas, can discourse on space occur (Greimas 1990: 139-140). Modiano's novel vividly depicts the heterotopic world where people with multiple and conflicting national identities come into contact in diverse real and illusory spatial-temporal realities constructed by an alienated amnesiac narrator.

On the other hand, in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1989), McHale refers to heterotopia as a "problematic world... designed... for the purpose of exploring ontological propositions" (McHale 1989: 43). Nevertheless, as Chernetsky (1998: 255) remarks, the critic uses the term exclusively as the depiction of allegorical "other worlds" delineated in such works of fiction as Cortazar's *62: A Model Kit* (1972), Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972) or Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). These allegorical "other worlds" are textual realms in which "a large number of fragmentary possible worlds coexist in an impossible space" (McHale 1987: 45). Chernetsky asserts, however, that the heterotopia is not what the text *describes* but what it *is* – a condition when multiple textual regimes meet to create a new symbiotic entity, a chronotope of coexistence that is ensured and at the same time ironically subverted (Chernetsky 1998: 255).

Chernetsky's viewpoint on textual heterotopia reflects more accurately its reference to Modiano's *Rue des boutiques obscures*. When set beside McHale's accentuating the exploration of ontological possibilities within the narrated world and referring predominantly to science fiction and selected types of anti-detective stories, or a maximalist model of metaphysical detective stories, Chernetsky emphasises the idea of heterotopia with regard to the narrative construction and its devices. It is in the narrative level that Modiano's book, representing a postmodern detective novel, subverts and questions the classic genre from within by equivocation, by a number of unintelligible gaps and *invraisemblances* (Bersani 1977: 78-80). *Rue des boutiques obscures* abounds in a world formed through a submersion in a shadowy, vague, or sordid past in combination with the persistent renunciation of the vanishing of beings and objects, the determination to probe the labyrinths of memory and life, the ongoing, frantic search for origins, and finally the obstinate and fruitless attempts to establish what happened (Prince 1986: 39). In accordance with Chernetsky's notion of heterotopia, in the textual realm of Modiano's book the reader is confronted with the wavering heterotopic universe that offers both an expression and a critique of countless quests of a contemporary subject.

Furthermore, heterotopia is a designation for specific texts, since the centrality of the “other” in its semantics refers to a particular strategy for the examination of cultural constructs they represent – by concentrating on the experiences of the marginal, the minor, the underrepresented, the oppressed (Chernetsky 1998: 256) – which allows the reading public to regard them as an example of the postmodernism of resistance, a concept developed by Hal Foster in his preface to the collection *The Anti-Aesthetic* (1983: ix-xvi, xi-xii), one of the key texts in the discourse on postmodernism, and which offers an insight into the political verge of these cultural projects. Nonetheless, in the scrutiny of textual heterotopia in Modiano’s text, it is also worth bringing into the framework of analysis Deleuze and Guattari’s “*literature mineure*”, being an umbrella term for “minor practices of major language within”, writings from a marginal subject-status (Chernetsky 1998: 256). In the examination of minor literature, Deleuze suggests situating this concept within the discourse on modernism/postmodernism which is accurately reflected in the works of the authors placed in the consecutive line: Kafka-Beckett-Godard (Deleuze 1986: 18-19; 1987: 4-5). Analogously, Hutcheon states that postmodernism’s study of dominant cultural constructs is rendered exceptionally effective by “making the different, the off-center, into the vehicle for aesthetic and even political consciousness raising” (Hutcheon 1988: 73). In this sense, a heterotopic text implies its preoccupation with the scrutiny of those topoi – cultural, social and linguistic – that lie on the margins of major literary discourses (Chernetsky 1998: 257).

Modiano’s novel provides a vivid illustration of a textual heterotopia proposed by Deleuze and partly Hutcheon since it depicts the narrator as an outsider of an unknown nationality, probably partly French and partly Jewish, who, “alternatively timid and ruthless, reckless and terrified, nostalgic and melancholic”, is endlessly searching for “the stability, security, safety and serenity that neither his situation nor the times permit” (Warehime 1987: 336). *Rue des boutiques obscures*, analogously to the novelist’s other works, brings into focus the displaced, the marginal, the “minor”, which are to a considerable extent autobiographically conditioned. As Prince (1986: 147) notices, Modiano is “as it were French by accident”, born in 1945 to a Flemish actress and a Sephardic Jew from the Middle East who met during World War II in German-occupied France. Various elements of his parents’ and his own biography, caught in the geographic, ethnic and political turmoil of the twentieth century, are constantly reflected in his books.

More importantly, *Rue des boutiques obscures* accurately exemplifies a heterotopic or “minor” text due to its narrative construction. As previously pointed out, Modiano’s novel abounds in ambiguity, numerous inexplicable gaps and improbabilities. Firstly, the narrative of an amnesiac protagonist-detective contains inconclusive information in which vital documents and witnesses escape Guy’s attention. Secondly, the time of the novel itself is “strange, labyrinthine, imprecise”, and its feeling is enhanced by “the vagueness of many of the temporal clues provided, the undatable nature of the deictics punctuating the text” (Prince 1986: 123). As for the space, the narrator frequently refers to it as dream-like: “Les automobiles roulaient vite avenue de New-York, sans qu’on entendît le moteur, et cela augmentait l’impression de rêve que j’éprouvais,”/“The traffic on the Avenue de New-York was moving fast but made no sound you could hear, and this increased the dream-line feeling” (Modiano 1978: 65; translation mine). Within this nebulous realm there are large gaps and *invraisemblances* which go almost unnoticed, like the blank space covering one decade between the disappearance of McEvoy/Stern in 1944 and the appearance of Guy Roland in the mid-1950s (Chernetsky 1998: 259-260). Space and time are equally labyrinthine in Modiano’s text where it is next to impossible to trace the characters’ convoluted migrations from one part of Paris to the other as the readers are overwhelmed by a flood of place-names.

Even though critics like Chernetsky allege that Modiano’s text is not a detective novel, *Rue des boutiques obscures* is an illustrative example of the metaphysical detective fiction, or anti-detective fiction (Ewert 1990; Tani 1984) which evidently violates the conventions of that classical genre as it is utterly anti-climactic, lacks suspense and is not representative of the “search for one’s roots” tradition (Chernetsky 1998: 260). According to Prince (1986: 151, 153), Modiano “adopts familiar structures and uses them as if they were not really made for him”. The French writer exemplifies formal hesitation between conventional forms and a new form of writing it implies through its discordance and lacunae. In fact, these hesitations and puzzling lacunae indicate a “fallout of historicity... descending over the postmodern world” (Scherman 1992: 294-295). All the formal characteristics, such as the plurality and indeterminacy of narrative lines, along with the text’s spatial, temporal and grammatical ambivalence, make the novel one of the most visible possible expressions of what a textual heterotopia might be – that textual condition of an equilibrium on the brink of dissolution from a familiar

realistic narrative into an enigma of manifold indefinite spatiotemporal continua and anomalous textual domains (Chernetsky 1998: 260).

From the above observations it transpires that the setting, the character, and, above all, the narration in Modiano's novel, constitute integral elements of the heterotopic text. Guy Roland embodies an individual whose life is torn apart by twentieth-century history and who occupies a marginal position or a position of total invisibility. As previously observed, the protagonist has adopted multiple, distinctive and conflicting identities. It is through the narrative itself, the heterotopic narrative of combined, maze-like space and time that his life is shaped. Thus, the narrative constitutes the topos where the repressed and suppressed fragments of the traumatised memory are exposed and united in order to articulate and simultaneously face the past. *Rue des boutiques obscures* is an illustration of the process in which writing functions as "a mechanism which allows for self-definition and which provides cohesion and unity in a chaotic and otherwise meaningless world". In this kind of the narrative intertextuality is put forward as "the solution to the crisis of identity" (Telford 1994: 347, 352).

2.4. Conclusion

The two sections of this chapter have outlined the notion of spatial labyrinth in *The New York Trilogy* and *Rue des boutiques obscures*, the novels constituting the reworkings of the classic detective fiction, representing its metaphysical variant. The consecutive sections have presented heterogeneous aspects of spatial experience as evidenced in Auster's and Modiano's novels, most notably, metropolitan urban experience, intertextual maze, the writer's locked room and heterotopia. From the above analysis we may infer that space functions both as the subjective inner terrain and the outer territory which governs the relations between the protagonists in the narrative world as well as regulating the relations between the author, the characters and the reader. Regarding the elements of detection and investigation which Auster's and Modiano's works deftly manipulate and subvert, spatial maze and ambiguity, either in the form of urban alienating experience, or, an ambivalent narrative act, create and enhance an aura of non-solution, failure of the detective quest and equivocal relations between the author, the character and the reader.

It is also interesting to observe that, in comparison with *Rue des boutiques obscures*, investigating urban and textual labyrinth in contextual relation with the images of the forgotten past and the exploration of tremors of memory thanks to which the French author endeavoured to evoke ungraspable human destinies and hidden motives, *The New York Trilogy* foregrounds the centrality of the visionary and anticipatory dimension of the detection process, its ambiguity and unexpected twists against the background of urban maze and textual constraint. Auster's more visible playfulness with the detective story formulas in all likelihood contributed to a huge popularity of his book, both among literary critics and the reading public, especially in the United States, whilst Modiano's recurring obsession with the traumatic memory of the past and an interminable enigmatic search for the lost identity at the expense of the suspense plot made the French author comparatively obscure beside his own country though widely studied. However, irrespective of the reading response to *The New York Trilogy* and *Rue des boutiques obscures*, there is no denying that these novels represent distinct and unique American and French postmodern travesties of the hard-boiled crime literature and *noir* fiction. Using thriller mechanics which yield an existential and metaphysical rather than a conclusive outcome, the texts constitute an intriguing melange of an existential *neo-noir* thriller, a mystery tour and a postmodern odyssey of memory and self-discovery.

Chapter Three

Various faces of temporal labyrinth in Paul Auster's, Patrick Modiano's and Alain Robbe-Grillet's narratives

Time is a universal feature of narrative.

(Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* 2007)

3.1. Introduction

Time, being a universal feature of every narrative, is a point of departure for examining Auster's *The Book of Illusions* (2002), Modiano's *Quartier Perdu* (1984) and Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages* (1953) in this chapter. The concept of time, especially its circular dimension, next to the notion of spatial labyrinth, are the main common denominators of these writers. As exemplary postmodern novelists, these authors use in their narratives time that is isolated, at times disjointed and discontinuous. Despite visible structural distinctions between the three works and different time periods in which they were created, the American and French texts reveal their authors' preoccupation with "postmodern time", especially in confrontation with the modernist approach to time. Auster, Modiano and Robbe-Grillet highlight not the psychological experience of time but the labyrinthine and fragmented logics of time that define postmodern society³⁰.

The Book of Illusions, *Quartier Perdu* and *Les Gommages* fluctuate in illustrating the shift from the modernist mysteries of temporality, memory, and consciousness to the postmodernist estrangements of urban life and

³⁰ See Heise, Ursula, K. (1997). *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 7.

spatial experience of events. All the three texts bring into prominence temporal fragmentation which leaves the characters and the readers with the sense of living in an isolated and temporary, disjointed moment. Auster, Modiano and Robbe-Grillet abandon in their works chronological description of events and therefore break the logical sequence of time/space and the correlation between cause and effect in the story, which is particularly visible in Robbe-Grillet's experimental detective novel. Temporal distortion employed by the American and French writers takes miscellaneous forms, ranging from cyclical or spiral time, as evidenced in Auster's and Modiano's novels, to fractured narratives, conspicuous in Robbe-Grillet's work. The books to be scrutinised in this part abound with temporal labyrinths, creating numerous effects, such as irony, parody, mainly of the classic detective fiction conventions, and a cinematic effect, noticeable especially in Auster's and Modiano's works. In Auster's work, experimentation with time reflects the author's exploration of the characters' existential anxiety in confrontation with the random operation of the universe. Modiano's novel presents achronological time as a mirroring of the narrator's temporal personal experience and time comprehension determined by geographical location. In Robbe-Grillet's novel, temporal distortion reflects the author's examination of the fragmented, chaotic and atemporal aspect of existence in the present.

3.2. Reflection on time in Paul Auster's *The Book of Illusions*

[T]here is objective time, but also subjective time, the kind you wear on the inside of your wrist, next to where the pulse lies. And this personal time, which is the true time, is measured in your relationship to memory.

(Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* 2011)

3.2.1. *The Book of Illusions* as a distinct variant of the metaphysical detective novel

Temporal labyrinth, alongside external and internal alienation, resulting from the man's frantic yet futile attempts to search for identity and authentic experience, comes to the fore in Auster's metaphysical and metafictional

detective novel, *The Book of Illusions*. This 2002 novel by Auster is an example of a hybrid genre, blending a literary and film discourses in which past and present are interwoven. The book powerfully illustrates the novelist's world of doubles, parallels, internal labyrinths, deaths within deaths, stories within stories as well as revealing layers of disconnection, loneliness, confusion and irresolution. Beside these recurrent motifs penetrating the vast majority of the novelist's works, this book is one of the most prominent examples of exploring the concept of time, its perception by the narrator and the reader alongside its relation to the fictional world and the world of the text itself. Although Auster's novel has not been specifically examined in respect to time, and some research studies barely mention the temporal dimension of his book, such as Huebert's (2016) critical reflection on archival futurism or Brown's (2007) analysis of the idea of the journey in the novelist's work, it is worth emphasising that *The Book of Illusions* is an exemplification of the postmodernist fiction marked by the abandonment of chronological presentation of events and the overlapping mainly of the past and present. With respect to the detective story rules accentuating linear progression and closure of the investigation, this novel illustrates the replacement of linear progress and unravelling of the mystery in favour of nihilistic post-historical present and non-solution.

In contrast to such novelists as Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Kurt Vonnegut, Donald Barthelme or Gilbert Sorrentino who freely experiment with the notion of time, dissolving time/space relations and breaking cause/effect relationships in the story, Paul Auster problematizes an existential angst of an individual in the face of ontological incertitude and unpredictability of the contemporary world, and explores the fragmentary, chaotic and atemporal nature of existence in the present. In *The Book of Illusions*, reflecting, in contrast to Auster's other novels, such as *Travels in the Scriptorium* as well as other novelists' works like *The Music of Chance* (1990) or *Leviathan* (1992), a seeming equilibrium between an existential, contemplative mystery text and a metafictional play, the author produces a kind of "isolated, disconnected, and discontinuous" or even "schizophrenic" time (Jameson 1998: 137). This time disavows a clear-cut distinction between traditional literary time frames, principally the narrator time (a melange of Zimmer's 1st-person and Hector Mann's 3rd-person narratives times) and plot time (a circular, two-phase story frames encompassing the late 1980s – Zimmer's time perspective, 1920s and 1930s-Mann's time perspective and

again the late 1980s), mirroring their continual shifts, diffusion and fragmentation. In Auster's text atemporal distortion takes, in particular, the form of achronological, spiral time and fractured narratives (particularly the narrative recounting Hector Mann's life between 1929 and 1988 – the book's present year), resulting in irony and a cinematic effect, which becomes also conspicuous in Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's texts. Within the narrative structure, the effect of time chaos is reflected in various narrative time levels which are often interwoven and overlap. In Auster's book, temporal totality and objectivity give way to time relativity and subjectivity, thus conveying a sense of chaos, uncertainty, and disorientation.

For Auster's readers, on the one hand, and the figures of his fictional world, on the other hand, time is the source of perplexity due to its elusive character. Like the labyrinthine space, embodying the internal incarceration, the writer's alienating experience as well as the link between the inner and outer terrains, time reflects the impenetrability of the man's internal world, his/her relation with, and perception of outer reality, along with the maze-like relationship, or even disjunction between the world of fiction and the world of the text. Among Auster's metaphysical detective novels and mystery books, not directly engaged in social and political issues, *The Book of Illusions* vividly problematizes the idea of time and its conceptualisation which is reflected in the spatial-temporal journey that the main character, David Zimmer, undertakes in order to penetrate the mystery of a long-forgotten silent actor, Hector Mann, and simultaneously to regain emotional stability having suffered the family tragedy. As was underlined in the two preceding chapters, this spatial and temporal interrelatedness, based on Bakhtin's chronotope, is a constitutive category in Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's texts. Nonetheless, they are interpreted separately for purely analytical purposes. In view of that, just like in the study of *The New York Trilogy* I brought into focus the hermeneutics of spatial detection, showing an inextricable link between the protagonists' "inner terrain" and their metropolitan outer territory, in *The Book of Illusions* I place emphasis on temporal distortion, time shifts and circularity against the background of the fragmented, disorderly nature of human existence. Significantly enough, however, analogously to other postmodernist novels, Auster's 2002 book accentuates the narrator's experiencing the events spatially rather than temporally. The protagonist's preference for geographical coherence over chronological order mirrors his personal temporal experience and time

comprehension. Zimmer's individual attitude towards time, reflecting in fact temporal relativity, clearly contrasts with temporal objectivity delineated in the majority of fictional works created before modernism and postmodernism. Hence, Auster's novel, highlighting a disorderly narration, temporal chaos, its subjectivity and relativity, is essentially postmodernist in its characteristic rejection of rules and canons, in this particular case, the denial of temporal objectivity and chronological order in favour of the individual treatment of the category of time (Fedosova 2015: 78).

Beside the representation of time, *The Book of Illusions* exemplifies the way in which postmodernist fiction participates in philosophical discourse on contingency and unknowability. The dominant motif in this book is the insight that "life-long certainties about the world can be demolished in a single second" (Auster 2002: 289). Analogously to *The New York Trilogy* and similarly to *Travels in the Scriptorium*, *The Book of Illusions* foregrounds chance events, unforeseen encounters, and deadly accidents, implying that our lives "don't really belong to us [...] they belong to the world, and in spite of our efforts to make sense of it, the world is a place beyond our understanding (Auster 2002: 289). The book's characters live under the shadow of gnawing doubt and distress, acutely aware that, as the novelist states in his recent memoir, "all life is contingent, except for the one necessary fact that sooner or later it will come to an end" (Auster 2012: 5). Thus, as Carstensen (2017: 412-413) rightly observes, the contemporary storyteller endeavours to gather the remaining pieces of the autonomous subject that once has been shattered by the arbitrary operating of the universe.

The Book of Illusions is an illustrative example of the protagonists' existential angst in the face of random workings of the universe. More importantly, this novel by Auster most vividly depicts temporal labyrinth situated in the author's, narrator's and the main character-the second narrator's overlapping narratives. When set beside spatial maze leading to spiritual alienation of the detective in *The New York Trilogy* as well as the idea of the locked room as an internal incarceration and mental claustrophobia in *Travels in the Scriptorium*, this novel brings into focus the problem of time, memory and loss in the narrative, the way they are shaped by the author, the narrator and the characters. In fact, *The Book of Illusions* oscillates between two realms, on the one hand, it exemplifies a metafictional text carrying the burden of representation and appearing to celebrate postmodernist intertextual play, yet, on the other hand, it shows their narrator's and

characters' an essentially modernist desire for authentic experience and their endeavours to liberate themselves from the oppressive, de-humanizing structure of either the hypertext or the invisible universe. In view of this, it can be observed that the novel problematizes the representation of time in the postmodernist narrative by emphasising the circularity, relativity and subjectivity of time and its repetitive ritual, particularly when linked to the notions of memory, loss or death on the one hand, and the writer's past, the process of writing and the future of the writer's works on the other hand. Having said that, it is difficult to call Auster's novel experimental on account of his conventional use of the tenses, in contrast to Modiano's texts, especially *Quartier perdu*, *Fleurs de ruine* and *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, most of which have been extensively analysed in relation with time and narrative order. The overlapping of multi-layered narratives, the self-reflexive process of artistic representation and a series of disguises, of shifting mysterious identities, and multiple narrator figures reinforce intertextual playfulness and an existential character of Auster's work, making it a postmodernist literary game and a metaphysical mystery novel.

When compared with *The New York Trilogy*, bringing into focus the detectives' and simultaneously writers' ("The City of Glass", "The Locked Room") frantic search for the missing person, which turns out to be the quest to uncover his self, and *Travels in the Scriptorium*, highlighting physical and mental confinement of a man-writer, presumably embodying a detective, a culprit and simultaneously a victim, *The Book of Illusions* does not have any overt reference to crime or investigation, even though search, enquiry, disappearance and death are its central motifs. That is the reason why Auster's work is usually analysed not from the perspective of the detective story conventions, particularly the hard-boiled crime fiction tradition. Nonetheless, despite the book's apparently lacking the crime and investigation subject matter, its foregrounding reflections about searching for one's double and simultaneously exploring one's self, a circular, repetitive and subjective aspect of time, as well as its showing how the daily course of existence is shaped by the power of contingency, situate the text in the context of the metaphysical mystery genre. Furthermore, in the discussion on *The Book of Illusions*, critics appear hesitant about classifying the novel solely as a critique of representation (Peacock 2006), postmodernist intertextual and metafictional play or a critical reflection on archival futurism (Huebert 2016) on the one hand, and as a meditation on ontological and epistemological

unknowability, next to the study on identity loss and exchange, yearning for authentic experience and a wish to reach the bottom of things (Carstensen 2017: 413) on the other hand.

Taking into consideration the critics' scrutiny of the above-mentioned tenets of Auster's fiction, faithfully mirrored in *The Book of Illusions*, one is inclined to adhere to Carstensen's theory on ontological and epistemological incertitude as well as ethical responsibility, not dismissing at the same time Huebert's and other theorists' views on the critique of the power of representation, metafictionality and intertextuality in Auster's work. As Carstensen astutely observes, Auster's book challenges postmodern paradigms by reconsidering the humanist subject as a locus of ethical conflicts and choices (Carstensen 2017: 412). In this way the novel reflects the writer's shifting attitude towards the deconstruction of genres and the surrealist narrative games which emphasise the protagonists' self-destructive impulses and their concomitant disappearance from the text (*The New York Trilogy*), and advocates instead the characters' endeavours, though frequently futile, to overcome alienation and scepticism. For Zimmer, the main character, writing constitutes an opportunity to explore his connection with others, most notably, with the 1920s silent film actor Hector Mann, being his spiritual "other self", and to create a strong link to the material world outside the writer's room in which he remains voluntarily locked. Despite the fact that for Zimmer writing is an act of radical self-evasion, unlike a self-exploratory undertaking in the tradition of Thoreau's *Walden*, Auster's book highlights the relation between annihilation of the old self and an establishment of a new identity (Carstensen 2017: 412). The novel brings into focus creative activity as a means to preserve one's self which is put into jeopardy and deconstructed to such an extent that the protagonist feels at the end as if the book he created may as well have been written "by someone else" (Auster 2002: 58).

Regarding the detective story conventions, according to which *The Book of Illusions* is to be scrutinised, Auster's work, albeit apparently vaguely reflecting the motif of crime, victimisation and investigation, as evidenced in Modiano's *Quarier perdu* and Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages*, foregrounds the theme of quest, specifically, the isolated writer-researcher-amateur detective's search for a missing actor, which proves to be a journey into a new self-discovery. Moreover, instead of the homicide case, the novelist brings into focus accidental deaths, suicides and mysterious disappearances, being

the pivotal motifs in the majority of his works, such as *The New York Trilogy*, *Moon Palace*, *Oracle Night*, to name but a few. It is the main character's internal struggle between self-destruction and self-formation, his confrontation with the power of contingency, unknowability and the inscrutable mystery of the self that makes this Auster's novel a distinct kind of the metaphysical mystery genre.

As emphasised at the beginning of this chapter section, *The Book of Illusions* problematizes the idea of time and temporal labyrinth which is the subject of in-depth examination, next to such crucial constituents of the metaphysical detective story mirrored in Auster's works as presentation of the text as labyrinth, the missing person, the double, and the lost, stolen, and exchanged identity, and the absence or circularity, or closure to the investigation. Attention is drawn to the narrator and simultaneously the main protagonist's exploration of another main character, as well as his meditation on his own endangered self, which is closely related to the complex process of recollection, recreation and destruction in the ambiguous act of writing. The protagonist's journey in pursuit of a long-forgotten actor and, subsequently, his creation of the book devoted to Hector Mann, prove to be an exploration of temporal labyrinth disclosing his tragic past and his memories related to his family. His quest and writing turn out to be ambivalent, provocative and simultaneously dramatic acts revealing ambiguous relations between a creator and a created act, and, more importantly, the narrator's manipulation of the narrative's time, its objectivity and linearity.

3.2.2. Detection and writing as temporal labyrinths in *The Book of Illusions*

Analogously to Modiano's Ambrose Guise – a detective story writer, and Robbe-Grillet's special agent Wallas, Auster's protagonist, professor David Zimmer, a scholar and a writer becomes engaged in an investigative quest for a missing person, which turns into a search to rebuild and redefine his own identity. Zimmer embarks on an investigative journey which inevitably leads him to the exploration of his own past, especially, the painful reconstruction of his family tragedy. Nevertheless, in contrast to *Quartier perdu* and *Les Gommages* where the narrators' search for the culprits is explicitly presented as their odyssey "in time" during which they endeavour to uncover

their true identity, in *The Book of Illusions*, the narrator is in pursuit of another person, another self (or a double, like in Robbe-Grillet's *La Reprise*) thanks to whom he commences constructing a new self and who initially motivates him to leave his writerly confinement cell. Like Modiano's narrator, Zimmer's existence is solely determined by his writing from the very beginning till the end of the novel when it seems to take entire control of its narrator who informs the readers that he speaks from beyond the grave.

It is the process of writing, particularly Auster's idiosyncratic narration, that closely illustrates temporal labyrinth, and related to it, ontological and epistemological preoccupations. One can easily notice that the American novelist excels at building layer upon layer of narration, or a story within a story, to the extent that, as Peacock (2006: 60) astutely observes, many a reader might be confused and uncertain which character is actually speaking. Considering the narrative time levels, one can draw its two-fold distinction: chronologically, the novel contains two time levels – the period of Hector Mann's life between 1929 and 1988, and the book's present 1988; whilst from the narrator's standpoint, there are three levels – next to the period between 1929 and 1988, one distinguishes the novel's present 1988 prior to Zimmer's discovery of Zimmer and the total time after Mann's and his wife's death, and Alma's – Zimmer's partner's suicide in 1988.

Auster opens *The Book of Illusions* with the narrative of David Zimmer, a professor of comparative literature at a college in Vermont, who is devastated after his wife and two sons die in a plane crash in 1985. Having insisted "on driving them down to Boston so they could be on a direct flight" (Auster 2002: 7), the protagonist feels responsible for their death and subsequently undergoes a process of self-disintegration and alienation, continually pondering on the contingencies and connections "in the chain of cause and effect" (Auster 2002: 6) which may have brought about the tragedy that befell him. In his solitary writing room to which he purposefully confined himself, Zimmer happens to read the story of Hector Mann, a largely forgotten star from Hollywood's silent era, who disappeared in unknown circumstances in 1929. Having been fascinated by Mann's obscure performance, the narrator embarks on a book-length analysis of the actor's career which results in his publication of *The Silent World of Hector Mann*. Creating the book becomes Zimmer's therapeutic and selfless endeavour (Carstensen 2017: 415). At this point it is also worth mentioning that Zimmer's sense of guilt at the death of his relatives is evocative of Auster's guilt and regret at the death of his father,

mirrored in *The Invention of Solitude*, the pages of which the writer inhabits. The novelist does not refer to his father in *The Book of Illusions*, however, by presenting the scale and the dimension of grief, sense of guilt and loss, Auster draws a close parallel between Zimmer's and his own tragedy. Like its author, Zimmer is a writer who strives to fill the pages of his book with signs to delay the moments of bereavement he experiences, and to postpone the silence which will engulf him upon acceptance of his relatives' death. As Peacock (2006: 56) observes, in the novelist's world art enters into a problematized relationship with both life and death: a life could be resurrected through the creation of art exclusively in the process of confirming the loss which inspired the creation itself. Zimmer endeavours to prolong his relatives' existence textually by representing his life in words, in order to postpone the ominous silence indicating the acceptance of death.

Significantly enough, by writing and publishing this authoritative story of Hector Mann's widely-knowns films, David Zimmer produces a "recuperative archive" (Boutler 2011: 246); in this way he resurrects a body of work that otherwise is doomed to oblivion because copies of the films are "scattered among six different cities in Europe and the United States" (Auster 2002: 11). As can be later observed, the protagonist's desperate striving to regain and preserve the long-forgotten actor's films visibly contrasts with Hector's desire to destroy his works entirely. This clash is attributed, according to Boutler (2011: 245), to two competing visions of the archive: on the one hand, Zimmer's seeking to extend Mann's life through the archive, and, on the other hand, Hector's exemplifying a queered vision of the traditional archive which results in his rejecting futurity by destroying the archives of films he has been making for over sixty years. As we can notice, Auster gives the final voice to Zimmer, who keeps "worship[ping] the archive until the end (Boutler 2011: 259). Even though the narrator ceases writing until he ultimately pens the book the reader encounters as *The Book of Illusions*, he cherishes the hope that Mann's archive has survived. In fact, there are the archives that do remain, such as Zimmer's notes on *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* as well as the text of *The Book of Illusions* itself, a book which is apparently a non-fictional testament to the events it depicts.

Regarding the order of the narrative structure, Auster, similarly to Modiano and Robbe-Grillet, begins the novel's story *in medias res* to maximise drama. Thus, he introduces the readers into the second, according to the chronological order, time level, prior to the book's central event, Hector

Mann's acting life, and especially the mystery of his disappearance that occurred after 1929, which becomes depicted in *The Silent World of Hector Mann*. As we read at the beginning of the novel: "Everyone thought he was dead. When my book about his films was published in 1988, Hector Mann had not been heard from in almost sixty years" (Auster 2002: 1). *The Silent World of Hector Mann* is Zimmer's book encompassing the period between 1929-1988 in which the main character and simultaneously narrator is the eponymous Hector Mann. Hence, Auster's shift from the second to the first narrative time level coincides with the change of the narration and the narrator – in lieu of Zimmer's first-person narration, we are introduced to Mann's third-person narration. Furthermore, together with the alteration of the narrators and the narratives, Auster changes the tenses: he shifts from the past to the present, as seen in the following fragment:

If I meant to write the book, I would need a place to hole up in, and of all the cities in the world, New York struck me as the one least likely to wear on my nerves. Eventually, I drove across the bridge to Brooklyn Heights and took the first place I was shown. [...] The lease... began on March first, and that was the day I began writing the book. (Auster 2002: 27-28)

As seen in the above excerpt, by the use of Zimmer's first-person narration, the author gives the reader's direct access to the narrator's personal life, enabling them to share Zimmer's New York living conditions, in particular his changeable writing experience. Contrastively, the consecutive fragment exemplifies a shift of perspective – the author abandons Zimmer's first-person narrative, passing to Hector Mann's third-person narrative:

Before the body, there is the face, and before the face there is the thin black line between Hector's nose and upper lip. A twitching filament of anxieties, a metaphysical jump rope, a dancing thread of discombobulation, the moustache is a seismograph of Hector's inner states, and not only does it make you laugh, it tells you what Hector is thinking, actually allows you into the machinery of his thoughts. (29)

The two consecutive excerpts above illustrate the novelist's shifting from Zimmer's first-person narrative in which he speaks, using the past tense, about his relocation to Brooklyn Heights and starting to write a book on the missing film actor, to Hector Mann's third-person narrative, related in the present tense, where the reader is introduced to the nuances of his acting,

particularly facial expression and body language. The shift of the narrative perspective and its concomitant temporal variation are constituent elements of Auster's postmodernist detective novel. Temporal alteration and change of narrative voice in this novel as well as in his other books written before and after, mirror fundamental postmodern principles, like the rejection of strict rules of a plot construction, the ironic attitude to reality and simultaneously the writer's constant playing with the readers' expectations, as well as the discourse fragmentariness, accompanied by temporal variability and fluidity. As Fedosova (2015: 77) remarks, in postmodernist fiction, change is fundamental and flux is normal. More importantly, however, as evidenced in the second fragment of Auster's book, the writer's shift from the past to the present tense closely reveals his movement from the literary to film discourse. Here, the novelist does not just describe images, but he also summarizes, depicts, interprets them, and provides short descriptions using the specialised language of the most common way of translation between film discourse and literary discourse – the language of scripts, which is defined by the author as follows: "It is a jagged, efficiently orchestrated montage, combining close and medium shots in a succession of slightly off-kilter angles, varied tempos, and small visual surprises" (Auster 2002: 245). Thus, the novel's temporal shift and fluidity reflect Auster's unique combination of literary and film discourses in which his main characters actively participate experiencing ongoing transformations. The novelist's hybrid tale (González 2009: 42), with its essential components, like collage, montage, paradoxicality, playing with the text, time and the reader, is a prime example of the postmodern book.

Interestingly enough, change is the only constant in Zimmer's life. It is worth noticing that David Zimmer, whose surname means "room" in German, regards himself, after the death of his spouse, as a dead man, locked inside the family house. However, the writing of his book about Hector Mann forces him once again to occupy the room-that-is-the-book, sacrificing life in the process of creation (Peacock 2006: 60). While writing the book, the professor discovers how Hector moves from one life-changing event to another, gradually accumulating them into the life that Zimmer recounts in *The Book of Illusions*. Significantly enough, Mann's life, his constant change and transformations greatly affect David who, while travelling "in time" in order to find the key to the actor's disappearance, experiences continual personal change and variance. Once the book on Hector Mann is finished, the

protagonist moves out of the family home and into a new house in Vermont, commencing a new stage of his life. It is there that he undertakes translating François-René de Chateaubriand's two-volume, two-thousand-page memoirs, the title of which the professor prosaically interprets as "*Memoirs of a Dead Man*" (Auster 2002: 62). Brown (2007: 122) stresses that, by placing this text at the centre of his own story, Auster is disclosing the mechanics of *The Book of Illusions*, and is exemplifying the manner in which the lives of both the narrator and his narratee are posthumously shown. Analogously to François Couperin, then Chateaubriand's posthumous autobiography, and his many lives ("astride... two epochs, Chateaubriand saw three revolutions; he was by turn soldier, teacher, traveller, ambassador, plenipotentiary, minister and journalist") (Roger 1926: 5) are delineated by Auster in his novel to provide hints as to its literary method. As a matter of fact the many lives of Chateaubriand are projected forward to constitute the many lives of Hector Mann, and subsequently to those of David Zimmer – all of them spoken in the voice of a dead man (Brown 2007: 122).

In fact, the voice of the dead man marks a new phase in Zimmer's life, springing from his book on the silent film actor. Surprisingly enough, despite having disappeared in 1929, and remaining a bare footnote in film history, the main character soon receives a letter informing him that Hector is still alive. Consequently, the professor is forced out of his seclusion and embarks on a journey into a dreamlike and mythical community in New Mexico. The circumstances of Mann's disappearance and the vicissitudes of his life become revealed when Hector's emissary, Alma Grund, is sent to Vermont to find the professor and incline him to visit the ranch in which the actor resides. Alma proves to be a valuable source of information about Mann's life: she recounts Hector's life in both his own words (from her memory, presented to us via Zimmer) and from his journal. Later, it turns out that Alma is collecting this information for her own biography of Hector Mann, to be published after his death. Thus, she functions as the third narrator, or the co-narrator of Zimmer's narrative.

Moreover, Alma manages to heal David's psychosis, permitting him to emerge into the world without being devastated. As the protagonist states: "[a] series of accidents had stolen my life from me and then given it back, and in the interval, in the tiny gap between those two moments, my life had become a different life" (Auster 2002: 112). Similarly to the narrator from "The Locked Room" and Fogg from "Moonlight in the Brooklyn Museum"

(1987), Zimmer experiences “microscopic holes in the universe” through which he has managed to pass and start to develop a new sense of self (Auster 2002: 115). As illustrated in “Moonlight in the Brooklyn Museum” and *The New York Trilogy*, Fogg encountered the circles and holes of Blakelock’s *Moonlight* painting, whilst the narrator of “The Locked Room” discovered in “the tiny hole between self and not self” (Auster 1987: 274-275), the power of his relationship with Sophie that reunited him with the world. Similarly, Zimmer is initially immersed in self-annihilation, reducing his life to “a palpable, burgeoning emptiness” (Auster 2002: 24), yet, through Alma, he commences viewing the world from a new angle (Brown 2007: 123). Needless to say, Zimmer, analogously to Hector, lives lots of lives before he can thoroughly understand the significance of Alma’s role here. In time, his ability to fully understand the significance of Alma’s presence during his emotional and artistic recovery allows him the clarity to write down his own story, parallel with that of Hector.

The protagonist’s profound transformation, the shift from his acts of self-destruction to the act of artistic resuscitation also reflects the author’s individual treatment of time, visible in Zimmer’s narrative, especially the temporal rupture between the sequence of events in the fictional world and in the world of the book as well as the protagonist’s spatial and achronological perception of time. David’s sudden realisation that “in the interval, in the tiny gap between those two moments” his life “had become a different life” dramatically illustrates the subjectivity and relativity of time in the face of individual tragedies and personal traumas. Furthermore, Zimmer’s entirely focussing on writing after his spouse’s and children’s death shows his endeavouring to delay the time of mourning and an acute sense of loss; instead of staring into an epistemological and ontological vacuum, David frantically attempts to make the time elapse while continuously writing. A similar strategy is used by the narrator after Alma’s suicidal death, yet then, he becomes unable to endure his loss and consequently decides to leave the pages of his narrative.

On further reading of Zimmer’s narrative, we learn that the protagonist ultimately arrives in New Mexico, only to bear witness to Hector Mann’s death and to observe the destruction of his entire stock of film rolls. The narrative culminates in Alma’s committing suicide after Zimmer’s leaving her to prepare his Vermont home for their living together. All these tragic events lead to Zimmer’s total isolation and half-existence. The readers finally learn

that *The Book of Illusions* as a text is the story of a dead man: in fact, it was Zimmer's wish that his book be published posthumously. Accordingly, we are convinced to believe that Hector Mann constituted a product of Zimmer's imagination, created as a double, the protagonist's another self, that would enable him to work through his own traumatic history.

An essential link between David Zimmer and Hector Mann becomes conspicuous in their attitudes to time and temporal shifts, as evidenced in their narratives. The protagonists' individual treatment of time reflects the reconstruction of the author's individual temporal picture that does not actually grow out from the integration of cultural modes of time existing in a society but rather the personal temporal experience and time comprehension (ego-based and time-based models) (Fedosova 2015: 78). Zimmer's and Mann's perception of time, which "represents a certain construction which is formed by a personality" (Fedosova 2015: 79), especially temporal order, is determined by geographical location instead of traditional temporal chronology. Throughout their narratives, we constantly bear witness to the vicissitudes of their lives, specifically, their dramatic personal and family events, recounted by them, with reference to the places (a city's district, a state) they inhabit. One of the exemplifications of this process is David's movement from the family home into a new house in Vermont in which he launches his large book project – it is there that he hopes to initiate a new phase, the beginning of a new period of time, followed by the previous, tragic one, associated with the former place. Analogously, Hector's varying lifestyle, his continuous transition from one life to another, and from one sense of self to the next, which results in the emptiness of his soul, is reflected in one of the culminating moments he experiences in the Depression era industrial landscape of Sandusky, Ohio. Mann, as Auster writes:

found himself looking at a dreary expanse of broken-down factories and empty warehouses. [...] He couldn't remember his name. Bricks and cobblestones, his breath gusting into the air in front of it, and the three-legged dog limping around the corner and vanishing from sight. It was the picture of his own death... the portrait of a soul in ruins, and long after he... had moved on, a part of him was still there, standing on that empty street in Sandusky, Ohio, gasping for breath as his existence dribbled out of him. (Auster 2002: 192)

The foregoing quotation clearly shows how Sandusky's landscape reflects the protagonist's nihilistic experience and sense of despair. It is not a mere

textual construct but a reflection of the protagonist's painful memories and it therefore becomes the indicator of his temporal experience. In this respect, the citation closely mirrors the fusion of spatial-temporal categories into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole (Bakhtin 1981: 85). Nonetheless, the same place, mirroring the most devastating moment in his life, provides Hector with his salvation as he soon meets there a banking heiress, Frieda Spelling, who turns out to be his spouse and who, later, will write to Zimmer. As we read, after that, Hector and Frieda move to New Mexico where they can live anonymously in a "blank and savage" landscape, the natural environment which, they believe, can harbour dangers (Brown 2007: 125). However, their domestic felicity is broken as their three-year-old son dies when stung by a bee, as a result of which they become engaged in film making as a way to supersede their grief. New Mexico proves to be Hector Mann's final environment where he will bury his last new self and which will witness his last change of name. From the above description of the events reflecting the main characters' vicissitudes of personal and family lives, one can notice that Zimmer's and Mann's narratives explore the narrators' personal perception of time whose order is associated with geographical location, not traditional time chronology.

As evidenced in the foregoing depiction, Auster employs a rhizome narrative structure to set out Hector Mann's life between 1929 and the novel's present year. His build-up of several narrative layers contributes to the readers' disorientation in recognising the narrative voices as well as the narrative time levels which frequently overlap or come in full circles in the story's climactic moments. In the chain, or sequence of narrative layers, one can notice that Auster narrates Zimmer who in turn narrates Alma, relating Mann's life in both his own words and his journal. This proliferation of narrative layers coincides with the overlapping of narrative time levels: Zimmer's present time narrative intertwines with Hector's and Alma's past time narrative, which in turn are followed by David's present time narrative bringing the story to its end. This shift of narrative layers and a concomitant movement of time levels in *The Book of Illusions* reflects the subjective and relative dimension of time, which has been explored in the majority of postmodernist novels and critical works. Furthermore, when set beside the classic detective novel where time is preordained, in Auster's postmodern mystery, time is open, spiral, chaotic and fragmented.

In the study of narrative layers of *The Book of Illusions*, Brown (2007: 123) emphasises that, despite the complexity of the novel's narrative structure, Alma's additional information about Hector's past, presented in the form of the seventy-two pages of the extended passage, constitutes the most captivating section of the book. Actually, this additional part more powerfully illustrates the relation between Hector's and David's experiences, especially the circular process of creation, re-creation and destruction both characters painfully undergo. Hence, the story of Mann's life, especially the period between 1929 and 1988, narrated by Zimmer, yet recounted by several protagonists (including David, Alma and Hector himself), becomes ultimately presented to the reader in several interrupted narratives. This narrative rupture, accompanied by temporal distortion, reflects the fragmentary dimension of human existence, and, more importantly, the narrator's and the protagonists' inability to describe fully and accurately Hector's past due to the elusive, mystifying nature of time. In Auster's work time is a personal category which finds its reflection in the text as a creative product, not a mere background to the events depicted by the author.

From the perspective of the narrative time level, Alma's "narrative" constitutes the filling of the temporal lacunae visible in Zimmer's *The Silent World of Hector Mann*: she reveals crucial facts about Hector's life which are missing, or become involuntarily suspended in Zimmer's narrative. Hence, the professor's initial investigation of Mann's past proves to be inaccurate and incomplete. His research stands in contrast to the classical detection in which a reconstruction of the past ends as soon as this past has been fulfilled. In order to reconstruct the past, the investigator ought to return to a fixed point (the one of the crime or the mysterious disappearance); otherwise the regression in time would be infinite. Consequently, going back in time is tantamount to finding a criminal, or a missing person, and to unveiling a mystery (Tani 1984: 45). In Auster's novel, Zimmer explores the past of the missing actor in order to temporarily bury the memory of his family tragedy. Nevertheless, his investigation proves incomplete and partly erroneous, as Hector turns out to be alive after the release of Zimmer's book, and the information he collected needs to be complemented with Alma's new facts. More importantly, Zimmer's going back in time, which, in the traditional detective story is synonymous with finding a culprit and shedding light on a mystery, and consequently restoring harmony and order, brings him ultimately neither peace nor sense of stability but instead confines him in the

internal world of alienation and uncertainty. Zimmer initially embarks on the investigative search for another person hoping to find his other self, or assume a new identity, and consequently, regain a sense of balance after the traumatic past experience. Similarly to Quinn, Blue and the narrator of "The Locked Room", David is driven by a desire for authentic experience, however, his endeavours become unsuccessful. Alma's suicide reinforces the protagonist's sense of loss and disintegration, culminating in his informing the reader about his death. As Zimmer states in the following excerpt:

It doesn't matter what happened to me after that. This is a book of fragments, a compilation of sorrows and half-remembered dreams, and in order to tell the story, I have to confine myself to the events of the story itself. [...] Hector's films had been destroyed, Alma's book had been destroyed, and the only things I could have shown anyone was my pathetic little collection of notes, my trilogy of desert jottings: the breakdown of *Martin Frost*, the snippets from Hector's journal, and an inventory of extraterrestrial plans that had nothing to do with anything. Better to keep my mouth shut, I decided, and let the mystery of Hector Mann remain unsolved. [...] If and when this book is published, dear reader, you can be certain that the man who wrote it is long dead. (Auster 2002: 316, 318)

As evidenced in the above passage, Auster's novel ends in the non-solution, or absence of closure. Zimmer ends his narrative without throwing light on Hector Mann's mystery, but instead, bombarding initially the reader with miscellaneous documents and meaningless objects only to admit in the next sentence that he resolves to keep the enigma unsolved. Hence, like metaphysical and deconstructive anti-detective novels, this book challenges the conventional use of solution and suspense. Nonetheless, similarly to the unresolved denouements of Auster's other metaphysical detective stories, most notably, *The New York Trilogy*, *Squeeze Play* and *Travels in the Scriptorium*, the ending of *The Book of Illusions* refers to the conventions of writing (Brown 2007: 126). Furthermore, it draws attention to the ways in which the novelist lays fictional worlds within each other, and to the manner in which the link between the fictional world and the world of the book is broken by the demise of the first-person narrator.

It ought to be marked that the unresolved ending of Auster's book reflects the circular dimension of time, tracing the protagonist's undergoing the initial process of alienation and self-disintegration, followed by his creative activity

by means of which he attempts to preserve his endangered self, and concludes in Zimmer's self-evasion and, concomitantly, his death. *The Book of Illusions* exposes the author's postmodern approach to time which is circular and open, in contrast to the traditional detective fiction where it is chronological and linear. In the classic detective novel, the present is employed to throw light on the past which has already happened before the story began, whilst the future is not even considered, as visible in most of the narrative conventions of the Golden Age detective stories. In the traditional detective story, the detective unveils the past, yet only to be condemned to go backwards in time in the following story. As Tani (1984: 46) argues, analogously to Sisyphus, the detective is doomed to infinitely roll the stone of detection up to the top of the hill. The critic remarks that the necessity to repeat the discovery finally indicates that no discovery is ultimate and that the discovery is not tantamount to a solution but rather a tendency or an approximation since the past abounds with unresolved enigmas waiting for their detective (1984: 46). Tani's observation on the comparison between the futility of the classical detective's and Sisyphus's work throw some interesting light on the very process of detection, yet it seems incomplete. In fact, when juxtaposed the efforts of the detective from whodunnits or the private eye from hardboiled fiction which result in detecting or capturing the culprit, the mythological Greek hero is condemned to endlessly roll the stone. In this respect, Sisyphus's endeavours bear more similarity to postmodern detectives, such as the ones who populate Auster's books. In *The Book of Illusions*, the absence or impossibility of the discovery is brought to its climax in the non-solution, which discloses a tendency toward chaos and irrationality (Zimmer's self-disintegration and his subsequent death engendering the rupture between the fictional world and the world of the book). David Zimmer does not unveil Hector Mann's mystery and therefore eludes the trap of repetition. As an anti-detective, or a failed detective, he reluctantly achieves the non-solution, however, forced to it by the proliferation of meanings (clues which prove to be meaningless and inconclusive) in the events he takes part.

As remarked at the outset of this section, *Travels in the Scriptorium* is one of the most illustrative examples of a text displaying the process of artistic creation, the author's vocation both as a writer and a film critic. Auster seems to regard traditional films as simulacra, using Baudrillard's term: the apparently seamless manner in which they "represent" reality screens the

lack of profoundness both of the process and of “reality” itself. In fact, the cinematic medium, acting as a simulacrum (a sign with no corresponding referent) masks reality at the same time as it purports to be demonstrating it to the audience. As a movie, *The Book of Illusions* displays Auster’s endeavours to add that third dimension, which other films apparently lack, in order to offer “the real thing” in lieu of the “simulacrum of reality” that the majority of movies provide instead (González 2009: 2). The author brings into prominence the process of filmmaking, special emphasis being placed on Hector Mann’s *written films* (González 2009: 13; original emphasis) as they perform a thematic function, establishing links of analogy, similarity and contradistinction between the diegetic story and the hypodiegetic ones. Nonetheless, these stories stand in contrast to other stories-within-the story since the medium depicted is apparently different from the language employed to narrate them, constituting a postmodern way to attract the attention of the reading public toward the frames, the distinct languages in which the stories are told, as Peacock emphasises (2006: 15): “The very title boldly refers to itself as an aesthetic artefact. Uniquely, this book of illusions chooses to foreground a particular medium of representation and framing – cinema”.

Auster’s difficulty in translating from film discourse to literary discourse turned out to be his tour de force by means of which he attempted to reproduce in words the effects of film images, as illustrated in the following quotation: “The camera holds on the door for a second or two, and then very slowly starts pushing in on the keyhole. It is a lovely shot, full of mystery and anticipation, and as the opening grows larger and larger, taking up more and more of the screen, we are able to look through into Hector’s office” (Auster 2002: 42). Interestingly enough, next to capturing images, the novelist recapitulates, depicts and provides shot description by using the language of scripts, being the most common way of translation between film discourse and literary discourse: “It is a jagged, efficiently orchestrated montage, combining close and medium shots in a succession of slightly off-killer angles, varied tempos, and small visual surprises” (Auster 2002: 245).

A key to understanding Auster’s hybrid tale lies in the reader’s indispensable return from words to the “original” images in the process of visualisation that features the reading of fiction. In case of Hector Mann’s written film, the author endeavours to attain the required abstraction or conceptualisation by offering the interpretation of the images: “A twitching

filament of anxieties, a metaphysical jump rope, a dancing thread of discombobulation, the moustache is a seismograph of Hector's inner states, and not only does it make you laugh, it tells you what Hector is thinking, actually allows you into the machinery of his thoughts" (Auster 2002: 29). Additionally, he provides the critical commentary and, more importantly, the audience's reaction: "We no longer know what to expect. The story has shifted into another register, and one minute after laughing our heads off, we find ourselves in the middle of a tense, melodramatic scene" (Auster 2002: 263). The amalgamation of the description of images, sound and the critical interpretation produces a poetic effect:

The camera pans from a close-up of Martin's face to a wide shot of the trees. The wind is blowing again, and as the leaves and branches tremble under the assault, the sound amplifies into a pulsing, breathlike wave of percursiveness, an airborne clamor of sighs. The shot lasts three or four seconds longer than we think it will. (Auster 2002: 246)

The above descriptions, especially the final fragment, exemplify Auster's attempts to attain the viewer's involvement by providing the opportunity for further readings and viewings, metafictional mirrorings and frames, and a network of links between various stories, characters, relations between the protagonists and the readers, as well as illustrating the author's thorough investigation into the dissimilarities and analogies between the visual and literary languages. Auster's combination of using literary and cinematic techniques accentuates a heterogeneous, multi-layered dimension of "reality" of the novel, particularly the exploration of frames, time shifts and different languages in which the narrators' stories are told.

To conclude, *The Book of Illusions* constitutes a particular variant of the metaphysical detective story which problematizes the concept of time and its perception, specifically temporal shift and variability reflected in the novel's rhizome narrative structure. In his work, Auster displays a quintessentially postmodern treatment of time, placing emphasis on its subjectivity, relativity and fragmentariness, especially in the context of the narrative writing process. The novelist demonstrates a special status and unique features of the textual time which can, nevertheless, dovetail with the objective time. By experimenting with time, illustrating its distortion and achronology, the writer examines the fragmented, chaotic and atemporal character of existence in the present which is fluid and variable. Significantly enough, this

book by Auster is an example of a hybrid genre, blending literary and film discourses in which past and present become merged. An ambiguous treatment of time and personal memory are the most significant elements of Auster's novel, analogously to Modiano's *Quartier Perdu*. Having said that, still one cannot fail to notice that Auster's text, like Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's novels, highlights an inextricable link between time, identity and space which defines and determines a postmodern condition of a man, in particular, the position of a writer and his relation with the text, the narrative subjects and the readers. It is the intersection of spatial-temporal indicators that characterises the novelists' postmodern narratives.

3.3. A disorder time narrative in Patrick Modiano's *Quartier perdu*

When the past is forgotten, the present is unforgettable.

(Martin Amis, *Other People: A Mystery Story* 1981)

Similarly to Auster, time, next to space and identity, is the central element in Modiano's fiction. As has been previously demonstrated, these categories unavoidably blur into one another. Together with the French novelist's preoccupation with space, implied by the importance attributed to the addresses – of apartments, restaurants or offices – that proliferate in his narratives, his books abound with dates as the narrators seem to gain pleasure from specifying when certain events took place. Dates as indicators of time are useful given that Modiano's novels, concerned with explorations of the past and its different levels, are made accessible through long flashbacks. Nonetheless, perusing *Quartier perdu*, *Rue des boutiques obscures* or *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* leaves the readers with the indelible impression that chronology, albeit naturally present in his works, is curiously redundant. For instance, in *Quartier perdu*, the time when Jean Dekker met Carmen and was involuntarily involved in the crime twenty years before he changed his name to Ambrose Guise and became a crime story writer, presents itself to the reader no further away or feels only a little more distant than the current level of the 1980s. Evidently, reading Modiano's novel produces the sensation that the different chronological levels are situated on a single surface on which they enjoy an unhierarchical status and autonomous existence. However, when set beside the experimental

overthrow of conventional time occurring in certain *nouveaux romans*, the impression of redundant chronology in Modiano's work is not that clear. In contrast to *Le Voyeur* or *La Reprise*, the subversion of a traditional concept of time in *Quartier perdu* is rather unobtrusive because it occurs within the framework of a conventional dating system.

In the scrutiny of the notion of time and time chronology in *Quartier perdu*, it is worth, first of all, referring to the order in which events are presented in a narrative as it is vital in understanding the sense of time which governs it. Nevertheless, the order is determined by the type of narrative which is under examination. Thus, in lieu of scrutinising classical time frames, principally narrator time, plot time and reader time categories, constituting points of departure for the majority of literary studies dedicated to time, prior to the discussion on temporal labyrinths in Modiano's text, it will be more pertinent to incorporate in my analysis Kawakami's classification and Genette's scheme as they reflect a penetrating insight into a postmodern approach to time in the French author's work, particularly when linked with the inspection of the concept of space.

The first of the above-mentioned critics has indicated that several objects coexist within a single narrative. Kawakami (2000: 26) points to three of them: the first one, being the actual written text, the collection of signifiers on the page, which the Russian Formalists called the *sjuzhet* and in Genette's scheme it is called the *récit*; the second one, referred to as *fabula* by the Russian Formalists and *histoire* by Genette, which is the story behind the text, the collection of "real" signifiers of which the text is in an arrangement, and the ultimate one, called *narration* by Genette, being the enunciation of the narrative by the narrator of the text. As the theorist observes, the events associated with these three types of narrative, *récit*, *histoire* and *narration*, occur in a different order. The order of the *histoire* constitutes the chronological order of events in the "real world", the order of the *récit* parallels the order in which these things are told, whilst the order of the *narration* shows the order in which the occurrences appear to the narrator's consciousness. When set beside the *histoire* which is itself a form of selected, momentous events, the *récit* is governed by the order in which events are described in the actual narrative and comprises a dramatic effect, such as the incorporation of *in medias res* to maximise drama. Added to that, the ordering of the *récit* is occasionally referred to as "the logic of the narrative" which

indicates that it has a logic specific to itself in accordance with its goals (Kawakami 2000: 27-28).

The ultimate kind of narrative order, the order of *narration*, deserves special attention since it becomes the subject of a further in-depth discussion in relation to *Quartier perdu*. It is worth pointing out that the order of narration constitutes the sequence of events as they appear to the narrator's consciousness. As a clarification of Kawakami's (2000: 27) remark, we may state that an event which took place several years prior to the time of narration (regarding the order of *histoire*) could be placed at the outset of the narrative for dramatic effect (with reference to the order of *récit*), however, it appears to be an ever-constant present to the narrator at the time of its narration (as concerns the order of *narration*), such as the memory of an unresolved murder case. Obviously, this would be noticeable in the choice of tense used; in lieu of the adequate past tense, it might be recounted in the present tense as it indicates its relation to the consciousness of the narrator.

These three types of order can be found in any narrative since they are the consequence of the fact that a narrative is the relating by a narrator of a sequence of events occurring in time. Nonetheless, distinct narratives highlight different orders. For instance, a historical narrative is likely to favour its order of *histoire*, whilst novels dependant on plot and intrigue, such as detective or crime stories, will presumably direct the readers' attention to its order of *récit*. Kawakami rightly notices that Modiano's works, with respect to their predominantly first-person narrators, the particularly flat and seemingly superfluous chronology, especially in *Fleurs de ruine* (1991), alongside the relative insignificance of the present time-frame, ought to be interpreted as narratives which follow the order of *narration*.

The above examination of the orders of the three aspects of narratives and their selection of the tense used leads us to the study of *Quartier perdu*, specifically with regard to the order of narration. The process of this order, presented above, is illustrated in Modiano's analysed novel where Ambrose Guise, a prominent detective story writer, meets in Paris a Japanese publisher, Tatsuke, as a result of which he commences recollecting a woman from his youth who changed his life and a vague criminal affair in which he became involved and which forced him to change his previous name, Jean Dekker into Ambrose Guise, and made him leave France. The character's love affair and the murder occurred twenty years prior to the time of narration and even though these events are not placed at the very beginning of the narrative, but

in the middle of it, their relation is preceded by the conversation between Guise and the Japanese publisher which instantaneously evokes the memory of what happened two decades before. The love affair and the mysterious homicide remain vivid in the mind of the narrator at the time of his narration, which is conspicuous in his frequent, yet not exclusive, use of the present tense as it is close to his consciousness. This exemplification of Kawakami's categorisation also confirms the critic's further claim that the order of narration, as evidenced in Guise's narration, could be considered a disorder in its idiosyncrasy (Kawakami 2000: 27). To aptly illustrate her point, the critic points to Sartre's implication that subjective orders are always disorders. Sartre makes this suggestion when depicting his childhood understanding of the coherence of the world, calling it "un désordre qui devint mon ordre particulier"/"a disorder that became my particular order" (Sartre 1964: 201; trans. Kawakami). Thus, Ambrose Guise's subjective order (his use of the blend of the past and the present tenses to describe the events from his youth) defies chronological order and instead shows his unique view of the past.

As seen in the above, the order of narration in *Quartier perdu* substantiates the peculiarities of Modiano's presentation of time in his narrative. Although this novel is not an exemplification of the oscillation between multiple time levels, as seen in *Fleurs de ruine*, it is governed by the (dis)order of narration, especially in terms of the narrator's subjective employment of the present and past tenses. The time ordering in *Quartier perdu* seems highly random, chaotic, even hallucinatory to the readers, particularly when Guise continually shifts from the past to the present when referring, in different moments of his narration, to the events from the past, as visible in the following fragments:

Il faisait beau. À cette heure-là, j'étais le seul passager du wagon. J'allais la rejoindre dans un lieu de villégiature. Reuilly. Saint-Mandé. Vincennes. Biarritz.

[The weather was fine. At that time, I was the only passenger on the train. I was going to join her in a holiday resort. Reuilly. Saint-Mandé. Vincennes. Biarritz.] (Modiano 1984: 171, 172, 173; translation mine).

...

Neuf heures du matin. L'air n'est pas encore trop étouffant bien que le soleil brille dans un ciel sans nuages. Pas de brume de chaleur. Le rouge brique du

grand immeuble du 76 boulevard Sérurier se détache sur le vert du parc, dont les pelouses divalent jusqu'au périphérique.

[Nine o'clock in the morning. The air is not too stuffy yet the sun is shining in a cloudless sky. No heat haze. The brick red of the large 76 boulevard Sérurier building stands out against the green of the park, whose lawns divide up to the ring road.] (Modiano 1984: 182-183; translation mine).

The above excerpts describe Guise's waiting for, travel to, and subsequently his encounter with, Ghita Wattier, the girl who unintentionally involved him in the murder she committed on Ludo Fouquet after he had physically abused her. It is interesting to observe the narrator's alteration of past (*imparfait*) and present (*présent*) tenses in these passages of the novel. In the fragments above, the narrator fluctuates between past (*imparfait*) and present (*présent*); in the first passage he employs *imparfait* while relating his journey to his girlfriend and enumerating the names of the train stops he passed whereas in the consecutive excerpt Guise uses *présent* in describing the place of his meeting with Ghita and its surroundings.

The scenes delineated in the above fragments reflect the events from the narrator's past, yet they are presented in the final sections of Guise's narration who uses interchangeably the past and present tenses. In this sense, the narrative order of *Quartier perdu* mirrors a serious disorder from the point of view of the orders of *histoire* and *récit*. Consequently, such a narration creates in the readers the feeling of dizziness and hallucination, similarly to Robbe-Grillet's nausea.

The randomness and chaos which the ordering of Modiano's novel produces has been pointed out by Ferrara (1985/1986: 489): "les événements du passé sont présentés simultanément à divers moments du présent et semblent surgir par association"/"the events of the past are presented simultaneously at various moments of the present and seem to arise by association" (translation mine). Needless to say, as Kawakami (2000: 28) notes, the principle of association is directly governed in Modiano's work by an order of narration which mostly concerns geographical location. All events in the novel, whose brief excerpts have been presented above, are associated in the consciousness of the narrator owing to their coincidence in the same areas of Paris or its vicinity. In fact, geographical coherence takes the place of chronological order in the consciousness of the narrator, which is not an unusual procedure because, as Genette (1972: 120) observes, it was also used by Proust who preferred to order his narrative in line with geography rather

than chronology. The order of geographical association could be attributed to a direct result of the narrator's experience: at the time of narrating, the narrator experiences the happenings spatially rather than temporally (Kawakami 2000: 29). Analogously to the experience of Auster's narrator, Modiano's narrator's placing emphasis on geographical association and spatial memory instead of chronological order illustrates a postmodern concept of time-space continuum. However, next to the spatial-temporal interrelatedness, in Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's texts special emphasis is placed on a personal treatment of time, temporal non-linearity and chronological disruption.

The above-cited fragments of *Quartier perdu*, next to other passages from Modiano's novel, aptly illustrate Kawakami's argument, supported by Genette's remark on the tension between a traditional perception of time and its individual subjective experience on the one hand and a time-space continuum on the other hand. Similarly to *Rue des boutiques obscures*, *Quartier perdu* mirrors a spatial aspect of memory alongside temporal disruption and coincidence in lieu of its linearity and chronology. With regard to the detective story conventions, this contradiction reflects the tension between the traditional hermeneutics of time and a more modern hermeneutics of spatial detection. As seen in the above quotations, the order of Ambrose Guise's narration, marked by his use of the past-present tenses while reminiscing about a significant event from his past, is clearly governed by geographical relationship, which has no objective coherence but obeys the narrator's internal order. The protagonist's memory of meeting Ghita, or travelling to see her, in order to recall a dramatic crime event that preceded their encounter, is inextricably linked with the place and his feelings associated with it. For Modiano's protagonist, analogously to Marcel Proust's and Virginia Woolf's characters, time is not linear, but circular. Since Guise's existence is determined by, and counted in accordance with his coming back from and to concrete places, in this case, certain areas of Paris, which shaped his childhood and were witnesses to the tragic happenings in his youth, the man is unable to narrate the events according to the traditional time chronology but in line with his individual experience of time and place. Thus, his experience reflects fragments of chronology, implying, as Warehime (1987: 339) maintains, "a linear narrative by locating an individual in a place at a certain period of time".

Although Warehime's statement is based on her scrutiny of *Rue des boutiques obscures*, her examination could be equally applicable to *Quartier perdu*. Similarly to amnesiac Guy Roland desperately attempting to uncover his identity by referring to specific places and people he was associated with at certain periods of time, Ambrose Guise, previously known as Jean Dekker, therefore the man of a double identity, returns to Paris in order to evoke the traumatic memories of the past events which he, however, subconsciously endeavours to erase. Visiting certain areas of the French capital city makes Guise revive particular moments in his life, especially his infatuation with a mysterious Carmen Blin and his unfortunate involvement in the homicide. The narrator's constantly returning from and to the same places at different times, or evoking the same events from various times' perspectives, closely reflects the circularity of his narration: "So, always go through the same places at different times and, despite the distance between years, we'll end up meeting" (Modiano 2014b: 25).

Ambrose Guise's circular narration mirrors the protagonist's individual perception of time which appears chaotic and labyrinthine. It is due to the fact that the order of his narration springs from the narrator's consciousness at the time of narrating. Hence, the character's continual shift of tenses during his recounting the same or parallel events: Ambrose's employment of the past tense (*imparfait*) in the first excerpt mirrors the nostalgic tone of his journey, whilst the use of the present tense (*présent*) in the second part may imply the protagonist's emotional suspension while waiting for his lover and contemplating the landscape.

As seen from the above, the traditional chronological order is substituted in Modiano's novel by the narrator's temporal perception disorder which manifests itself in Guise's memories of the past, being much more visible and tangible than the present moments. This view is held by Brândușa-Steiciuc (2015: 135) who adds that this peculiar individual (dis)order is demonstrated in Modiano's prose as well as his photography. The constant alteration of the tenses in Guise's narration inevitably leads the readers to confusion in perceiving the current reality delineated by the narrator, as well as truly recognising the identities of the characters. As Kawakami (2000: 29) observes, such a highly idiosyncratic order of narration makes special requirements on the readers of the narrative, making their reading process more demanding and challenging. Instead of exploring the mystery leading to its explanation and resolution of the crime, the readers become overwhelmed

by the endless temporal shifts in Guise's subjective narrative which leaves them with the feeling of vagueness and hallucination.

Modiano's dexterous play with the readers' expectations becomes a point of departure for the examination of the way in which *Quartier perdu* uncovers the fundamental impasse of a hermeneutical project founded on the traditional notion of time. In this novel, contrary to the classic detective fiction, the enigma is not satisfactorily resolved. Therefore, Modiano's work exemplifies the alteration of the distinctive narrative structure of the detective genre. Evidently, the elementary structure of detective fiction presupposes the interplay between the absent, "real" story (the story of the crime) and a present, secondary story (the story of the investigation) which mediates between the reader and the crime (Todorov 1977: 159). This dual system – "one story in search of another" (Eisenzweig 1983: 9; trans. Botta 1999) indicates that the detective novel is based on an absence, to be specific, on a difficulty in narrating. According to Eisenzweig (1983: 11; trans Botta 1999): "It is the absence of the crime story (that is to say, finally, the mystery) which both calls for and allows the development of the story of the investigation... Such impossibility [of narrating] concerns of course only the crime story, and it is only relative insofar as the mystery itself is relative". In traditional detective stories, the power of this "mystery", which entails the "impossibility" of narrating, is restricted and disappears as soon as the investigation comes to an end (Botta 1999: 220). *Quartier perdu* evidently questions this rule as it illustrates only a partial, unsatisfactory solution of the story's initial enigma. Ambrose Guise's narrating the mystery becomes difficult, almost impossible, therefore the readers' expectations of any conclusive ending become unfulfilled. If classic detective stories commence in a frustrated desire as their narration constitutes an expression of that frustration, then narrative closure gratifies that original desire. On the contrary, in Modiano's novel, the protagonist is tormented by the analogous fear at the outset of his inquiry – when, while endeavouring to suppress the acute memory of the past crime, he does not disclose complete information about the case in his narration, – and, similarly, at the end, he briefly alludes to the tragic event, pointing to the "scar" on Ghita's face, yet he subsequently states that he wishes to totally forget it:

Elle revient de plus loin encore. Carmen. Rocroy. La Varenne-Saint-Hilaire. Paris. Toutes ces roues en pente... Sa valise ne pèse pas lour. Je la regarde à la dérobée. Une grande cicatrice lui barre le front. La marque du temps, peut-être. Ou bien la trace que vous laissez l'un de ces accidents qui vous ont fait perdre la mémoire pour la vie. Moi aussi, à partir d'aujourd'hui, je veux ne plus me souvenir de rien.

[She comes back from even further. Carmen. Rocroy. Varenne-Saint-Hilaire. Paris. All these sloping streets... Her suitcase is not heavy. I look at it furtively. A big scar blocks her forehead. The mark of time, perhaps. Or the trace that leaves you with one of those accidents that made you lose your memory for life. I too, from today, want to remember nothing.] (Modiano 1984: 184; translation mine)

From the foregoing citation it transpires that the main character does not intend to confront the past, leaving the criminal case unclarified and the mystery unsatisfactorily resolved. Hence, in *Quartier perdu*, similarly to *Rue des boutiques obscures* and *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, the "suspense" convention of the classic detective fiction is changed by a hermeneutical "suspension" of closure (Botta 1999: 222).

The narrator's temporal perception disorder, and his final refusal to offer a clear-cut answer to the mystery and reach a satisfying conclusion, disorientates the readers, falling to satisfy their expectations. Being attracted by an initial "mystery", they begin reading the text with "aetiological" or "hermeneutic expectations" (Davis 1995: 667). Interestingly enough, the readers' temptation to further explore the enigma is reinforced by the irresolute tone of the narrative voice: the characteristic Modiano's narrator's lack of confidence is likely to induce them to reconstruct the story more energetically than when perusing a narrative told by an authoritative voice. Nevertheless, the readers' attempts to re-order the narrative, to impose coherence and meaning on it, are thwarted in *Quartier perdu*, as the text ultimately frustrates the quest for a primal cause or origin of the problem (Kawakami 2000: 29). Modiano's work exemplifies neither final closure nor victorious detective but instead an anti-climactic dissolution or a displacement effect.

Modiano's highly idiosyncratic order of narration, foregrounding an anti-climactic ending, manifests itself in the author's employment of the tenses, being the key to a thorough understanding of Modiano's fiction. In fact, the past tense that the author predominantly uses does not constitute a figure of

temporal signification but a token of fictionality. This confirms Ricoeur's assertion that the tense system in fiction is independent of, albeit linked to, the temporal scheme in the outside world (Ricoeur 1983-1985: 94). The critic's argument is a point of departure for the discussion on the manner in which different novels, including Modiano's books, display various levels of reliance on the "external" system of tenses. According to Pascal (1962: 5): "we do not use the same criteria for all novels, but the novel itself tells us what criteria are relevant". Clearly, certain novels rely on the reader acknowledging the order of *histoire*, which reflects the "external" temporal system. Others, like Modiano's works, use tenses within the realm of fiction in order to present the narrator's view, the order of *narration*. *Quartier perdu*, *Rue des boutiques obscures* and *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* illustrate the process where different tenses used to depict a past event could be considered expressions of the narrator's attitude towards the event, an act of the narrator's subjective experience of time, rather than as indicators of temporality (Kawakami 2000: 33).

In Modiano's books, tense apparently operates in this way to feature the emotional distance between the narrator and the event described. This could account for the impression it gives, as observed earlier, of a redundant chronology. Chronology is actually present in the narrative in the form of meticulously recorded dates, however, it is simultaneously superfluous since it fails to establish a temporal hierarchy in which the more distant past is adequately presented as more remote than a more recent one. *Quartier perdu* is a vivid illustration of this process.

As said before, *Quartier perdu* is a first-person narrative in which the narrator relates the story of his past through regular flashbacks which take the narrative back to "past" levels. The term "level" seems precise as they are discreet, not continuous; a change from level to level by the narrative constitutes frequently a rapid movement, not a gradual one. There are several time levels in this novel, however, not as many as in Modiano's other works, such as *Voyage de nocces*. When set beside approximately five levels of time in *Voyage de nocces*, separated by concrete dates, like, for example, the present time, 1989, and the year when Ingrid committed suicide in 1968, in *Quartier perdu* the narrative contains about four time levels which are divided into events to which, however, no specific dates are assigned. Thus, in this novel, one may distinguish four levels of time between which the narrative develops: the first one, being the present, presumably, 1984, when the

protagonist returns to Paris as a well-known detective story writer; the second time level, twenty year previously, when he encountered an enigmatic Carmen Blin whom he fell in love with and who indirectly involved him with the criminal intrigue; the third one, marking the time of the murder; and the ultimate time level, denoting a short time after the commitment of the crime, when the narrator is about to meet Ghita Wattier, and constituting at the same time the closing scene of the book. At this point, it is worth noting that in contrast to *Voyage de nocces* where the boundaries between the time levels are clear-cut, in *Quartier perdu*, they at times vary or become blurred. For instance, the borderline between the first and the second level is explicit, whereas the boundary between the second, third and fourth time level becomes vague and indefinite. Hence, one can conclude that Modiano's novel oscillates between two time plane schemes: the first one, containing four time levels, thus distinguishing the time prior to and after the crime, and the second one, encompassing two time levels, which draws a distinction between the current time, the moment when the narrator tells the story, and the time when the events he is describing at present, occurred in his past: his meeting with Carmen, the homicide and his encounter with Ghita after the crime.

Following the narration on these time levels, the boundaries between some of which are not clear and direct, is undoubtedly difficult. The complexity of the structure of the narrative's time level is further enhanced by the narrator's use of the past tense while depicting the current situation, as well as his frequent shifting from the past to the present when referring to the same, or a neighbouring event, as exemplified in the preceding citations. Consequently, the reader is forced to become engaged in an activity of reconstruction, of re-ordering the story chronologically, as he/she reads, either in accordance with the dates provided in the text, as visible in *Voyage de nocces*, or in line with the logical chain of events taking place in the story, as seen in *Quartier perdu* or *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*.

Needless to say, one cannot fail to notice that the readers' active participation in the process of re-ordering the story Ambrose Guise, Jean Daragane or Guy Roland narrate leads to a startling discovery. In fact, it is not only the complexity and ambiguity of the levels that make the reconstruction a demanding endeavour, but it is also the total lack of temporal hierarchy in the protagonists' narratives, the conspicuous absence of a dominant time level. Following Kawakami's (2000: 34) observation, one is prepared to concede that there is little sense that the level equivalent to the present is the

appropriate site of the narrative, from which the narrative's flashbacks, for instance, ought to be measured. Hence, the evident effortlessness with which the chronological alterations appear to occur in most of Modiano's novels, and the ensuing feeling that chronological order, albeit present in the text, is peculiarly redundant. This is especially evident in *Quartier perdu* and *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* where, in contrast to one of the above-discussed texts like *Voyage de noces*, delineating explicit time level boundaries, the bordering lines between time layers are indistinct or even fuzzy. Thus, *Quartier perdu* and *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* are the novels neatly illustrating the rhizome structure of spatial-temporal labyrinth, particularly its un-hierarchical, non-linear temporal construction.

In terms of the reader-response theory, one may notice that regular shifts of tenses and the absence of the dominant time level in *Quartier perdu* result in the readers' continuous bewilderment and the succeeding disillusionment. Guise's narrative commences with the seemingly central time level, corresponding to the present, from which the narrative's flashbacks are to be estimated. As previously mentioned, this first level, despite being equivalent for the present, is narrated in the past tense (*passé composé*). Analogously, the subsequent level, encompassing the events from the protagonist's past, is narrated in the same past tense. The ending of the first level reads as follows: "De retour à l'appartement, j'ai commencé à écrire, les jambes repliés sur le canapé du salon, le bloc de papier contre mes genoux. J'ai lassé la porte-fenêtre ouverte..." / "Back in the apartment, I started to write, the legs folded on the sofa in the living room, the pad of paper against my knees. I left the French window open", after which we are introduced to the beginning of the second one: "Avant de devenir le romancier anglais Ambrose Guise, j'ai débuté dans la vie, en qualité de bagagiste" / "Before becoming the English novelist Ambrose Guise, I was a porter" (Modiano 1984: 90; translation mine).

The above-quoted excerpts invite several remarks. Firstly, the occurrence of these two consecutive fragments, each reflecting a different time level, yet neither of them being distinguished by separate tenses, creates the initial impression of their overlapping or forming some chain of events. It might be due to the fact that even though we are clearly introduced into two distinct levels, the narrator's sudden shift from one level into another engenders our disorientation, or even, in case of more abrupt changes, mental hallucination. Moreover, one may notice that the second time level, introduced by the narrator in the middle of the story, gradually becomes

equally significant in Guise's narrative. In fact, the first time level prevails in the first half of Guise's narrative since it develops and successively increases the readers' desire to discover increasingly more facts about the protagonist's past, whereas the subsequent level exercises control over the second half of his narrative by gradually revealing to the reader the narrator's implication in the crime. Thus, in their entirety these two time levels remain equiponderant. On the other hand, given the presence of four time levels in Modiano's novel, the second one actually turns into three, separated according to the time which preceded, coincided with and followed the murder. Also in this classification, each level appears to enjoy an equal status. Nonetheless, as emphasised before, the boundaries between the three levels are so vague that their differentiation is questioned. Yet, irrespective of the distinct views on the number of time levels in the narrative of *Quartier perdu*, all of them generate the same degree of interest. Thus, the equality of the time levels, all of them appearing central to the narrative, corroborates Kawakami's theory on the lack of temporal hierarchy in Modiano's oeuvre. In *Quartier perdu* these two different levels command the same degree of narrative attention; action, narrative development and the distribution of information occur on both of them to an equal degree, hence, they disperse the focal point and homogenize them.

The above examination of temporal un-hierarchical structure in Modiano's novel closely mirrors the study of the rhizome structure of the labyrinth. Similarly to the rhizome construction, time in *Quartier perdu* constitutes a proliferating network of levels and positions, none of them being central and peripheral, yet each of them enjoying equal status and attracting separate attention. Furthermore, the lack of visible dominance of any time level strengthened by the novelist's shift of perspective challenges the leading role of the narrator (and the author), highlighting instead the active, deep involvement of the reader.

The absence of a dominant time level indubitably leads to the readers' confusion in reconstructing the story chronologically, as well as their disorientation as to the level they ought to bring into focus. Having said that, it is the narrator's regular time shifts, often within the same time levels, that make the readers genuinely perplexed. The next two scenes from the narrator's past in which Ambrose Guise (as Jean Dekker) is studying Ghita's address and then is waiting for her are the illustrations of this process; in the first one, he uses the past (*passé composé*): "j'ai consulté le papier"/"I looked

at the paper" (Modiano 1984: 171; translation mine) whilst in the second one, he employs the present (*présent*): "j'attends en bordure du trottoir"/"I'm waiting on the sidewalk" (Modiano 1984: 172; translation mine). Another exemplification is the sequence of several scenes from Guise's youth, the first one, where the main character is on the train, with Carmen's luggage, waiting for the departure, and the subsequent one, in which the train moves, making him think about Carmen and ponder on a new turn in his life. Firstly, the narrator uses the past tense (*passé composé*): "le train est resté une dizaine de minutes"/"the train stayed about ten minutes"; then, he shifts into the present tense: "...le train s'ébranle doucement"/"the train starts moving gently"; and afterwards, he returns to the past tenses (*passé composé*): "je n'ai pas beaucoup dormi"/"I slept a little", (*passé composé* and *imparfait*): "j'ai pensé que ma vie allait prendre un cours nouveau"/"I thought my life was going to turn over a new leaf" (Modiano 1984: 100-101; translation mine).

As seen above, in this novel, Modiano uses predominantly past tenses. However, the status of the present tense deserves examination. Its use has several effects. Firstly, it contributes to heightening dramatic tension, which is relevant, provided that it is the depiction of a vital moment. This is a highly conventional technique in fiction, and one which springs from considerations belonging to the order of *récit*. In this sense Modiano does not experiment with the presentation of time but adheres to the convention of traditional fiction. As visible in the second scene of the first sequence of citations, the narrator's use of the present tense reflects the moment of his waiting for Ghita, and his expectations connected with this meeting. In the subsequent quotation, the protagonist employs the present tense when describing the beginning of his train journey which becomes a turning point in his life. By depicting these two past events, among others, in the present tense, the narrator apparently suspends them, thus mounting dramatic tension. More importantly, the suspension of these events, being crucial to the main character, entails the dramatization of his geographical relationship. As previously pointed out, in his entire narrative, Guise presents momentous events in association with the environmental setting. Consequently, his accentuation of their dramatic tension by means of the present tense is accompanied by the dramatization of his geographical link which is expressed by the adequate present tense. One of the illustrations of this process is the sequence of two scenes where Guise broods over a mysterious Farmer who turns out to be his father and then he describes his strolling along Paris

streets while recalling the disappearance of his father: “..Et je voudrais que ce Famer soit pour moi, ce soir, un peu plus que le souvenir d'un visage brouillé sur une photo. Je suis son fils, après tout’.” And I would like this Famer to be for me tonight, a little more than the memory of a face stamped on a picture. I am his son, after all” [...] “Boulevard Haussmann, avenue de Friendland, avenue Victor-Hugo. La nuit est toujours aussi chaude et Paris aussi vide. Et moi, je sais que Farmer a disparu depuis longtemps’/”The night is always so hot and Paris so empty. And I know that Framer has been missing for a long time (Modiano 1984: 124; translation mine).

Ambrose Guise's introduction of the figure of his father closely mirrors the autobiographical aspect of *Quartier perdu*, similarly to Auster's *The Invention of Solitude* and indirectly *The Book of Illusions*. Furthermore, by assuming the role of a writer, the narrator reflects the constant presence of Modiano during the act of writing, despite the author's distance towards his narrator and narratees. The French writer treats writing as the act of remembering which creates the past and configures it anew for the narrator. In keeping with this, the protagonist's description of events encompasses both remembrance and creation. His writing follows the order of *narration* where chronology, order and identity are exclusively related to the narratorial consciousness. Hence, his employment of several shifting tenses, mirroring the achronological, non-objective temporal reality. Modiano's dissolution of time relations, where past, present and future are intertwined, creates the effect of time chaos and temporal distortion.

All told, *Quartier perdu* represents the metaphysical detective novel bringing into focus, among its pivotal elements such as destabilised detective-murderer-victim identities, the detective's failed investigation turned into the quest for his roots and, finally, the story's anti-climactic ending, a circular dimension of time, its relativity and individual perception. The novel mirrors the condition of postmodern living which strikingly illustrates the “volatility”, “ephemerality”, “instantaneity”, and “disposability” (Harvey 1990: 286, 291) of postmodern time. Analogously to Auster's and Robbe-Grillet's novels mirroring temporal heterogeneity, displacement and circularity, conspicuous especially in *Les Gommés*, Modiano's work foregrounds temporal non-linearity and achronology, particularly when shown from the character's individual perspective. *Quartier perdu*, exemplifying a postmodern mystery story, emphasises the dissolution of time and space relations, where past, present and future are interwoven, contributing to Modiano's unique style.

3.4. Circular time as a reflection of the “deformed” narrative in Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *Les Gommages*

Despite men’s suffering, despite the blood and wrath, despite the dead who can never be replaced, the unjust wounds, and the wild bullets, we must utter, not words of regret, but words of hope, of the dreadful hope of men isolated with their fate.

(Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death: Essays* 1960)

Similarly to Auster’s and Modiano’s metaphysical detective novels, accentuating non-linear narratives and the achronological dimension of time, Robbe-Grillet’s book is a particular example of the metaphysical detective story, placing the emphasis on temporal circularity and a subjective experience of time. However, in contrast to the above-analysed American and French postmodernist novels, in which crime and investigation are the pretexts for the authors to explore their traumatised pasts, on the one hand, or take the form of a suicide and an existential quest for authentic experience, on the other hand, Robbe-Grillet’s novel foregrounds the motifs of crime and inquiry, yet, at the same time it emphasises their fictional character, thus challenging their traditional meaning and function. In spite of the fact that a number of Robbe-Grillet’s novels and films incorporate diverse components and images in general associated with crime fiction, it is his first published novel, *Les Gommages* (1953), that provides the fullest treatment of concrete detective-story materials. The novel represents a fine example of adapting the principles of the detective genre so as to construct the *nouveau roman* since the writer precisely follows the rule of assigning the least likely suspect the role of the criminal: the detective murders the victim. Even though classic detective fiction writers have sometimes employed this form of surprise ending, as visible in Edmund Clerihew Bentley’s *Trent’s Last Case* (1913) or Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), no true precedent exists for Robbe-Grillet’s story of a detective whose investigation opposes his endeavours, enforcing him to commit crime. As Ricardou remarks, it is a case where “l’enquête engendre le crime”/“the investigation begets the crime” (Ricardou 1973: 35; translation mine).

Analogously to the authors of *The Book of Illusions* and *Quartier perdu* who employed the detective genre constituents to undermine or subvert them, for Robbe-Grillet, this genre offers compelling and useful material to experiment, encompassing an especially well-defined set of patterns and narrative functions to transform and refute. Robbe-Grillet ascribes the leading roles to all the actors of the drama, including the reader. Paradoxically enough, in this text, the detective unintentionally performs the role of the criminal because he is unable to carry out the traditional narrative function of an exemplary detective who exposes a truth and re-establishes order. The identity crisis of the detective is part of other issues explored by the writer in his work, such as the labyrinthine setting, the network of criminals and police which magnify the problems of situating, naming and determining identities, the mixed genre (combining the detective, metaphysical or anti-detective genre, as well as mingling the detective genre and the nascent *nouveau roman*), varied points of view, and, above all, contradictory time schemes of the narrative (Tibbitts 1988: 174). All of these issues create a similar mystery as to the identity of the text for the reader who, in the course of reading the story, becomes increasingly perplexed and disorientated.

The novelist structures his text with certain forms generally linked to the detective genre, like the double and the labyrinth, here a circular one, by means of which he subverts chief functions of traditional detective literature. In particular, he transforms the two inverse, linear time schemes of the genre into a circle, thus distorting the classic detective genre temporal system based on linearity, and disrupting the chronology of the story and the telos which explains and justifies everything leading up to it. As will be evidenced in the following pages of this section, temporal circularity, next to temporal displacement and distortion, is a crucial element of Robbe-Grillet's novel, as it reverses the dynamic of the detective story, contributing to the enhancement of the crime enigma instead of resolving it, as well as illustrating the hallucinatory atmosphere of the investigative process the main character, inspector Wallas, undergoes. It is this temporal circularity that displaces the murderer and the detective, being the main narrator in the story, and his "wavering" narrative, in turn, disorientates the reader.

Temporal circularity and the spiral facet of investigation become conspicuous from the beginning of the novel which narrates the movements and actions of inspector Wallas, who arrives as an outsider in a northern European city to conduct an investigation into a crime that has not actually

occurred. The victim, Daniel Dupont, who has been shot and wounded, resolves to fake his death with the help of his doctor so as to flee from a group of terrorist assassins. Within the exact circular period of twenty-four hours, Wallas wanders through the maze-like streets and canals of the city pursuing numerous leads which prove to be insignificant and ambiguous, and the investigation turns out to be the performance of a crime in which Dupont, together with his collaborators, perpetuate the illusion that he has been killed. Wallas's experience is initiatory since this is the first investigation he conducts and therefore has to prove to his superior, a well-known detective Fabius, that he is endowed with the intellectual capacity to join the "Bureau des Enquêtes".

It is noticeable from the outset that Wallas is in a highly ambiguous situation as a detective since he is occasionally misidentified as one of two suspicious men who are likely to be involved in the crime. In fact, Wallas bears a striking physical resemblance to a certain André VS whose correspondence he intercepts and who he supposes may contain messages about assassination assignments. To take the analogy further, the police commissioner, Laurent, jestingly implies that Wallas could be indeed the criminal since he was in the right place at the right time. Additionally, Garinati, Dupont's would-be killer, is assigned with the new task of tailing Wallas. In consequence, a detective is followed by a culprit. Wallas's position as a pawn or a puppet in a larger network of plots and counterplots of which he is not notified further blurs his sense of identity, and, finally, he reverses the roles of the classic detective story by carrying out the already failed assassination of the victim. Similarly, at the novel's end we witness Dupont returning to the scene of the crime in order to collect some documents precisely twenty-four hours which followed the initial attempt on his life, and afterwards we observe Wallas shooting him, erroneously believing him to be the murderer. Accordingly, like Revel in Butor's *L'Emploi du temps*, Wallas scrutinises a labyrinth of a city, undertaking an investigation in which the identities of the detective and the criminal steadily intermingle (Tibbitts 1988: 136). Nonetheless, it is Wallas's fate that offers beforehand a literal representation of George Burton's definition of the detective as a perpetrator of a second murder: "all detective fiction is based on two murders, of which the first, committed by the murderer, is merely the occasion for the second, in which he is the victim of the pure and unpunishable murderer, the

detective" (quoted in Todorov 1977: 159). By assassinating Dupont, Wallas provides a corpse and simultaneously offers a solution to the detective story.

This duplicity of opposing identities that Wallas embodies and the double roles he is compelled to perform in the maze-like, alienating city and a circular time frame in which he is locked reflects the double narrative structure of *Les Gommés*, namely the detective story and an embedded version of the story of Oedipus incorporated in the detective narrative. Directing the critics' and readers' attention to the formal theatrical structures of the novel, Morrissette (1975: 53-54) views the story of Oedipus as retold in modern guise:

The story of Wallas in *The Erasers [Les Gommés]* is a modern version of the tragedy of Oedipus. From its epigraph taken from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex...* through its prologue, five acts, and epilogue crowded with more or less hidden references to the Greek legend, its use of authorial "choruses", to the foredoomed outcome in which the man who has sworn to uncover a murderer finds that he himself is the criminal, *The Erasers* owes its form and content in large measure to this powerful ancient story.

The story of Oedipus is an integral narrative of Robbe-Grillet's novel, constituting the mythical counterpart to a detective who solves enigmas ("The name of Oedipus... designate[s] those who can solve enigmas and obscure questions") (Rey-Debove, Rey 2006: 1769) and who comes to identify himself as a criminal. More importantly, the insertion of the Oedipus story in *Les Gommés* mirrors the problem of deciphering the meanings and chronology in Robbe-Grillet's narrative. Amid a number of allusions and parallels between the French novel and the Greek text, Morrissette draws attention to Wallas's overall situation and his almost frantic quest for a particular eraser. As the story unfolds, we read that Wallas vaguely recollects visiting the city as a child, seeking a relative who proved to be his father. Walking through the city in search for a criminal, the protagonist eventually realises he commits the very crime he is investigating. In the study of eponymous erasers, Morrissette (1975: 63) brings into focus the letters "di", imprinted in a worn eraser that Wallas desires to substitute, completing the word to read "Oe-di-pe". Moreover, the critic observes that the main character is sexually attracted to the female shopkeeper displaying her stocks of erasers to him; this is evidenced in two visits to the stationery store run by the former Mrs. Dupont, Evelyn. Despite Morrissette's avoiding to describe the erasers as a symbol for an Oedipal quest, he claims that Robbe-Grillet uses such

objects as “the supports of his [Wallas’s] passions and thoughts;” hence, the titular erasers function as “an objective correlative for the important incest motif” (Morrissette 1975: 64).

Apart from the novel’s title’s connection with the myth of Oedipus, Morrissette identifies a number of inner representations which link *Les Gattes* to the ancient text. One of them is the scene in which Wallas perceives on some curtains an embroidered picture presenting an infant boy nourished by animals, another is the moment when the protagonist passes a statue in the Place de la Préfecture which may be said to present Laius. The novel’s subsequent reference to the ancient myth is the displaying in one of the windows of Mrs. Dupont’s shop a mannequin-painter completing a view of Thebes on his easel even though he apparently studies a large photo of the Dupont residence, linking the scene of the crime to Oedipus’ setting. Interestingly enough, the failed assassin, Garinati, emerges in a scene where he rearranges numerous objects on his mantelpiece, such as a statue of an old man led by a child. On top of that, *Les Gattes* alludes to the riddle of the Sphinx, by showing a drunk man whom Wallas encounters a few times, asking the protagonist to identify the animal that is parricidal in the morning, incestuous at noon, and blind in the evening. According to Morrissette (1975: 63, 64), this version of the riddle of the Sphinx in reverse order, which also appears in the text, recapitulates Wallas’s story since the main character remains blind to the truth as he commences the morning investigation, feels desire for his “stepmother” at midday during his visits to Dupont’s spouse, and kills his “father” at nightfall when he shoots Daniel Dupont. Morrissette does not routinely use the term *mise-en-abyme*, however, he regards these representations as inner reflections or doublings of the Oedipus story inserted in the detective tale of Wallas.

Similarly to Morrissette, Stoltzfus (1964: 71) notes that “the meaning of the novel hinges on an explication of the Oedipus problem and without this insight the novel has no cohesion – it lacks a center”. As “recuperative” critics, Morrissette and Stoltzfus bring into focus the exploration of the meanings and chronologies in Robbe-Grillet’s works. *Les Gattes* exemplifies a double text for these critics: the inner, embedded story of Oedipus constitutes the true story, whilst the outer detective tale functions as a camouflage for the crucial material of the myth (Tibbitts 1988: 139).

Needless to say, the double stories of *Les Gattes* have created an approach to the book which contrasts the recuperative work of critics like

Morrisette, concentrating instead on the reflexive, linguistic and nonmimetic facets of the text. Ricardou, advocating a reflexive reading of *nouveau romans*, quotes these works as instances of “auto-représentation” and “anti-représentation” (Ricardou 1971: 13). In the opinion of the critic, the three oracles of Oedipus myth represent vivid illustrations of the acting of all *mise-en-abyme* stories, which is to call into question the frame story which comprises them (Ricardou 1967: 176-179). In fact, Laius and his son strive to overthrow the outcome of their stories by satisfying the oracle three times: firstly, when Laius is informed that he will be murdered by his son, therefore he sends him to die, however, his son survives; secondly, when Oedipus is told that he will kill his father and marry his mother, thus he escapes his adoptive parents; and thirdly, when Oedipus manages to solve the riddle of the Sphinx but he fails to recognise in it a depiction of his own life. As Ricardou asserts, the myth conveys a central premise of literature because it exemplifies “la vengeance du récit primordial... contre les perturbations structurelles que lui ont apportées les mises en abyme,”/“the vengeance of the primordial story... against the structural disturbances that made them mises en abyme” (translation mine) and its final lesson could be concluded in this theorem: “Les grands récits se reconnaissent à ce signe que la fiction qu’ils proposent n’est rien d’autre que la dramatisation de leur propre fonctionnement”./ “The great stories being recognized by this sign of the fiction they propose are nothing but the dramatization of their own functioning” (Ricardou 1967: 178; translation mine).

Although the above critic does not refer to *Les Gommés* in his study, one can clearly see a distinction between Ricardou’s and Morrisette’s approaches: the former examines the textual function of the myth in lieu of its contents. Accordingly, Robbe-Grillet’s novel would represent a story which questions itself and enhances this questioning because its own *mise-en-abyme* story of Oedipus comprises an inner series of *mise en abyme* in the oracles, which indubitably indicates that *Les Gommés* represents one of “les grands récits” for Ricardou (Tibbitts 1988: 140). Furthermore, the critic interprets the title as a token of the way the text as a whole functions: “Ainsi *les Gommés* signalent... le fonctionnement général du livre qui conduit, notamment par la répétition partiellement textuelle du prologue dans l’épilogue, vingt quatre heures à s’effacer”/“Thus *the Erasers* signal... the general functioning of the book which performs it, particularly by the

partially textual repetition of the prologue in the epilogue, twenty four hours to be erased" (Ricardou 1975: 202; translation mine).

The meaning and significance of the eponymous Erasers, especially in the context of the twenty four hours to be "erased", lead us to the exploration and analysis of time, specifically, temporal labyrinth, one of the central elements of *Les Gommés*. In an enigmatic cover of the book we read that the novel retells the death of a man, "un événement à caractère policier – c'est-à-dire qu'il y a un assassin, un détective, une victime" (Robbe-Grillet 1953). Nonetheless, the writer forewarns the readers that the relations among the role-players are fairly ambivalent, explaining puzzlingly that: "Car le livre est justement le récit des vingt-quatre heures qui s'écoulent entre ce coup de pistolet et cette mort, le temps que la balle a mis pour parcourir trois ou quatre mètres – vingt-quatre heures 'en trop'." Because the book is precisely the story of the twenty-four hours that elapse between this pistol's shot and this death, the time the ball has taken to cover three or four meters – twenty-four hours 'in excess' (Robbe-Grillet 1953; translation mine). Robbe-Grillet states that in his "detective" story, next to the alteration of the roles of the detective and the criminal being fused in the committing of the crime by the detective, the essential, missing period of time which ought to be considered in the detective tradition becomes time which is actually superfluous, time "to be killed" or erased so as to produce a murderer (Tibbitts 1988: 143).

The enigmatic function of time is indicated in the epigraph, a paraphrase of Sophocles which reads: "Le temps, qui vieille à tout, a donné la solution malgré toi'." The time, which is older than anything else, produced the solution despite you" (Robbe-Grillet 1953; translation mine). This statement seemingly stands in contrast to the following sentence on the first page of the prologue: "Soon unfortunately time will no longer be the master" (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 1; trans. Howard 1964). To make the descriptions of time more mystifying, in the subsequent part of the passage the writer says that some very minimal events will "in a few seconds begin their task, gradually encroaching upon the ideal order, cunningly introducing an occasional inversion, a discrepancy, a confusion, a warp, in order to accomplish their work: a day in early winter without plan, without direction, incomprehensible and monstrous" (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 1; trans. Howard 1964). These opposing pronouncements about time, resulting in that this "fourth dimension of space" (Bakhtin 1981: 85) can provide a solution, on the one hand, and fail to rule as a master, on the other hand, depict the

paradoxical detective intrigue in *Les Gommès*. In fact, it is only at the moment the story draws to its close that we discover that Wallas indeed provides an ending (by murdering Dupont), without having ordered events and solved mysteries. Furthermore, as Tibbitts (1988: 144) astutely observes, the element of time is so fundamental to the narrative position that deformations of time can be proportionate to those of the storyline. As a reflection of Wallas's day, the narrative and its detective-fiction constituents, as the author indicates, are subject to shrewd inversions, displacements, anarchy and curving. In the course of reading the novel, we can notice how Robbe-Grillet dexterously subverts the conventions of the classic detective story by reversing, displacing, altering, or even distorting the roles of the central actors of the drama, including the reader, next to the dynamics of the intrigue, and the function of the setting, both place, and, above all, time. The author multiplies, at times bewilderingly, circular labyrinth figures and doubles them in order to ultimately force the reader, as well as the main character, to conduct an investigation.

As for Wallas, he undertakes a backwards investigation over the course of five chapters, mirroring five acts of the ancient drama, in which he faces circular mazes, double identities, and evidence abundant with gaps and coincidences. In pursuit of the protagonist's venture, the reader encounters a number of the same patterns in the narrative, mirroring Wallas and simultaneously studying an enigmatic text which communicates crucial messages about itself (Tibbitts 1988: 149).

Analogously to the narrators of *The New York Trilogy*, *Rue des boutiques obscures* or *Quartier perdu*, undergoing an unsettling experience while conducting an investigation in an alienating, maze-like urban setting, Wallas, affected by an unnamed city's estranged setting where he ought to carry out his investigation, experiences his search in a concrete and very physical way. Unintentionally involved in a circular intrigue as a result of which he proves to be a murderer, Wallas also finds himself within a labyrinthine city which forces him to spend most of the day moving in circles. An exemplification of this process is his tracing a double circuit in the morning in quest for the Prefecture, and subsequently his circling through a maze of streets twice again between the Prefecture and the Dupont pavilion, being the scene of the crime. Wallas's investigation into the identity of the culprit, and therefore his search for himself, slows and transforms into one of the purest forms of identity quests, to situate oneself geographically in relation with buildings

and streets. Following a trail, the main activity for every detective, turns out to be a challenge for Wallas when he navigates through the city.

Next to its circles, the city has perplexing duplicates which further disorientate the protagonist's detective mission of identifying the culprit and situating himself geographically in relation to buildings and streets. While walking through the streets, Wallas meets "[The] same austerity, the same arrangement of windows, the same black glass plates carved with the same inscriptions" (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 42; trans. Howard 1964). Moreover, the signs apparently mirror each other via the terms they use, losing their ability to identify: "wood export, resinous wood, industrial woods, wood for export, export of resinous wood" (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 44; trans. Howard 1964). At this moment, Wallas wonders if the sleepy workers successfully differentiate the doors to their respective businesses, or if they enter anywhere and start working, interchangeably duplicating each other's duties. In fact, the lack of distinction engenders perceptual identity problems since, without any solid anchoring point, one is certainly lost and inclined to optical illusions.

In *Les Gommès*, a labyrinth which assumes the shape of a circle and reproduces its doubles constitutes a unique set of challenges and riddles for the searcher, both the main character and the reader. In the context of the detective story, moving in circles leads to no genuine change in position, thus such motion vividly contrasts with the idea of progression, a crucial component of the investigation process, resembling instead quiescence and inactivity. More importantly, circles are archetypically linked to times and timelessness. According to Cooper (1978: 18), they represent such notions as "time enclosing space, but also timelessness and having no beginning or end, and spacelessness as having no above or below". Hence, the circles and doubles which Wallas confronts in the setting of his search help recognise the fact that the time and space of the story are not the concepts defining habitual experience. Albeit corresponding in its setting to that of a distinctive detective-fiction environment as an English manor, yet by far more extreme, *Les Gommès* creates an artificial, self-contained narrative world, detached from reality.

Interestingly enough, Wallas's watch, which stops at 7.30 p.m. the evening he arrives, marks the literal disruption of the flow of time that becomes restored at the moment he kills Dupont twenty-four hours later. In addition, the protagonist's early morning stroll leaves him with the

impression that time can flow in a reversed, anti-chronological order, and vary its course. This is illustrated in the scene where a crowd of cycling workers vanish, leaving the street once again deserted, which appears that “the day which they [cyclists] had inaugurated has retreated behind a few gestures”, and that no sooner does the rest of the city awaken than it will “again be the same time for everyone” (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 46; trans. Howard 1964). We further read that the investigator crosses the city during “this fragile interval”, behaving like a person who delays sleep for so long that he “no longer knows to which date to ascribe this dubious time” and discovers that “between yesterday and tomorrow there is no place left for the present” (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 46-47; trans. Howard 1964). As announced in the prologue, Wallas’s experience and perception of time is subject to shift, inversions and distortions, and, evidently, is not governed by the ordering frameworks of chronology and causality. Additionally, the image of the drawbridge the protagonist crosses at various times mirrors his situation in time because one side takes longer to return to position than the other, producing “a tiny gap in the continuity of the roadway”, which continues to oscillate indiscernibly in a state of “a quite illusory fixity” (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 150; trans. Howard 1964).

The “illusory fixity” of time the main character experiences and its evident contrast with the story’s “real” timeline bring us back to Genette’s classification of narrative orders as well as to Durozoi’s (1973) examination of temporal types in *Les Gommès*. Firstly, Durozoi (1973: 43) distinguishes two kinds of present tenses dominating in the novel: the present time of our reality (“notre réalité”) (time of *histoire*, according to Genette) and that of the fictional world (time of *récit*). As the critic argues, *Les Gommès* shows the lack of coincidence between these two present times and denounces the illusory character of the second one. This heterogeneity can also be read in all the scenes built in a circle which end at the point in which they commenced (prologue, page 3, chapter 1, page 4, chapter 2, page 1, the entire chapter 4; and, obviously, the novel as a whole): the repetition of the elements functions as the cancellation of the sequence. Since the novel itself is captured in such an echo, Durozoi adds, one can already state that it appears in its entirety as a pseudo-reality but at the same time denounces itself as a lie.

Considering the third kind of present time, reflecting the time of *narration* (in Genette’s scheme), Durozoi (1973: 43) claims that this present time does not coincide with the chronology of the story but instead makes room for the

reader's timetable during which he/she departs from his/her daily practice. Having established the chronology of *Les Gommès*, beginning from Monday evening and closing on Wednesday morning (even if one does not take into account the elusive character of the Tuesday survived by Wallas), Robbe-Grillet's narrative technique, which distorts this chronology, transposes all the consequences to the present, by describing them in the way they are imagined by the protagonists. In this regard, one may draw the analogy between Robbe-Grillet and Auster, and especially Modiano, whose narrators conspicuously depict their internal, frequently achronological, temporal order and their individual perception of events. Likewise, Durozoi (1973: 43-44) remarks that reading different versions of Dupont's death, one adopts the protagonists' perspectives, particularly Wallas's, at the moment when their imagination works, and by no means at the time of the crime. Regardless of the distance between the time the murder was committed and the current time of the narration, it is always in the present of a current thought that the story is offered to the reader ("c'est toujours dans le présent d'une pensée actuelle que le récit m'en est offert") (Durozoi 1973: 44; translation mine).

Analogously, the events of the story, including Wallas's movements, actions and thought processes, are described in the present tense. Nevertheless, as indicated in the prologue ("soon the time will no longer be the master") (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 11; trans. Howard 1964), and evidenced in Genette's and Durozoi's above study, in *Les Gommès*, time is not a homogeneous category but subject to shifts, displacements and reversals. Above all, as in the majority of postmodernist works, in Robbe-Grillet's novel time takes the form of spiral or cyclical movements which is confusing for the main character who, embodying a traditional sleuth, is accustomed to linear progression. Like an exemplary detective, Wallas objects to circles in which there is no progress, and refers to them as to the "circles of doubt and impotence" which have troubled him in the past (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 48; trans. Howard 1964). Contrastingly, he prefers walking in straight lines because "this perpetually renewed contact affords him a subtle impression of continuity" (47), and because linear movement offers a walker a broader visual perspective. While walking in such a manner, he has the impression of moving "toward an inevitable and perfect future" (48). Hence, straight lines to which he assigns continuity, rationality and temporal order, bring him a sense of safety and poise. As a matter of fact straight lines are inextricably connected with Wallas's paragon of linear progression which, as in traditional

detection, contains precise goals and clear objectives and which undeniably provides a model for the way he intends to investigate as well as walk (Tibbitts 1988: 153). When set beside investigative methods of inspector Fabius who is prone to “hesitate about accepting even the most established facts” (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 56; trans. Howard 1964) and who, it is speculated, “ceased to believe in the existence of any solution whatever” (56), Wallas unyieldingly believes in answers, solutions, and closure to investigation. Even when he is compelled to detour in the course of his investigative work, the protagonist retains confidence in order and common sense: “Wallas remains the attentive witness of a spectacle which has lost none of its qualities of order or permanence; perhaps, on the contrary, the course is growing stricter, gradually abandoning its ornaments and its slackness” (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 52; trans. Howard 1964). From this citation it transpires that Wallas's reasoning makes him apparently an ideal Golden Age-type detective, yet it places him in opposition to the circular world where he conducts his investigation.

While endeavouring to gather and process evidence and information relating to the crime, the main character faces some of the same maze-like patterns of the setting which include the proliferation of the doubles, and a constant increase of identity riddles, leading to the situation in which the linear reasoning Wallas highly values cannot provide solutions. Indeed, the protagonist is confronted by a number of doubles symbolising reverse images of each other. Analogously to the circles he traces, these paired opposites consequently invalidate the idea of progressive, forward movement and convey the impression that the main character's investigation erases itself as it proceeds (Tibbitts 1988: 154). Suitable for its time frame of a day in excess, the protagonist's detective work does not advance or fill in the time with any substance or subject matter.

Noticeably, Wallas fails in struggling to order his investigation in a concatenation of causes and effects, to make the logical links among similar elements, to fill the lacunae, answer the questions and clarify meanings. In fact, in his reasoning and sense-making operations, his work corresponds to the work of the reader deciphering the text. However, the inspector exemplifies a negative interpretative model as his approaches to the construal and clarification of meaning prove unsuccessful. Readers searching for coherence and logical interpretation the main character does in their reading of Robbe-Grillet's novel may comparably be destined to struggle with

comprehending the text. Needless to say, as has been pointed out, the prologue alters the position of the readers, compelling them to assimilate a double set of information about Wallas's case, and, above all, about the narration of his case. As opposed to the detective's conducting his investigation at random, failing to acknowledge his origins, the reader is supposed to read with an awareness of the text, recognising its sources and constituents.

The reader's role is to actively participate in the construction of the story by suturing the intrigue and simultaneously reflecting on the means of storytelling. The labyrinthine patterns shaping Wallas's investigation, such as circles, doubles, reversals and displacements, are in tune with those which concretely structure the narrative experience for the reader (Tibbitts 1988: 165). These patterns provide genuine content material for the story as well as a means of telling it on the level of the language and construction of the book. The novelist employs these forms in an attempt to undermine Wallas's investigation and to challenge traditional functions and fixed definitions of crucial aspects of literature, like point of view, temporal schemes, plot and genre. Hence, in the course of reading, we double the detective in certain experiences and alternately double the author who manifests some of his concerns.

The illustration of the process of following, or repeating the pattern of Wallas's movement is the situation in which the reader moves through some structural and linguistic circles which are inserted in the text, and these circles address relevant questions about literature. As was previously indicated, the novel's each chapter is composed of a chain of numbered sections analogous to the scenes of a play. Accordingly, one reads through six or seven consecutively numbered sections for a chapter and subsequently commences the identical process again in the following chapter, creating in some way a cyclical movement. An exemplification of this procedure is a passage in the prologue depicting the crime as a performance which can be cyclically repeated or suspended in mid-scene. In the excerpt below, a singular tableau portrays Garinati at the scene of the crime:

In this setting determined by law, without an inch of land to the right or left, without a second's hesitation, without resting, without looking back, the actor suddenly stops, in the middle of a phrase... He knows it by heart, this role he plays every evening; but today he refuses to go any further. Around him the

other characters freeze, arm raised or leg half bent. The measure begun by the musicians goes on and on... He would have to do something now, speak any words at all, words that would not belong to the libretto... But, as every evening, the phrase begun concludes its stride. In the pit, the orchestra is still playing with the same vigor. (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 19; trans. Howard 1964)

As seen in the above fragment, the plot is momentarily suspended, making the reader be cognizant of the text's fictionality, of its artificial performance which can be paused and started up again or repeated cyclically. Such temporal distortion and simultaneously interruption of the flow of the story additionally erase the distinctions between beginnings and endings in the text and enhance the notion of readers as spectators, observers and participants. Moreover, the suspension of the plot which for the moment disrupts the reading process actually mirrors the distinction between the fiction and reading timelines which the novelist accentuates when maintaining the distance between the text and the reader.

Temporal circularity, being a pivotal component of both the main character's and the reader's investigation, carries significant implications for the complicated processes of reading and writing. There is no escaping the fact that classic detective fiction exemplifies a particularly strong teleological orientation because these works are constructed to delay and then suddenly uncover a truth at the ending. This truth then permits the reader to piece together all the enigmatic incidents which preceded it. In this respect, detective stories are quintessentially non-circular texts since they have a powerful linear force, speeding towards the ultimate "explosion" of truth which restores order in a world ruled by causes and effects (Tibbitts 1988: 168). Mirroring linear progression, traditional detective fiction, in contrast to *Les Gommages*, meets the expectations of the readers as it confirms the existence of a rational universe, and its delayed truth establishes texts which reflect Wallas's ideal of "a smooth band where each element immediately takes its place in the web", and in which "the ribbon extends without flaw or excess, in time with the regular speed of his footsteps" (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 48; trans. Howard 1964). As opposed to a series of irrational, unrelated images, fortuitous events leading to the anti-climactic closure in Robbe-Grillet's novel, in the classic detective fiction all the gaps are filled in, all the enigmas are resolved and the order is reestablished.

By and large, *Les Gommès* exemplifies Robbe-Grillet's transitional novel oscillating between the detective genre and the *nouveau roman* which accentuates temporal circularity, identity crisis, labyrinthine setting and anti-climactic closure. Amid all the novel's elements reflecting crucial constituents of the metaphysical detective story, or the anti-detective story, a presentation of time, specifically, temporal circularity and displacement, has attracted the attention of a number of critics and scholars, thus in this section, the emphasis was placed on the scrutiny and exploration of the notion of time. As evidenced in the two previous parts of this chapter, temporal distortion, achronology and non-linearity have been integral components of Auster's and Modiano's postmodernist novels. Likewise, in Robbe-Grillet's work, time is subject to inversions, twists and displacements. Such a depiction of time in the (quasi)-detective novel, apparently emphasising linear progression and teleological orientation, unavoidably disorients the reader who is compelled to actively participate in the process of reading during which he/she selects, alters and "erases" some narrative material.

3.5. Conclusion

The analysis of the above Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's novels shows the writers' diverse treatment of the temporal labyrinth with respect to the narrative space and the characters as well as in connection to the relationship between the author, the narrators, the characters and the reader. Regardless of their distinctive presentation of temporal distortion, the three novelists accentuate the concept of time and time shift as an individual category which can be perceived, expressed and represented subjectively by the author, the protagonists and the reader. It is the fragmentary discourse, composition randomness, temporal contingency and the overlapping of various temporal planes that lie at the heart of the American and French novels.

Considering the traditional detective fiction rules which the three writers overtly challenge, *The Book of Illusions*, *Quartier perdu* and *Les Gommès* exemplify circular narratives reflecting the replacement of linear progression and teleological orientation, structured to delay and ultimately discover the truth about the mystery, in favour of a sceptical post-historical present. The three novels' spiral narrative structures reflect their characters' unsuccessful

investigative search which leads to anti-climactic closure and thus disorientates the readers, failing to reach their expectations. By challenging a traditional experience of temporal continuity, these three metaphysical detective texts, particularly Robbe-Grillet's work, reflect fragmented, "schizophrenic" temporality which, in view of Jameson, represents the historical obsolescence of time itself³¹. Having said, the three novels expose, in fact, an ongoing struggle between temporal continuity and chronology the narrative subjects and most readers identify with and the volatility, ephemerality and instantaneity characterising postmodern time.

³¹ Jameson, Fredrick (1998) "Postmodernism and Consumer Society", in Foster, Hal. (ed.). *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. New York: New Press, 137.

Chapter Four

Narrative and narrated confinement: labyrinths of identity in Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's texts

We are what we have been told about ourselves. We are the sum of the messages we have received. The true messages. The false messages.

(Donald Barthelme, *Snow White* 1967)

4.1. Introduction

The four-part chapter comprises the scrutiny of identity labyrinths presented in the four novels: Paul Auster's *Travels in the Scriptorium*, Patrick Modiano's *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, next to Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages* and *La Reprise*. When set beside the previous two chapters which analysed the labyrinthine dimension of urban and textual maze, next to temporal circularity and distortion, this part focuses on the exploration of identity quest, with special emphasis being placed on its duality and ambivalence. The four works to be examined closely reflect the process of the duplicity or exchange of identities, being a crucial component of the metaphysical detective story, as well as scrutinising the concept of power and the process of imprisonment in the narrative universe.

Apart from *Les Gommages*, the other three books were composed in the later phases of the authors' literary career, thus reflecting profound yet not radical transformations in the authors' styles and narrative techniques. Two remarks deserve special attention here. Firstly, in *Travels in the Scriptorium*

and *La Reprise* Auster and Robbe-Grillet dramatically shift their focus from the metaphysical maze-like dimension of the investigation process mirroring an existential anguish of the protagonists in favour of metafictional playfulness and authorial sadism. This can partly explain why these authors' later works were eclipsed by their previous by far more popular novels like *The New York Trilogy* and *Les Gommages*. Secondly, in Auster's *Travels in the Scriptorium* and Modiano's *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, the accent is placed on autobiography and literary criticism which become to dominate the elements of detection and mystery on the one hand and postwar trauma and memory on the other hand. Regarding identity quest, constituting one of central aspects examined by Auster, Modiano and Robbe-Grillet, the novelists raise the absorbing questions of alienation and displacement of the subject, being either a protagonist, narrator or a reader, in the context of narrative entrapment and manipulation staged by a sadistic, capricious or unbalanced author.

Travels in the Scriptorium brings into focus the notion of the hyperreal locked room as a determinant of human experience and the investigation of self-referentiality as a reflection of the metafictional game between the author, the characters and the reader. Modiano's novel, on the other hand, raises the problem of identity quest pursued by the empty, or involuntarily amnesiac, narrator embodying an amateur detective, a professional writer and the author's alter-ego who, via his protagonist, strives to write about his past as well as by the reader endeavouring to reveal the narrator's and author's mystery. In view of this, the text serves as an illustration of the maze-like detective game between the author, the narrator and the reader. Subsequently, Robbe-Grillet foregrounds the motif of power hierarchies and the politics of watching as a mirroring of identities' incarceration in the investigative cell of postmodernism as evidenced in *Les Gommages*. The central point of the ultimate book to be scrutinised, *La Reprise*, is the exploration of double identities and the process of counterespionage in Robbe-Grillet's labyrinthine narration.

4.2. Identities trapped in a metafictional and metaphysical maze: Paul Auster's *Travels in the Scriptorium*

To write: to try meticulously to retain something, to cause something to survive; to wrest a few precise scraps from the void as it grows, to leave somewhere a furrow, a trace, a mark or a few signs.

(Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* 1974)

Travels in the Scriptorium (2007) is the work accurately depicting a labyrinthine quest for identity, alongside the acts of authorial violence, the attempts of artistic homicide and the characters' imprisonment in the narrative text. Unstable, ambiguous identities in Auster's novels have been frequently the subject of a lengthy discussion among numerous critics and scholars. Some research studies have been undertaken on the author's above-mentioned text (Stolarek 2015, Neethi, Srirupa 2014, Buday 2014, Alexander and Chatterjee 2014, Sanjoy and Neelakantan 2010, Butler and Gurr 2008). In fact, this book strongly reflects postmodernist narrative, especially with regard to the treatment of literary characters in association with the authors themselves (Buday 2014: 36-37). Provided that authors are in a god-like relation to their literary creations, one may postulate that the status of protagonists is automatically diminished. Having said that, however, Buday (2014: 37-38) notices that in *Travels in the Scriptorium* the characters continue to exist in the text and outside the text in spite of their creators' overwhelming power who endeavour to "murder" or "execute" their figures in the process of writing. Hence, one is prepared to concede that the claim that literary characters occupy the position inferior to their creators, which has been prevalent in literature until the emergence of Postmodernism, is nowadays constantly challenged. In view of that protagonists perform the roles of ethereal beings who, despite the fact that they are unable to exorcise power over authors, frequently outlive their original makers (Buday 2014: 37). Such a concept is deconstructed, yet in an ambivalent way, by Auster.

Taking into account detective fiction conventions, *Travels in the Scriptorium* indubitably defies the classic detective story canon which puts accent on hierarchic relations between the god-like status of the author and the inferior position of the characters on the one hand, and a clear-cut distinction between the detective, the murderer and the victim figures on the

other hand. Furthermore, similarly to the majority of his previous metaphysical detective novels, such as *Squeeze Play*, *In the Country of Last Things*, *The Book of Illusions*, and, most notably, *The New York Trilogy*, this work dexterously manipulates the expectations of the readers accustomed to narrative harmony, stability and predictability in the crime text which is manifested in the final solution of the crime, punishment of the culprit and restoration of the literary world's order.

Analogously to *The New York Trilogy* and partly *Squeeze Play*, *Travels in the Scriptorium* masterfully subverts the narrative conventions of classic detective stories, specifically American hard-boiled crime fiction, by emphasising the artistic dimension of the murder, as reflected in Quincey's (1827) emblematic statement: "For the final purpose of murder, considered as a fine art, is precisely the same as that of tragedy in Aristotle's account of it; viz. "to cleanse the heart by means of pity and terror"." Furthermore, Auster's text highlights the equivocal relations between the protagonist, the narrator and the author, as well as tantalising continually the readers, forcing them to actively participate in their exhausting labyrinthine game. One major thematic correlation between *Travels in the Scriptorium*, *Squeeze Play* and *The New York Trilogy*, the novels written in such different periods of Auster's literary career, is indubitably the novelist's deconstruction of American hard-boiled crime fiction. Another crucial correspondence between this novel and most of his previous crime works is the inclusion of the persona of an author which mirrors the correlation between the process of detection and the act of writing. In his 2007 novel, as well as in his previous works, Auster highlights the metafictional facet of the detective story by including its characteristics in the process of writing. This results in a continuous series of observation, note taking, tailing and inspection, all of which constituting a parody of investigation undertaken by the amnesiac narrator-detective in order to find clues and solve criminal cases, particularly the mystery concerning his own identity. Like in *The New York Trilogy*, in *Travels in the Scriptorium* ratiocination is apparently a useless weapon against the tide of incoherent and mystifying events. Consequently, the novel reads like the "disembodied text" of a detective story, in which the outer narrative components have been largely deleted (Cook 2011: 134-135). Hence, the reader's desire lies not in the crime resolution but in the discovery of the mystery itself, which becomes, however, never satisfied.

With respect to the motif of writing in Auster's fiction, critics such as Little and Cook emphasise the distinction between "the act of writing and the actions of the generic detective" (Cook 2011: 135). Even though Little carries out his examination largely with reference to *The New York Trilogy*, the critic's analysis could be even more pertinent to *Travels in the Scriptorium* in view of the fact that here Auster vividly problematizes the amnesiac narrator-detective writer's impotence when applying the certitude of the language and narrative traced in detective fiction to the wider world. The endeavour to disclose a form of hermeneutics from the detective story's pure narrative, where advancement in a preordained solution is ensured, fails owing to the fact that the contingencies of existence do not constitute part and parcel of the genre's general schema. Effectively, the American novelist manages to relieve the artifices of such a narrative by revealing it to the vagaries of the world. The result is to transform the narrative into an unending series of inquiries in which questions and mysteries are raised but answers are never provided (Cook 2001: 135). Thus, Auster's aims are the structural components, not their final product; as McCaffery and Gregory put it, "a form of storytelling that emphasizes the formal peculiarities of the genre and foregrounds epistemological quandaries at the same time" (McCaffery and Gregory 1992: 2).

The theme of writing, particularly the relation between the act of writing and the process of detection, as well as the inclusion of the persona of the author, dominates *Travels in the Scriptorium*, like his preceding works, most notably *The New York Trilogy* and *In the Country of Last Things*. Having said that, this novel, being a combination and reworking of the writer's all major former texts, differs from his preceding books in the manner and extent to which the author reverses the status of literary characters in relation to their creators. Moreover, this work is apparently Auster's most mature novel with respect to the author's use of diverse metafictional elements and strategies, such as a proliferation of different characters' small narratives, constant references to the self-reflexive aspect of the novel, or a continuous maze-like game between the author, the narrator, the protagonists and the reader. What undoubtedly links, however, *Travels in the Scriptorium* to Auster's all preceding postmodern works is the metaphysical dimension of crime committed by the main figures of the drama who perform simultaneously the roles of the murderer, the victim and the detective. Furthermore, similarly to Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages*, *La Reprise*, Modiano's *Quartier perdu* and *Pour*

que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier, *Travels in the Scriptorium* accentuates above all an existential search for identity and the characters' ongoing titanic struggle with their sadistic, omnipotent creators. Although most of them fail in their final labyrinthine battle, falling prey to their author's adroit manipulation which belittles and alienates them, their very quest turns out to be paramount. It is the narrative and narrated imprisonment, the protagonists' determined attempts at releasing themselves from it and their constant existence regardless of the author's power, that constitutes the essence of *Travels in the Scriptorium*, alongside Auster's other works and the novels of the French writers. Needless to say, such a viewpoint, advocated by critics like Buday (2014), is challenged by Alexander and Chatterjee (2014) who attribute this disorientating locked-room experience, resulting in the futile search for meaning, to the absurdities featuring postmodern human existence which is shaped by the hyperreal. Both standpoints of the two critics are not entirely exclusive, however, and their thorough examination of Auster's text has indubitably enriched the studies on the character of the metafictional maze and the nature of postmodern human condition depicted in the novel.

Challenging the classic and modernist detective story models, *Travels in the Scriptorium* vividly illustrates absurdities typifying postmodern human existence. Analogously to Modiano's protagonists and simultaneously narrators playing the roles of either "professional" yet displaced detectives (*Rue des boutiques obscures*) or amateur detectives-writers (*Quartier perdu, Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*), alongside Robbe-Grillet's alienated private eyes, Auster's character is a bewildered amnesiac, appropriately named Mr. Blank, who remains confined in a mysterious cell while his faulty memory and failing actions are monitored by external invisible agents. The protagonist's and simultaneously the narrator's life is reduced to taking food, liquids and pills, as well as writing a diary. Except the last-mentioned activity which gives Mr. Blank the illusion of liberty, the rest denotes his subjection to some abstruse medical and scientific experiments. As a character, the man is the prisoner of some mysterious guests and remains obedient to the orders issued by people who pay him regular visits: a nurse, an ex-policeman and a doctor. All of them unyieldingly interrupt the protagonist in perusing the diary of the previous detainee by querying him about his "operatives". Later in the novel both the visitors and operatives are revealed as all the characters populating Auster's preceding books.

Travels in the Scriptorium is this novel by Auster which most accurately illustrates the atmosphere of mental and physical imprisonment. At the same time it displays the link between the inner and outer – more specifically, between the self and the physical environment, the psyche and the text (Cook 2001: 150). The labyrinthine ambience of confinement and the darkness of the main character's own particular locked room are appropriately reflected by Mr. Blank's surroundings which encompass arbitrarily tagged objects and, even more strongly, by the fact that the man derives awareness of his situation and the vicissitudes of his life from random meetings with visitors and by studying manuscripts and photographs from his past. Being deprived of any agency to assert his identity, Mr. Blank becomes precisely controlled and perplexed by inscrutable words and images conveyed in a number of documents and simultaneously by the information provided by unknown callers. The protagonist's state mirrors the estrangement of an individual in an increasingly dismal and maze-like landscape. Moreover, on the example of the figure of Mr. Blank, Auster conveys the idea of the mind as a locked room being both a physical and metaphysical space in which all the secrets of the self are enacted. It is this concept that contributes to the novelist's investigation into the nature of the detective genre.

The notion of the mind as a locked room, next to the ideas of mental and physical confinement and the character's identity crisis, direct the attention of various scholars to Alexander and Chatterjee's (2014) claim that *Travels in the Scriptorium* is a critique of the hyperreal. Interpreting Auster's book as a critique of the postmodern condition that erases the distinction between reality and representation, the critics argue that the play of signs, images and words manipulating and controlling Mr. Blank's life is evocative of Baudrillard's thesis on hyperreality. Accordingly, it postulates that Auster's work problematizes the entrapments of the present-day world where human experiences are formed and determined by the hyperreal and therefore the quest for meaning is futile (Alexander and Chatterjee 2014: 53).

Following Alexander and Chatterjee's (2014: 53-54) argumentation, it could be noticed that the hyperreal, exemplifying the postmodern condition, overwhelmingly dominates Mr. Blank. Significantly, the novel shows that the disintegration of his sense of self commences with language – firstly, the man is unable to ascertain the vacuous identity his name confers upon him, and secondly, he is being continuously deceived by inadequately labelled objects. This correspondence between the man's condition and his

experience with language, more specifically, between the protagonist's distorted sense of self and the arbitrariness of language, is a recurrent motif in the majority of Auster's oeuvre. Apart from *The New York Trilogy*, this theme is extensively explored in *Travels in the Scriptorium*.

Critics like Brown (2007: 7-8) emphasise the fact that the relationship the characters such as Mr. Blank, Quinn, Peter Stillman Jr, Blue or the narrator of "The Locked Room" form with language is determined by the conditions under which they experience it. Under some dire circumstances, which is the case of Mr. Blank's entrapment in an unknown locked room, Stillman Jr.'s domestic confinement, or Quinn's alienating labyrinthine urban experience, the individual begins to perceive language as a vast, complex and distant system which steers them, and to which they are unable to truly relate. Consequently, the individual suffers a breakdown of his language function, experiencing, at its most critical phase, the condition called "aphasia" (Freud 1953: 2-3). Aphasia, which causes a disjunction of the mind of the sufferer between their experience of the world and their capacity to position language to describe it, results in the lack of correspondence between words and things. As evidenced in *Travels in the Scriptorium* and *The New York Trilogy*, characters experience "aphasic" episodes under conditions of total seclusion and solitude, which leads to the disconnection from their physical and social worlds.

Although the concept of aphasia is scrutinised by Brown mostly in relation to Auster's characters' metropolitan experiences, neatly presented in *The Invention of Solitude*, *The New York Trilogy*, *The Book of Illusions* or *Brooklyn Follies* (2005), it is pertinent to mention it while examining the notion of the hyperreal in *Travels in the Scriptorium*. As previously pointed out, Auster's protagonists suffer from aphasia while experiencing loneliness and alienation which result in their disconnection from the outside world. Such is the case of the amnesiac Mr. Blank who, being confined in an unknown cell, constantly controlled and monitored by secret agents and some mysterious signs, is unable to find the connection between words and objects which would enable him to affirm his true identity and determine the relations with people visiting his room.

From the beginning of the novel, the protagonist is not able to establish his own identity. While being addressed as "Mr. Blank", he responds: "If you say so... I'm not sure of anything. If you want to call me Mr. Blank, I'm happy to answer to that name" (Auster 2007: 6). The character's disorientation

mirrors the arbitrariness of language which continues as the man realises in the middle of the narrative that he is being misled by improperly labelled objects. The protagonist notices that: “The wall now reads CHAIR. The lamp now reads BATHROOM” (115), after which he states: “To indulge in such infantile whimsy is to throw the world into chaos, to make life intolerable for all but the mad” (116). Nonetheless, later Mr. Blank concedes that he finds it impossible to question the misrepresentation of his milieu and the narrative unfolds to inform that: “Mr. Blank... is in decline... [and] a day might come... when his brain will erode still further and it will become necessary for him to have the name of the thing on the thing in order for him to recognize it” (117).

As seen from the above, the narrative accentuates the character’s angst toward the arbitrariness of linguistic signs and in this way establishes how words not only fail to express reality but also mislead subjects whose meanings they control (Alexander and Chatterjee 2014: 54). At this point, the critics draw some parallel between the description of language as a system of misrepresentation in Auster’s book and Baudrillard’s idea of simulation, which is illustrated in the following statements:

In the realm of the hyperreal, the distinction between simulation and the ‘real’ implodes; the ‘real’ and the imaginary continually collapse into each other. The result is that reality and simulation are experienced as without difference... Simulations can often be experienced as more real than the real itself – ‘even better than the real thing.’ (Baudrillard 1994: 2)

Hyperrealism, as the author claims, is the distinctive mode of postmodernity. From the above fragment it transpires that the difference between “simulation” and the “real” collapses; the “real” and the imaginary constantly merge. Consequently, reality and simulation are experienced as without difference. More importantly, simulations are frequently experienced as more real than the real itself, as Baudrillard underlines. The French critic’s defining the hyperreal and simulation reflects a haphazard meaning of signification in postmodern culture, as reflected in the following excerpt: “[E]very time there is signification, there is lying, for the reason that what is real is an effect of the sign... signification simulates reference to a real state because no real state corresponds to the sign” (Genosco 1994: 40). This passage defining Baudrillard’s simulation exemplifies the entropy and

randomness of the system of signification in the postmodern world and therefore closely reflects the arbitrariness of linguistic signs surrounding Mr. Blank. Accordingly, the protagonist's confusion about encountering language games and a misconstrued reality is a manifestation of the paranoia that marks the Baudrillardian hyperreal.

Prior to Alexander and Chatterjee's analysis of manuscripts and various mystifying documents as well as visual representations purportedly of people from bygone years Mr. Blank is instructed to inspect, it is worth additionally referring to the aforementioned arbitrary system of signification in the discussion of Auster's work as a postmodern metaphysical detective text. As we read in *The New York Trilogy*: "In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so – which amounts to the same thing" (Auster 1987: 92). Analogously, according to Robbe-Grillet (1963: 22, 24; trans. Howard 1989): "any exhibit in a classic detective story, such as the evidence collected by the inspectors – an object left at the scene of the crime, an event or movement documented in a photograph, or a statement overheard by a witness – apparently requires an explanation or exists exclusively in relation to their function in a context which gains control over them". Similarly, the theories commence taking shape by attempting to create a logical and vital link between things. Thus, "it appears that everything will be resolved in a banal bundle of causes and consequences, intentions and coincidences..." (Robbe-Grillet 1963: 22; trans. Howard 1989).

The above statements closely reflect the mechanism operating in the traditional detective story: in the narrative world governed by order, logic and ratiocination, any evidence, clue and linguistic sign appearing in the text has a crucial meaning in the investigative process. Nevertheless, both Auster and Robbe-Grillet later juxtapose this classic detective story genre with its metaphysical variant. In contrast to the traditional detective story model accentuating linguistic logic and order, *Travels in the Scriptorium* highlights linguistic randomness and chaos. Auster's novel, facing linguistic arbitrariness and miscellaneous language games, precludes the main character from uncovering his true identity as well as finding the key to his "criminal" past. Being unable to control his life and the world around him by assigning it a meaning (Robbe-Grillet 1963: 23), Mr. Blank fails both as an individual and a detective.

The protagonist's alienation and mental imprisonment are reinforced by the fact that he becomes instructed to read manuscripts, supposedly for therapeutic purposes. While inspecting closely a narrative of a soldier named Graf, Mr. Blank commences formulating alternative theories on Graf's life, thereby experiencing a momentary sense of power through authorship (Alexander and Chatterjee 2014: 54). However, this sense of supremacy turns out to be instantaneous as he soon finds the second manuscript entitled "Travels in the Scriptorium by N.R. Fanshawe". Ironically, this document proves to reflect the protagonist's own experiences in his cell: "The old man sits on the edge of the narrow bed, palms spread out on his knees, head down staring at the floor..." (Auster 2007: 140). Perusing the manuscript, the man gradually realises that his life is only a piece of fiction, a simulation, controlled by external invisible forces under which he can "never die, never disappear, never be anything but the words... on this page" (Auster 2007: 118). This awareness, as Alexander and Chatterjee (2014: 54) argue, is evocative of the hyperreal and recalls Baudrillard's assertion that in a simulated universe "all the referentials intermingle their discourses in a circular, Moebian compulsion" (Baudrillard 1994: 18). Hence, *Travels in the Scriptorium* demonstrates that the only unvarying element in Mr. Blank's life is the circularity with the constant postponement of the real.

The aforementioned overarching unseen forces which, according to Alexander and Chatterjee (2014: 54), symbolise the Baudrillardian hyperreal, could be also attributed to the characters-author power relations in the narrative act. As can be observed in Auster's novel, Mr. Blank suffers two kinds of imprisonment; on the one hand, he feels adroitly manipulated by other protagonists of the story, and, on the other hand, he is tortured by the author who subjects him to his refined artistic experiments (Stolarek 2015: 101). In fact, it is the writer that wields entire control over Mr. Blank, determining his destiny:

Mr. Blank may have acted cruelly toward some of his charges over the years, but not one of us thinks he hasn't done everything in his power to serve us well. That is why I plan to keep him where he is. The room is his world now, and the longer the treatment goes on, the more he will come to accept the generosity of what has been done for him. Mr. Blank is ill and enfeebled, but as long as he remains in the room with the shuttered and the locked door, he can never die, never disappear, never be anything but the words I am writing on this page. (Auster 2007: 118)

The above excerpt proves that the main character is merely an element of fiction, a product in the author's creative process. It is stressed that Mr. Blank's presence is an integral part of the story as long as it is being narrated, however, the moment the novel draws to its close, his privileged status will be lost and his days will be numbered (Stolarek 2015: 101). Auster's quotation partly contradicts Buday's (2015: 37-38) view according to which Mr. Blank, analogously to other characters of postmodernist fiction, continues to exist in and outside the text albeit his creator's wielding absolute power over him. In fact, the author maintains overwhelming dominance over his protagonist, yet on the other hand, he recognises, to some extent, an individual in the character whom he created and whom he incessantly torments. It is this human, individual side of Mr. Blank that challenges his creator's absolute authority and motivates him to struggle for his autonomy. Even though the protagonist is not able to conquer his creator, being successively subjected to his artistic experiments, he manages to survive and gains autonomy as soon as the text exists whilst the writer's power over his narratee diminishes and disappears the moment he stops writing.

Having said that, the above fragment clearly illustrates the manner and extent to which the author controls his protagonist. Moreover, he skilfully manipulates Mr. Blank as well as disorientating the reader by shifting from the first- to the third-person narration when referring to the main character: "The moment I started to tell my story, they knocked me down and kicked me in the head" ... "There are two more paragraphs on the page, but before Mr. Blank can begin reading the second one, the telephone rings" (Auster 2007: 5). Such an alteration initially generates confusion and chaos but on closer inspection the readers recognise in this procedure an effective artistic mechanism showing a truly mystifying, labyrinthine, menacing world in which Mr. Blank is imprisoned. His confinement in a tiny room, serving as the centre of his universe, symbolises existential reduction of an individual in the postmodern world.

On the other hand, the excerpt above also reveals that Mr. Blank epitomises a creator and simultaneously a liquidator, thus embodying Auster's alter-ego who meets yet fails to recognise in his disorientating entropic world people from bygone years – the protagonists who are brought to life and formed only to be finally executed for the author's or audience's pleasure (Stolarek 2015: 101). All the visitors and operatives, being partly victims and partly persecutors of Mr. Blank, haunt him in spite of the

protagonist's desperate attempts to obliterate them from his memory. His surname and lack of the first name clearly indicates that the character's brain is stripped of any recollections of past events owing to his inability or refusal to recognise his victims as well as persecutors, and to admit his crime acts. This dual, or rather, multiple identity of Mr. Blank, embodying an unfortunate victim of his visitors' gruelling medical tests and his author's artistic experiments, a doomed detective and concurrently the authorial executioner – Auster's alter-ego, is emblematic of a destabilisation of identities typifying the postmodernist detective fiction. Among all the aforesaid roles the protagonist performs, it is worth mentioning the last one as it vividly illustrates the character-author power relations both in this narrative and with respect to Auster's other texts. In *Travels in the Scriptorium*, Mr. Blank is charged by his operatives with heinous crimes. However, when inspecting closely his visitors-accusers, the reader can instantaneously recognise in them the characters from Auster's previous novels, most notably *The New York Trilogy*, *In the Country of Last Things*, *The Book of Illusions* and *Moon Palace*. All these protagonists resent the main character for the fact he brought them to life and subsequently tortured and executed most of them. In this context, Mr. Blank functions as the criminal-writer, who is however, unaware or, prefers to be, unaware of his guilt and responsibility, as exemplified in the fragments hereunder:

I've done something terrible to you. I don't know what it is, but something terrible... unspeakable... beyond forgiveness. [...]

It wasn't your fault. You did what you had to do, and don't hold it against you.

But you suffered. I made you suffer, didn't I?

Yes, very badly. I almost didn't make it.

What did I do?

You sent me off to a dangerous place, a desperate place, a place of destruction and death.

[...]

My husband died three years ago.

What was his name?

David. David Zimmer.

What happened?

He had a bad heart.

I'm responsible for that, too, aren't I?

Not really... Only indirectly.

(Auster 2007: 21-22)

It transpires from the foregoing excerpts that Mr. Blank contributed substantially yet unintentionally to the suffering of his victims even though he offers them his commiseration. Nonetheless, on more in-depth examination, the protagonist-criminal proves to be a mere puppet in the hands of the omnipotent and omnipresent author who controls his every move and uses him as an artistic tool in tormenting the characters from his former works. Thus, Mr. Blank apparently enjoys the status of the writer in Auster's novel, whereas in fact his writing process is, on the one hand, regularly monitored by the remaining characters of the story, and, on the other hand, subjected to the dictates of a real author of the book (Stolarek 2015: 102). In the light of this thesis, one could raise three key questions: Who wields power over the writerly process: the creator or the act of creation? Who is a genuine murderer and who is a victim: the author, the characters or the reader? Do truth and freedom really exist, or are they only the fabrications of imprudent writers?

The above queries, reflecting an ambiguous, manipulative nature of the narrative act, a misconstrued reality as well as complex power relations between the creator and his literary creations, redirect us, to Baudrillard's hyperreal which shapes and governs Auster's protagonist's existence. Living in the confined, delusory world controlled by the hyperreal, Mr. Blank gradually loses contact with reality. While arbitrary linguistic signs and written narratives undermine his perception of reality, visual representations allegedly of people from his past add to his hallucination. The illustration of this process is the case of the old photograph of Anna Blume, at present an aging woman, starkly juxtaposed with the youthfulness of Dr Samuel Farr, which makes the protagonist uncertain about the timeline defining his own life. He observes that: "[In the picture] Anna is young... But she told me it was taken more than thirty years ago. She's not a girl anymore... time is turning her into an old woman. But not you, Farr. You were with her... and you haven't changed" (Auster 2007: 87). The character is evidently mystified by the temporal discord between these two pictures which additionally enhances his incertitude of the timeline determining his life.

Clearly, pictures in *Travels in the Scriptorium* turn out to be unreliable records, calling into question their proverbial connection with reality. They are reminiscent, as Alexander and Chatterjee (2014: 55) underline, of Baudrillard's theory on history, cinema, photography, and "the terrorism of the real" in *Simulacra and Simulations* (1994), where he claims that:

“Photography... contributed in large part to the secularization of history, to fixing it in its visible, ‘objective’ form... [However,] it only resurrects ghosts, and it itself is lost therein” (Baudrillard 1994: 48). Mr. Blank’s frustration with his inability to connect people from his past with their faces on the photographs testifies this: “He looks at another ten pictures with the same disappointing results” (Auster 2007: 40). As the novel declares from the very beginning: “pictures do not lie, but neither do they tell the whole story” (Auster 2007: 2). The description of Mr. Blank’s photograph exemplifies this: “The old man’s age, for example, is difficult to determine from the slightly out-of-focus black-and-white images. [...] the word *old* is a flexible term and can be used to describe a person anywhere between sixty and hundred” (Auster 2007: 3).

Travels in the Scriptorium regularly turns the photographic image into an illusory source of representation (Alexander and Chatterjee 2014: 55). What was hitherto regarded as a stable, reliable determiner of reality proves only to be a simulation – an artefact which confounds rather than enlightens Mr. Blank. At this point, it is worth mentioning photography as a crucial reference in Modiano’s writing. Even though Auster’s novel is not modelled on any novels of the French author, some significant parallels can be drawn between *Travels in the Scriptorium* and Modiano’s selected works with respect to the two writers’ treatment of the photographic image as an illusory symbol of objective reality. Auster’s narrative, like Modiano’s texts, both those dealing with the times of the Occupation and the post-war period, illustrate gaps and lacunae – an amnesiac Mr. Blank, analogously to Guy Roland, and similarly to Jean Daragane or Ambrose Guise, undertakes painstaking yet fruitless efforts to uncover his identity and recognise people from his past. Photographs, purportedly crucial leads in his investigation, prove to bewilder the main character rather than shed light on his inquiry. In Modiano’s novels, on the other hand, pictures play an ambiguous role. Photographs both mask and expose the gaps in his narratives – stories which incessantly reprise what the narrator of *Vestiaire de l’enfance* (1989) distinguishes as “le thème de la survie des personnes disparues, l’espoir de retrouver un jour ceux qu’on a perdus dans le passé” / “The theme of the survival of missing persons, the hope of finding one day those we have lost in the past” (Modiano 1989: 10; translation mine). Being obsessed with the past, the French writer frequently refers to photography which permits him to conjugate time and space, to

bring an objectified past into a narrative present, and to suspend time and blend it with the virtual space of the narrative (Warehime 2007: 311-312).

Neither in Auster's novel nor in Modiano's oeuvre photographic images are stable markers of reality, becoming rather its illusory representation. At the same time, pictures are the characters' connectors to their past and their quest for missing persons, both victims and perpetrators. Mr. Blank and Guy Roland, embodying amnesiac protagonists and amateur detectives being persistent in their quest for their own identity and the investigation of missing persons from their past, initially hope to find the answer to their search in the photographs. It soon turns out, however, that the photos of people Mr. Blank or Guy Roland are offered do not enlighten them or contribute to the elucidation of their past mysteries but add to their confusion. Auster's and Modiano's characters are unable to either recognise people from the pictures or identify them as inseparable elements of their past. In this regard, the photographs deepen their sense of loss, vacuity and alienation. This becomes particularly visible in *Travels in the Scriptorium* where the protagonist, confined to his cell, is denied any initiative, movement or action.

Photographic images, next to manuscripts, words and names, indubitably reinforce Mr. Blank's disorientation and paranoia. Trapped in a labyrinthine web of misinformation, linguistic manipulation, or what Baudrillard defines as an "overproduction and regeneration of meaning and of speech" (1994: 86), Auster's character is deeply uncertain of his condition, wondering whether he is a free-thinking individual, a prisoner, a patient, a writer, or a product of the author's whimsical imagination. Contrary to his doctor's informing him that his imprisonment and treatment are accorded out of his volition, his lawyer assures him that he himself decided on the place of his confinement. To his greater astonishment, Mr. Blank is being informed that he allegedly used to be a writer, or rather a tool in a genuine author's hand, who created and subsequently subjected his characters to cruel experiments, most of whom are the people who visit him. Clearly, this network of manifold, complex messages Mr. Blank is overwhelmed by leaves the protagonist suspended with an illusion of freedom while in fact having him enchained. In this context, one may raise the following questions: Does Mr. Blank live in genuine captivity (by being entrapped in his tiny room) or in paradise (he is nourished, dressed-up and sexually serviced by one of his nurses)? Is his imprisonment a reality or hallucination? Is writing a captivity? Instead of

offering answers, Auster frequently poses ambivalent questions which are genuine keys to his novels.

Analysing Mr. Blank's existential impasse, Sanjoy and Neelakantan, in their essay on *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2010: 2-5), maintain that the fragmentary clues bombarded on Auster's character not only obscure information but also, when combined with the instruments of incarceration and supervision, enhance an anonymous control over him. As Alexander and Chatterjee (2014: 55) underline, Mr. Blank proves to be unsuccessful at forging a coherent reality and identity for himself. According to the critics, the American writer points out that his protagonist's condition can be interpreted as a metaphor for postmodernity in which hyperreal maintains absolute dominance.

In the scrutiny of Mr. Blank's human experience as shaped by the hyperreal, Alexander and Chatterjee are right arguing that the character fails at imitating a stable reality, or creating an alternative one where he could reclaim his identity. Needless to say, when discussing the position of Auster's protagonist in the light of the narrative act, the role of the author, narrator, narratees and the readers, one arrives at several valid conclusions. Firstly, as the critics state, the American novelist does not offer any obvious solution for his character. This partly indicates that Mr. Blank is not thrown into an eternal abyss or condemned to death in the narrative act but instead attempts to build the alternative world albeit being continually monitored by either the invisible forces of the hyperreal or the power of the god-like author. In the light of Auster's thesis, reflected in *Travels in the Scriptorium* as well as in his other novels, it can be deduced that the author wields control over his protagonists, yet his power is never absolute or final. The writer provides room for possibilities, alternative worlds and "imaginative freedom" (Butler, Gurr 2008: 197). This stands in contrast to Alexander and Chatterjee's view on the supreme power of Baudrillard's hyperreal. Secondly, the ambivalent relations between the protagonist and the writer, mirroring a masterfully prepared hide-and-seek game in which the author endeavours to entrap his character, lead this examination to the scrutiny of the role of the reader. In this novel and in the majority of his other works, the function of the reader is by and large vital, forming the third component of the story as well as constituting an intermediary between the author and the protagonists.

Travels in the Scriptorium is a self-reflexive and self-referential novel which directs the readers to a number of Auster's other works. Analogously

to the writer's former books, mainly *The New York Trilogy*, this novel constitutes a fine metafictional game between the author and the readers which abounds in metaphysical riddles, mystical and intricate clues, whose goal is to bewilder the readers yet at the same time to compel them to fully participate in the narrative process, and to decipher the hidden meaning of certain objects, phenomena and characters' names that regularly appear in most of the novelist's oeuvre (Stolarek 2015: 103). The dense referential structure of Auster's book could be best exemplified by the intertextual potential of the name "Fanshawe", which plays a crucial role in the text: four pages before the novel ends, when Mr. Blank commences reading the manuscript of "Travels in the Scriptorium by N.R. Fanshawe" (Auster 2007: 126), a text that repeats the opening pages of *Travels in the Scriptorium* itself, we find out that Fanshawe is purportedly the author of the book we are studying. Significantly, *Fanshawe* is also the title of Nathaniel Hawthorne's juvenile 1828 novel, which the writer came to dislike or even loathe and of which he endeavoured to destroy all copies. Furthermore, in Auster's own short novel "The Locked Room" (1986), constituting the final part of *The New York Trilogy*, Fanshawe functions as a writer disappearing under mysterious circumstances, forcing the narrator of "The Locked Room" to read and perhaps to destroy his work. Hence, the intertextual reference to Hawthorne's early novel turns the readers to Auster's own previous novel and can be here a valid point of departure for a study of the complex and unique way in which *Travels in the Scriptorium* engages with Auster's former works (Butler, Gurr 2008: 2000).

Fanshawe, a key name in Auster's 2007 novel, inaugurates the process in which the book re-situates figures from the author's previous oeuvre. The amiable and supportive but traumatised "Anna Blume", who reminds the amnesiac Mr. Blank that he is accountable for sending her off "to a dangerous place, a desperate place, a place of destruction and death" (Auster 2007: 21), is evocative of Anna Blume, the protagonist of Auster's apocalyptic 1987 novel *In the Country of Last Things*. Anna Blume is the one who entered the abandoned "country of last things" of her own volition in order to find her brother William, who has disappeared under suspicious circumstances (Auster 1987: 2, 188). Furthermore, Samuel Farr, Mr. Blank's doctor, recalls the earlier Samuel Farr, Anna Blume's partner turned fake doctor in Auster's 1987 novel. *Travels in the Scriptorium* may even imply that Woburn House, the presumably safe and humane place but actually progressively embattled

and jeopardized house of refuge in the inhumane, post-apocalyptic world of the *Country of Last Things* (Auster 1992: 130) in which Farr administers kindness and consolation to the sick, and thus it could be the site of Mr. Blank's cell. Added to that, the novelist redeploys the figure of David Zimmer, the protagonist's close friend and one-time college dorm roommate in *Moon Palace*, who fell in love with a certain "Anna Blume" (Auster 1989: 88), whose William, has gone missing in "some foreign country" (88). In *Travels in the Scriptorium*, the readers discover that these two protagonists got married "three years ago" (Auster 2007: 22). In fact, Zimmer is mostly known to Auster's readers as the narrator of *The Book of Illusions*, the story of a silent movie star Hector Mann, who mysteriously disappears in 1929 and then clandestinely continues making films, which are never displayed to the public. *The Book of Illusions* also constitutes the source of the title of *Travels in the Scriptorium* which appears as the designation of Hector Mann's films as well as the title of a novel by a character in another of Mann's secret films.

To conclude the exploration of the dense referential structure of Auster's novel, it is worth exemplifying a redeployment of yet other several characters from the writer's former novels. One of them is indubitably Sophie from *The New York Trilogy*, a woman once married to a man named "Fanshawe" who left her soon after she had become pregnant. Another case is Mr. Flood, a protagonist concerned about "whether [he] even exist[s]" (Auster 2007: 52), since he only realises he is a character in Fanshawe's novel *Neverland* (2007: 48-54), and is indeed barely mentioned in parentheses in *The New York Trilogy*. Thirdly, there are references to Walt the Wonder Boy, the levitating protagonist of *Mr. Vertigo* (1994), his later spouse Molly Fitzsimmons and her nephew Daniel Quinn who are said to have been allegedly related to Quinn, the narrator from "The City of Glass". Ultimately, the writer John Trause – an anagram of "Auster" – supposedly the author of the story of Sigmund Graf which Blank reads, is evidently known to the readers from *Oracle Night*.

In terms of the metafictional potency of Auster's text, the above scrutiny of references to characters of the American writer's former novels has two functions. On the one hand, it accentuates the rich referential structure of *Travels in the Scriptorium*, which truly shifts the apparently closed space of the text into an intertextual network of significance. On the other hand, it reflects the novel's potential to rewrite Auster's earlier fiction. Here Butler and Gurr (2008: 203) draw special attention to socio-political events the

American novelist refers to in his work. Some of the crucial motifs pervading *Travels in the Scriptorium* and earlier *Oracle Night* is the war on Communism, McCarthy and all sinister events occurring in the light of the “war on terror”, as well as dramatic events related to the Bush Administration. Another significant theme emerging from *Leviathan* (1992) is an individual rebellion against an overbearing state, which mirrors Emerson’s motto from “Politics (1844): “Every actual State is corrupt” (Emerson 1983: 563). This topic becomes retrospectively recontextualised in *Travels in the Scriptorium*: considering the new novel’s political engagement, Auster implicitly updates Sach’s rebellion around 1990 to the beginning of the third millennium. Although the subject of this part’s discourse is not a political reading of Auster’s novel but the poetics of metafiction and the exploration of self-referentiality in his work, some references to key socio-political events in his texts have been provided in order to thoroughly understand the narrative structure, particularly the self-reflexive strategies of the novelist’s work, and to make Auster’s reading public aware of the writer’s involvement with the current political situation in the USA and in the world.

Travels in the Scriptorium, reflecting the engagement with Auster’s earlier works, turns from the closed text towards a potentially infinite literary universe outside (Butler, Gurr 2008: 200). This argument is evidenced by the multiple fictions of authorship, which indicate that Mr. Blank himself is the author of the novels referred to in this book. As I observed in the previous part of the chapter (page 101-102), and a number of reviewers have noted, Mr. Blank is a writer, and the “charges” and “operatives” he sent out “on their various missions” (Auster 2007: 25, 51, 21, 104, 120), who presently return to haunt him, are in fact his own creations, protagonists from his own former books. Gurria-Quintana adds that the unavoidable situation in which Auster’s character finds himself mirrors that of an author who can never avoid his own creations: “Here is the novelist, old and confused, held to account by his own characters. The ultimate punishment is to find himself forever locked within his own work” (Gurria-Quintana 2006). In the light of this statement one is prepared to concede that next to Blank, Fanshawe and Trause also function as alter ego fictions for Auster himself. This assertion is further complicated by the circularity of the author in his fiction: Fanshawe is one of Mr. Blank’s earlier protagonists, whilst the novel which gives evidence to Mr. Blank, the very novel the readers are studying, is claimed to have been written by Fanshawe (Butler, Gurr 2008: 201).

Butler and Gurr's argument, as well as Gurria-Quintana's statement, support the view that Mr. Blank functions as an author of the fiction with all the remaining figures of the book as his characters from preceding novels. Mr. Blank's identification with Auster becomes explicit on the final pages of *Travels in the Scriptorium* where, after having said that all the characters are "figments of another mind" and "will outlive the mind that made us" (Auster 2007: 129), the narrator directs attention to one of the conventions of mimetic fiction, the notion of an anterior reality (Butler, Gurr 201). By breaking with the mimetic fiction and the illusionist claim, he underlines that his protagonists only start existing as he writes them, and that he uses them at his discretion: "In a short while, a woman will enter the room, and will feed him his dinner. I haven't decided who that woman will be, but if all goes well between now and then, I will send in Anna... [A]nd now is the moment when Anna kisses Mr. Blank and tucks him in..." (Auster 2007: 130). At the same time, the statement that the protagonists "will outlive the mind that made us" brings us back once again to Buday's (2015: 37) assertion that characters are no longer inferior to their creators and that they assume the roles of ethereal beings who, despite the fact they cannot wield power over their authors, often outlive them.

The above examination demonstrates that, due to its conspicuously self-reflexive nature and exceptionally rich references to Auster's other novels, *Travels in the Scriptorium* is one of the American novelist's most mature metafictional texts into which he invites his reading public to share with him his genuine artistic entertainment and pleasure in forming, manipulating and haunting his creations, being frequently characters, preoccupations, themes and motifs from his previous works. However, one cannot fail to notice that Auster's novel, constituting an intriguing thematic melange of his numerous previous works, mostly deals with the existential angst of the characters, their frantic, maze-like quest for identity, physical and mental (in)voluntary confinement, mysterious disappearances, and sadomasochistic relations between the protagonists and their creator. The dense metafictional structure of Auster's novel, exemplifying the postmodern metaphysical detective story, reflects a masterfully shaped act of narrative and narrated homicide, violence, victimisation and detection. In the process of creating and performing the narrative act, the author adopts the position of the criminal, his character and supposedly narrator assumes the role of the victim, whilst

the reading public functions as the detective. On the other hand, referring to Atwood's (1983: 3) classification, in *Travels in the Scriptorium*, the role of the writer is attributed to that of the murderer, the readers, especially those unacquainted with Auster's previous novels, their characters and narrative mechanisms, function as victims, whilst the critics assume the position of the detectives.

All things considered, *Travels in the Scriptorium* illustrates complex and ambiguous relations between the author, his protagonists and the reader. It particularly reflects the ambivalent role of the writer in the process of creating, manipulating and tormenting his narrators, narratees and partly readers, the last of whom become imprisoned by the labyrinth dexterously built by the writer. However, readers are simultaneously forced to participate in and take pleasure from the perilous hide-and-seek game between the author and his narrative subjects. The main character's world, reduced to a tiny locked room, mirroring the man's mental and physical oppression, symbolises the alienation and paranoia of postmodern human existence. In his book, the novelist demonstrates, via his elaborate metafictional strategies, that, while being trapped in a labyrinthine hyperreal world characterised by infinite arbitrary signs and significations as well as illusory photographic images, an individual like Mr. Blank is doomed to fail in his search for meaning and truth. At the same time, the Auster 2007 novel ambivalently deconstructs the view that characters occupy the position inferior to their creators. Both the proponents of the theory of the hyperreal and the critics exploring the poetics and politics of the metafictional structure of *Travels in the Scriptorium* cannot fail to notice a grave identity crisis the protagonists undergo in relation with other characters, the narrative space they occupy, the author they are shaped, manipulated and persecuted by, and, ultimately, the readers they are pursued by. A labyrinthine metaphysical and metafictional game between the author, his narratees and the reader shows the inability to establish distinct and unique identities of the criminal, the victim and the detective. Instead, we face destabilisation of identities, their indeterminacy, perennial shift and disguise which distinguish postmodern characters like Auster's Mr. Blank as well as Modiano's Jean Daragane, Ambrose Guise or Guy Roland.

4.3. Empty narrator on the trail of identity in Patrick Modiano's *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*

When I discover who I am, I'll be free.

(Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* 1952)

Similarly to Auster's works, the labyrinthine world of Modiano's novels reflects an individual's relentless quest for identity, existential anxiety and ontological incertitude. As emphasised in the second chapter, the characters populating the novels of the French author are constantly in search of their past in which they hope to find answer to the recurring, frequently insurmountable problems they are confronted by, such as their roots, mysterious disappearances of important people from their childhood or adolescence, and unsolved crimes of bygone years. With respect to this search or investigation the protagonists undertake, Modiano's works bear some similarity to Auster's books, in particular, *Travels in the Scriptorium* and *The New York Trilogy*. However, when set beside the self-reflexive and an exceptionally dense metafictional aspect of the American novelist's text in which the main character's quest for identity results in the exploration of the figures, themes and motifs from Auster's previous novels, Modiano's chief preoccupation is the individual's search for roots, in particular moments of his life or in history. The novels such as *Rue des boutiques obscures*, *Dora Bruder*, *Quartier perdu* or *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* mirror the protagonists' investigative journey into their past, being either the times of the Occupation in France, as graphically illustrated in the first two mentioned works, or the contemporary era, as shown in the two consecutive texts.

The vast majority of critics direct their attention to those novels by Modiano which deal with the traumatic war period arguing that they most accurately depict the existential crisis of the characters being haunted by disturbing memories of their personal holocausts. Needless to say, in the discussion of Modiano's oeuvre in the context of the metaphysical detective story model, it is worth having a closer look on those books which do not foreground the theme of the occupied France and the protagonists' identity crisis linked to the war but those focusing on the characters' struggling with

the vacuous, alienating contemporary world they live in as well as their endeavouring to erase their memories of the crimes or hazardous intrigues they become involuntarily involved in. The analysis of the characters' frantic quest for uncovering their identities against the background of mysterious disappearances and unsolved crimes, revealed at the example of Jean Daragane from *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, is inextricably linked with careful scrutiny of the novelist's employment of innovative narrative techniques, predominantly his theory of the narrator, which closely mirrors the complex, ambiguous process of narration, alongside the acts of writing and reading.

Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier, analogously to the great majority of Modiano's previous novels, falls into the category of the metaphysical detective story in view of the fact that it subverts, or slightly parodies the classic detective genre elements by raising existential questions concerning the reality and the possibilities or limits of knowledge. More specifically, Modiano's 2014 novel reflects the very quest for the truth, especially the resolution of the homicide case. Nevertheless, it brings to the fore the amateur detective and simultaneously reclusive writer who launches the investigation but becomes unable to carry it out in the long term because during the exploration of the mystery crime he commences concentrating on the events from his past. Analogously to the author's preceding works, this book focuses on the themes typifying the metaphysical detective fiction, particularly the motifs saturating Modiano's mystery stories such as the doomed detective, the missing person, the insignificance or ambivalence of evidence and clues, the circularity or absence of the solution to the crime and the self-reflexive nature of the text (Tani 1984: 43).

Prior to the examination of the identity quest in *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* as a reflection of the reversal of roles of the detective or investigator, the criminal and the victim, and the destabilisation of identities, one ought to make a thorough inspection of the function of the narrator, beginning with Genette's theory. In his classification, the critic (1972: 203) divides the narrator into "point of view" and "narrative voice", bringing into focus the second type, describing it as the "external utterance" which gives rise to the story. In Genette's classification the narrative voice has the distinctive positions from which it creates the narrative, such as the *extradiegetic* narrator who is outside the main story, the *intradiegetic* narrator who is inside the story and the *metadiegetic* narrator who tells a tale

within the main story (Kawakami 2000: 8). Further on, in the analysis of the relationship between the voice and the story, the French critic divides the narrative voice into the *heterodiegetic* narrator, who is absent from the story, and the *homodiegetic* narrator, who is a character in the story, either the hero or an observing character.

Scrutinising Genette's classification, Kawakami (2000: 8-9) stresses some of its shortcomings visible especially in a comparative delineation of Proust's and Modiano's narrators. As Kawakami observes, Genette's account of the Proustian narrator, in "Discours du récit", presents him to be a figure of presence and abundance, conveying full information to which he alone has access and which he decides to dispense or not to dispense. Proust's retrospective narrative is told by a narrator whose present identity directs the reader through its memories, which acquire meaning only in this act of retrospection by a consciousness enlightened with an identity (Kawakami 2000: 8). Next to other critics, she notes that Modiano's narrators formally correspond to Proust's narrator – in general, they are extra- and homodiegetic, the narrative is internally focalised, and retrospective. Despite this similarity, however, they are fundamentally different. In fact, Modiano's narrators are distinguished by their peculiar emptiness, comparative lack of character, and even though they are ubiquitous in the same manner as any narrator of a retrospective narrative, constituting the single consciousness in which the whole narrative is placed, they do not enforce a psychological tone on the narrative.

In the light of this contradiction, Kawakami (9) argues that Genette's study which makes the distinction between 'point of view' and 'voice' fails later on to consider the narrator as a unified person. The division results in his neglecting of the *narrator's* world, the space of the narrating consciousness, and this constitutes the crucial distinction between Proust's and Modiano's narrators. This space may be filled with significant information, as exemplified in Proust's novels, or could be relatively empty or void, as in the case of Modiano, but it ought to be recognised as a structure in any theory of the narrator. The critic maintains that Genette's designations prove advantageous in the analysis of the relationship between the "real" world and the "story" world created by the voice, but they fail to reflect the relationship between this "story" world and the narrator's world. In fact, the narrator's world constitutes the fictional world the narrator resides in, as separate from the world of the story he creates: it may or may not overlap

with the “story”, however, it is indispensable to the organisation of the narrative (Kawakami 2000: 9).

The above discussion on Genette's classification considerably helps in understanding the status of Modiano's narrator and his function in the organisation of the narrative. In the examination of Jean Daragane's narration, the main character of *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, it is crucial to recognise the distinction between Proust's modernist tellers and Modiano's postmodernist narrators. More importantly, in this study one ought to realise the influence of Modiano's protagonist's narration on perceiving and interpreting the fictional reality, especially the atmosphere of mystery, crime and investigation saturating the novel of the French writer. As pointed out before, when set beside Proust's revelatory narrators, Modiano's narrators are unobtrusively identity-less, inhabiting the space or world of the narrator but not filling it. On the other hand, they are not synonymous with certain *nouveau roman* narrators, like Robbe-Grillet's protagonists of *Le Voyeur* or *La Jalousie*, who are purposefully empty, stripped of identity. The narrators of *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, *Quartier perdu*, *Rue des boutiques obscures* or *Vestiaire de l'enfance* fulfil the structural requirement of equipping the narrative with an organisational base, a point of view and narrative voice, however, that is where their role ends. Hence, Kawakami (2000: 10) names this unusual kind of narrator the *degré zéro* narrator, which could be characterised as a “position” for subjectivity which could remain unfilled, but whose existence is essential to the organisation of the narrative as a “kind of empty locus” (Docherty 1983: 210) which records temporal distinction. Due to its emptiness, or void, the *degré zéro* narrator is not able to impose his identity on the narrative. In fact, it is in the narrative that the narrator finds the final source of identity which makes him essential for two reasons. Apart from the fact that he is crucial to the narrative as the only means of its articulation, he is also its *raison d'être*, its internal requirement, in that the narrative's existence is only substantiated as the quest for – or the formation of – the narrator's identity (Côté 1991: 317).

The above process is illustrated in *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*. Jean Daragane, a reclusive writer who, like Ambrose Guise from *Quartier perdu*, has deliberately refused to link his present to his traumatic past, embodies an “empty” narrator who needs to be filled by his own narrative. Evidently, this protagonist stands in contrast to the characters who

are devoid of any initiative or unable to control his narrative, like the amnesiac narrator-investigator Guy Roland, or Mr. Blank, the character-narrator apparently made amnesiac by his author and other characters of Auster's novel. Daragane's persistent denial to recollect Guy Torstel, one of the crucial figures from his book and a person who apparently played a significant role in his past, exemplifies a state which can be named "voluntary amnesia", which leads to an analogous emptiness of voice. The "voluntary amnesia" of Daragane stems from his inability and fear to connect his present solitary yet harmonious life of a writer with the turbulent period of his childhood, particularly his incapacity to confront the memory of a long-suppressed personal trauma. Finding himself unexpectedly entangled in the lives of an accidentally met stranger, Gilles Ottolini, who claims to be writing a story on the murder of Colette Laurent in 1952 and believes that information about Torstel may help with his enquiries, and his beautiful but fragile young associate, Chantal, Jean reluctantly endeavours to investigate the mystery of a decades-old murder, leaving his lonely apartment and exploring the terrible family secret.

The protagonist's voice displays peculiar impersonality which characterises the *degré zéro* narrator. Unlike the unnamed yet exposed narrators of Robbe-Grillet's novels, especially the narrator of *La Jalousie*, Daragane remains an anonymous and a discrete protagonist. Interestingly enough, the readers are supplied with a selection of information details on the identity of Modiano's hero enabling them to create a potential picture of him. Nevertheless, this feeling of knowledge and facts prove to be illusory. Even though we know the name, address, profession and lifestyle of Modiano's character, Jean Daragane, similarly to Ambrose Guise or Jimmy Sarano from *Vestiaire de l'enfance*, remains obscure, at times ambiguous, difficult to describe.

This lack of defining Modiano's protagonist, as Kawakami (2000: 15) underlines, is associated with the quality of his narrative voice. While perusing *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, any attentive reader can notice that Daragane's voice is an oddly non-reflecting voice, exceptionally reticent with regard to feelings and thoughts. The protagonist's third-person narration closely reflects an externally focalised narrative in which the voice has no access to the internal processes of any of the people it depicts. This process is exemplified in the following passage:

Colette Laurent. This apparently anodyne name aroused an echo in him, but too muted for him to be able to describe it. He seemed to have read the date: 1951, but he did not feel like verifying this among the words that were all huddled together and made you feel as if you were suffocating.

1951. More than half a century had gone by since then, and the witnesses to his news item, and even the murderer himself, were no longer alive. Gilles Ottolini had got there too late. (Modiano 2014: 45; trans Cameron 2015)

As seen from the above, Daragane betrays distance and detachment from the people he describes and events he recounts. When reading his narration one cannot escape the impression that this narrative is related by another person, some external narrator not identified with Modiano's character. Moreover, Daragane's style and tone strike the readers as very unemotional and matter-of-fact, especially when the protagonist refers to some homicide case, an unknown murderer, mysterious disappearances, witnesses and unsolved investigation. The narrator's reticence in analysing people's behaviour and scrutinising criminal cases indicates how impersonal his voice is and how external it is to the consciousness of people who were once involved in or were witnesses to homicide. The character's distance and taciturnity in exploring the crime enigma enhances in the reader the feeling of mystery, vagueness yet also insatiable curiosity about the homicide circumstances, which is, however, never fully satisfied owing to the protagonist's inability or reluctance to disclose complete information about the case. In fact, Daragane's impersonal and hesitating voice reflecting his apparently unemotional involvement in the investigated case stems from his deep-rooted unwillingness to inspect the murder mystery as it proves to be closely related to his long-suppressed personal and family trauma. Consequently, one encounters an alienated description of people, events and objects, similarly to *Quartier perdu*, *Rue des boutiques obscures* or *Vestiaire de l'enfance*. Nonetheless, Daragane's initial unwillingness to inspect the murder case soon gives way to his curiosity, even when enforced by a menacing stranger scrutinising the mystery, and later to his obsession, especially when he discovers the case's connection with his childhood trauma. Having said that, even when the narrator gradually offers increasingly important information, his narration remains obscure and does not leave the readers with any groundbreaking knowledge about motifs and circumstances of the homicide case.

Although it is not shown as explicitly as in *Vestiaire de l'enfance* or *Rue des boutiques obscures*, since the beginning of *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, the narratorial voice does not display a tendency to analyse and articulate his thoughts and emotions and instead demonstrates that the narrator is not a man given to reflection. Kawakami (2000: 15) and other critics, notably Boisdeffre (1980) or Prince (1986), stress that the narrators such as Daragane or Guise are frequently forced to be unrealistically articulate and psychologically sophisticated in order to meet the demands of their narratives. This holds true when considering Daragane as a writer and simultaneously amateur detective narrating the investigation of a decades-old murder. Exemplifying the narrators of classic detective stories, Modiano's protagonist is unemotional and distant to people and events he describes, which enables him to accurately interpret facts and circumstances, and subsequently provide the readers with a convincing, logical explanation for the crime mystery. Needless to say, the main character remains persistently reticent and disconnected from the surrounding world, and, above all, too alienated to remember the substance of his own book featuring the man who played a fundamental role in the murder case from the past. This reveals Daragane's isolation and incompetence as an investigator who is unable to find a comprehensive solution to the crime mystery and therefore fails to meet the expectations of the readers. In lieu of exploring thoroughly homicide investigation, we are offered the narration of a solitary writer who, having received a threatening call from a stranger, becomes forced to confront the memory of his family trauma and to launch a frantic quest to uncover his own identity.

Nevertheless, in contrast to some other protagonists of Modiano's novels, like Jimmy Sarano from *Vestiaire de l'enfance*, Daragane is not to be called a passive narrator, regardless of his impersonality, detachment and initial reluctance to search for the mystery case having roots in his past. As previously pointed out, the main character of Modiano's 2014 novel steadily becomes involved, albeit involuntarily, in the enigmatic investigation. When the story progresses, he undertakes more and more determined attempts to explore the enigma of Guy Torstel the meeting with whom he soon recollects. The encounter with the mysterious person from his book leads Daragane to his eventual recognition of a passport photograph of a seven year-old boy in the "dossier" as himself which triggers further memories of when the photograph was taken and how he included this rather

insignificant event with his first novel. As the story unfolds, we gradually learn about the narrator's past, specifically about the fact that in childhood he lived with a woman called Annie Astrand who turned out to be his older sister and that his sister took her and Daragane's photographs when they were about to go to Rome. The narrator remembers that he had included this information in the section of his novel in order to reach out to Annie whom he had lost contact with. However, in the final stage of Daragane's narration we read that Annie soon made contact with her brother and her relation shed some light on the narrator's investigation: we discover that Annie befriended Colette Laurent, whose death becomes later the subject of Ottolini's meticulous examination, and that she spent time in prison. Most of the facts are gradually revealed to the readers, some of them being fragments of unrelated or contradictory news, though. Furthermore, they are presented mainly through the memories of the unreliable narrator, accounts of accidental witnesses or by uncooperative people, which reinforces the vagueness and ambiguity of the narration:

In the end, he decided to take advantage of the silence of the night to reread all the pages of the "dossier" for one last time. But no sooner had he started his reading than he experienced an unpleasant sensation: the sentences became muddled and other sentences suddenly appeared that overlaid the previous ones and disappeared without giving him time to decipher them. (Modiano 2014: 113-114; trans. Cameron 2015)

The first fragment illustrating the atmosphere of enigma and mystery shows Daragane's unsuccessful attempts at deciphering the meaning of the sentences gathered in the mysterious dossier on the murder case and its circumstances. The next passage, depicting the narrator's meeting with the enigmatic Torstel, does not shed light on the case, as he later refers to Annie Astrand's coming back from Paris and wonders whether he saw her in reality, in his dream, or in the chapter of his book:

So, one afternoon, a few days after having met Torstel at the racecourse, he had taken a bus to Porte d'Asnières. The suburbs had already changed a good deal at that time. Was it the same route that Annie Astrand had taken when she came back by car from Paris? And yet he now wondered whether he had not dreamt this journey, which had taken place over forty years ago. It was probably the fact that he had made it a chapter of his novel that induced such confusion in him. (Modiano 2014: 115; trans. Cameron 2015)

...

Roger Vincent's daughter? [...]. He had never asked himself questions as to the precise relationship between Roger Vincent and Annie. It would appear, he often used to say to himself, that children never ask themselves any questions. Many years, afterwards, we attempt to solve puzzles that were not mysteries at the time and we try to decipher half-obliterated letters from a language that is too old and whose alphabet we don't even know. (Modiano 2014: 124; trans Cameron 2015)

The above citations, describing different phases of Daragane's private investigation, illustrate the protagonist's disorientation and confusion about various information he receives in order to examine people and objects related to the murder case, and, above all, linked to his family secret. The two passages reflect the failure of the character's investigation and present him as a doomed detective. The protagonist's frequent change of images, people and objects delays the process of detection, and accurately mirrors what Tani (1984: 46-47) depicts as the proliferation of meanings via which the detective, or rather anti-detective arrives at non-solution. Nonetheless, in the case of Modiano's novel, the narrator's shift of focus from Guy Torstel to Annie Astrand exemplifies the character's recurrent allusions to his past, especially childhood in which he hopes to discover his identity. This turns out to be the main motif in Daragane's private investigation, obscuring his search for the circumstances of Colette Laurent's assassination and the murderer's identity.

The narrator's quest for his family roots leads him to dr Voustraat who reveals the secret of his sister's origins. However, Daragane finds it next to impossible to recollect this fact as an aging man. This indicates the narrator's tremendous internal change which prevents him from a successful search for people he must have known in his childhood and demonstrates his inability to remember and recognise any reliable facts or credible witnesses to the murder case. Even Daragane's sudden discovery that his sibling was in prison fails to throw any light on the murder case:

..."She had been in prison". [...] He thought that Annie would have given him some explanations if she was still alive. Later on, when his book had been published and he had been fortunate enough to see her again, he had not asked her a single question about this matter. She would not have replied. (Modiano 2014: 141; trans Cameron 2015)

The above quotation illustrates the narrator's chance discovery of his sister's being in prison and his initial willingness to know its circumstances. Nonetheless, from the next sentence it transpires that the protagonist refused to investigate Annie's controversial case the moment his book was about to be published. Hence, to secure his reputation as a writer, Daragane is resolved not to release the truth, or some crucial information about Annie's arrest, despite, or rather because of her supposed involvement in Colette's death, which eventually frustrates the expectations of the reading public who are denied to be offered a revelation of the mystery.

Annie Astrand's "prison case" demonstrates that in *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* we are slowly supplied with increasingly crucial information apparently associated with the investigation, yet the knowledge we gain does not make any progress in the mystery story due to unexpected obstacles or apparently undesired circumstances. More importantly, however, one cannot fail to notice that the narrator's inadvertent or deliberate silence about his sister's imprisonment, combined with his inability or reluctance to collect substantial evidence and clues as well as gathering precise information from vital witnesses that would make progress in the investigation, actually mirrors Modiano's playing dexterous game with his readers, the writer's testing the patience and anticipation of the reading public, particularly the expectations of the classic detective story readers. The novelist often indicates in his interviews (Rumaan 2019) and essays (Modiano 2014b, 2015) that, contrary to traditional detective fiction which brings into focus the solution of an enigma, he foregrounds a quest and non-solution, or to be more exact, the impossibility of writing about the solution. Thus, *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* exemplifies the metaphysical detective story, a quasi- detective story or the "fake detective story" (Meyer-Bolzinger 2010:4: translation mine) which reflects the protagonist's internal struggle, his endeavours to decipher the crime mystery and painstaking search for truth and knowledge in lieu of proper intrigue and detailed criminal investigation.

As highlighted in the preceding chapter, in the metaphysical detective story, such as *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, alongside *Travels in the Scriptorium*, *Les Gattes* and *La Reprise*, it is next to impossible to make a distinction between the identity of the detective, or investigator, the murderer and the victim. In Modiano's novel, Daragane accidentally acquires the status of a detective-narrator who attempts to relate the story of an old

murder, yet, as seen above, fails to reveal the true identity of the culprit. Due to his inability to find concrete evidence, clues and witnesses, as well as his concealment of the facts vital to the investigation, the character proves to be an unreliable detective and narrator. In his dramatic quest to uncover his identity and family roots, the protagonist becomes involved in the investigation during which he encounters mystifying strangers, presumably secret agents, people with many pseudonyms and nicknames, as well as discovering a double identity of his relatives, like his sister's. In the entire labyrinthine journey he undertakes, Daragane becomes increasingly dubious about the motives, aims of his investigation and true identities of the murderer and the victim. This multiplication of false identities, pseudonyms and double agents mirrors the process of destabilisation of identities, visible in *noir* fiction and the metaphysical detective story. However, it also reflects the French novelist's idea that life is constituted, like a story, by autonomous, irreducible episodes to a set: "Il y a des moments de votre vie qui sont complètement hermétiques par rapport au reste, qui vous semblent tellement former un bloc qui ne se rattache pas au reste"./"There are moments in your life that are completely hermetic compared to the rest, which seem to you so much to form a block that is not related to the rest" (Modiano 2003: 23; translation mine).

Modiano's concept of life as an autonomous, irreducible and hermetic block, not connected with the rest, aptly illustrates Daragane's state, his isolation and estrangement with the outside world. His alienation, both as a character – a writer and simultaneously a detective, and a narrator, is highlighted by his impersonal voice expressing the protagonist's inability to articulate his thoughts and emotions. This becomes evident when Daragane embarks on the investigative journey during which he endeavours to inspect and describe the criminal enigma. As it soon turns out, the story he is narrating overwhelms him.

The impossibility of writing about the crime and the ambiguity in presenting the process of investigation, which constitutes the main motif of Modiano's novel, has been thoroughly discussed by Meyer-Bolzinger (2010). In her examination of Modiano's fiction, the critic analyses the novelist's variations on the theme of investigation. As Meyer-Bolzinger (2010: 8) observes, the inquiries Modiano's narrators conduct do not concern the essence of the investigation but reflect their pragmatic and structural use. Instead of describing the process of investigation, which appears yet it does

not play the vital role in Modiano's novel, it is the investigation as a structure that the writer modulates by varying the sharpness and readability.

At this point, Meyer-Bolzinger (2010: 8) refers to Todorov's scrutiny of the progressive-regressive structure of the detective story, specifically, the whodunnit, which is based on a double story, that is, the story of the crime, and the story of the investigation which describes "how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it" (quoted in Todorov 1977: 160). As Meyer-Bolzinger (2010: 8) argues, in the classic detective story, the investigator is confronted with an impossible account of the crime whose final, accepted version he/she has to expose, and the difficulties he/she encounters are related to literary order: How to unlock the secret and discover the hidden clue? and How to connect the facts? Likewise, she argues that: "...les faux romans policiers de Modiano racontent l'histoire d'un personnage qui cherche à raconter une histoire, et qui y arrive peu, mal, voire pas du tout. L'enquête inaboutie sert à dire les difficultés, ou l'impossibilité de l'écriture"/"...the fake detective stories of Modiano tell the story of a character who tries to tell a story, and who does it little, badly or not at all. The unfinished inquiry serves to express the difficulties, or the impossibility of writing..." (Meyer-Bolzinger 2010: 8; translation mine). The critic concludes that: "C'est donc aussi en tant que mise en scène de la narration que l'enquête intéresse Modiano"/"It is therefore the staging of the narrative as well as the investigation that interests Modiano" (Meyer-Bolzinger 2010: 8; translation mine). Hence, in *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, it is not the investigation itself and the solution to the murder case that come to the fore but the narrative structure of the quest and the way Daragane manipulates the readers in presenting his search for the clues and evidence.

The theorist further maintains that the logic of the progressive-regressive structure may seem contradictory since it functions both as a fragmentation force, by building several narratives and various temporalities, and as a unifying dynamic, since it leads to the final explanation. In order to understand Modiano's transformations, one ought to refer to the three moments of the structure's schema: first, the initial narrative, where the enigma is presented, subsequently, the inquiry itself, and ultimately, the final narrative, in which the mystery is resolved and where the solution is provided. The failure in the investigation entails two transformations of this fundamental schema. On the one hand, one observes the suppression of the final narrative: all that remains is the enigma and the investigation, as visible

in *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, and especially in *Rue des boutiques obscures* and *Dora Bruder*. On the other hand, one notices the superposition of the enigma and the inquiry, which are considered simultaneous, since the investigation produces mystery in lieu of dissolving it. In other words, in the absence of the ultimate unifying narrative, Modiano's novel of investigation emerges in the form of a fragmented and lacunary text (Meyer-Bolzinger 2010: 8).

The above analysis of the narrative structure of investigation in Modiano's fiction constitutes a key to the understanding of the complexity and ambivalence in which the writer, using the empty narrator, presents the inquiry into the murder mystery. *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* accurately illustrates the difficulty, or the impossibility of recounting the crime events and presenting the inquiry in a logical, coherent manner, as seen in the classic detective story. It is largely owing to the fact that the narrator is not a reliable provider of the meaning. Being empty, almost devoid of "character" (Kawakami 2000: 19), unable to express his thoughts and feelings, like Daragane, such a narrator and simultaneously a protagonist is not the character we can trust or identify with while reading the story. Modiano's novel, narrated by Daragane, is a lacunary text which brings into focus the elusive, the uncertain and the unspeakable. Instead of the resolution of the crime mystery, finding and punishing the culprit, the idea of the investigation as an enhancement of mystery, the ambiguity and inconsistency of the inquiry, even its non-existent results, lie at the heart of Modiano's book. In the text the narrator-detective fails to confront the alleged criminal who is never punished, nor does the main character demand justice on behalf of the victim. Similarly to Roland, Daragane assumes the role of a detective philosopher embarking on the existential quest for his own identity and metaphysical enigmas.

All told, Modiano's approach to his narrator, and to the concept of identity resulting from it reflects the essence of the postmodern mystery, specifically the metaphysical detective novel. Jean Daragane, exemplifying the *degré zéro* narrator, could be depicted as a *decentred* narrator (Kawakami 2000: 24) since he fails to hold the central position of meaning-provider in the narrative: actually, it is the narrator himself that necessitates input of meaning. Kawakami's term is applicable to the protagonist of *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* who embodies an empty impersonal, partly amnesiac narrator, even though, unlike in the case of Guy Roland, his amnesia

is voluntary or intentional. As Modiano's novel demonstrates, Daragane is the one who seeks sense, truth and order, and his fragmentary narrative substitutes for the detective as a dominant, ordering, reliable character the decentring and chaotic admission of mystery. Furthermore, the protagonist's investigation of the old murder mystery which quickly changes into an obsessed quest for identity seems to end in ambiguity and incertitude. Depicting Daragane as an unstable, disorientating character and unreliable narrator whose inquiry proves to be inconsistent and inconclusive, Modiano's work undermines or ironizes search for identity which has been the driving force behind a number of Modernist narratives. More importantly, the protagonist's embodying an unprofessional, disorientated detective and simultaneously a victim to his own investigation, likewise the uncovered identity of the murderer, challenges the classic detective story's theory on the clear-cut distinction between the identity of the detective, the criminal and the victim. Paradoxically enough, the search for identity, which is ironically treated and defeated in Modiano's book as well as in the works of Auster and Robbe-Grillet, motivates the readers to continue studying this postmodern mystery novel.

4.4. Labyrinthine power relations in Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages* and *La Reprise*

If you are not setting a trap, then you
are probably walking into one. It is the
mark of the master to do both at once.

(Jedediah Berry, *The Manual of Detection* 2009)

The exchange of roles and quest for identity are the motifs which Robbe-Grillet brings into focus in his oeuvre. Similarly to Auster and Modiano, the author of *Les Gommages*, *Le Voyeur*, *Dans le Labyrinthe* and *La Reprise* enjoys playing metafictional games with his characters and readers, forcing the latter to actively participate in the process of shaping, manipulating and torturing his narratees. In the examined works, *Les Gommages* and *La Reprise*, the protagonists' search for identity is the driving force in their investigation, even though it inevitably leads to their doom. More importantly, both novels, challenging the classic detective fiction model, particularly the espionage

genre, and expanding its domain, draw special attention to the highly ambiguous relations between the main figures of the criminal drama – the detective, the murderer and the victim, and their double statuses, on the one hand, and to the author’s ambivalent attitude to his narratees and the reader, on the other hand.

4.4.1. Power hierarchies and the politics of watching: identities imprisoned in the investigative cell of postmodernism in *Les Gommès*

As mentioned in the preceding chapter (Chapter 3, section 3.4), *Les Gommès* is regarded as a transitional novel in Alain Robbe-Grillet’s literary output which paved the way for pure anti-detective fiction or a more mature postmodern detective story which followed it, however, it did not break irretrievably from the canons of the classic detective story. Hence, despite the presence of illusory scenes and chronological discrepancies, more strikingly visible in the author’s successive novels, such as *Le Voyeur*, *La Jalousie*, or *Dans le Labyrinthe*, this novel is coded in such a manner that the reader can, albeit to some degree, discriminate between illusion and reality and reconstruct a chronology. Furthermore, as stated in the previous part of this study, Robbe-Grillet’s text offers the reader closure and solution, even though its kind leaves him/her with a feeling of doubt, uneasiness and a sense of the circularity of the text.

Les Gommès exemplifies a text shifting from the classic story of detection toward its metaphysical variant or an anti-detective stance (Ewert 1990: 167). Readers accustomed to the classic genre perceive, at first glance, Robbe-Grillet’s book as an imitation of the detective novel, yet, on closer inspection, they clearly see that the text does not adhere to the rules of the classic detective story. In emphasising the classic elements of the detective fiction in a *prière d’insérer* for the back cover of the first edition, the French author remarks: “It is a detective story event – that is, there is a murder, a detective, a victim. In one sense their roles are conventional: the murderer shoots the victim, the detective solves the problem, the victim dies...” (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 1; trans. Howard 1964). Needless to say, except these constitutive elements of the classic genre, *Les Gommès* is a very unconventional detective story in various respects. The text abounds with illusory scenes, events apparently leading to future action which do not materialize, along with fake flashbacks and rearranged chronologies (Ewert 1990: 168). This chaos on the

level of plot is reinforced by the book's manifold modes of narration, which encompass interior monologue, stream-of-consciousness, free indirect discourse, and an elusive omniscient narration.

Les Gommès undermines some pivotal constituents of the classic genre, such as a clear-cut distinction between the detective, the criminal and the victim, a privileged status of the detective, the capturing and punishment of the culprit, and, ultimately, a rational explanation of the criminal enigma. In this regard the novel closely mirrors the *noir* thriller which purposefully violates the conventions of the classic genre. As Horsley (2001: 10) maintains: "In *noir*, victim, criminal and investigator can all act as protagonists: combinations or reversals of roles and the destabilising of identities mean that [...] it is rare of central characters to occupy single fixed positions in the narrative". In *Les Gommès*, in lieu of three distinct characters, being three integral components of the classic detective story, one encounters the melange of the double, lost and exchange identities, especially blending of the detective and the criminal, a recurrent motif in the metaphysical detective story.

In Robbe-Grillet's text, the protagonist, Special Agent Wallas, adopts reversed roles – that of the detective and that of the murderer. The detective-inspector unintentionally becomes the murderer of the victim, professor Dupont, whom he desperately endeavours to protect. In this respect, he violates the rules of the classic detective genre according to which the detective can never be simultaneously the culprit. Wallas fails in his search for the truth, neither solves the case nor captures the criminal but instead becomes the alleged criminal himself. Considering the victim, Dupont is not assassinated at the outset of the plot, as is mostly the case in the conventional police scheme, but only at its end. Being shot by the special agent who is attempting to locate his "murderer", Dupont becomes, paradoxically, a double victim – of the plot against his life, which left him injured yet not dead, and of the inept detective, obsessed by an unresolved problem and an allegedly foolproof plan (Ewert 1999: 184-185).

The circumstances of Dupont's murder stand in stark contrast to the scenes of crime and the presentation of the investigation in the classic detective story. Critics such as Franken Kurzen and Unmüssig point out that while in the traditional police novel the signs lead to the clarification of the crime, "here the misunderstanding leads to the real murder" (Unmüssig 1997: 56; translation mine). The ambiguity of the case is further augmented

by the detective's lack of accountability for his action and his concomitant undertaking of a new investigation. In this regard, as Franken Kurzen emphasises, "se infringe el optimismo burgues del genero policial clasico y su confianza en el buen fin de la trama que reestablece el orden y garantiza la victoria del bien, representado por el detective-inspector, sobre el mal, representado por el criminal"/"it is there where the bourgeois optimism of the classic police genre and its confidence in the good end of the plot that reestablishes order and guarantees the victory of the good, represented by the detective-inspector, over evil, representing the criminal, are infringed" (Franken Kurzen 2017: 146; translation mine). These modifications and inversions of the classic detective genre elements render Robbe-Grillet's novel a parody of the conventional detective story.

Analogously to other metaphysical detective stories, *Les Gommages* accentuates a marginalised position of the inspector, having no family and focusing entirely on his work, which constitutes an apt metaphor for a de-centred self and a fragmented consciousness (Ewert 1990: 167). When set beside the classical detective enjoying a privileged status in the crime narrative as he always succeeds in resolving the case and retains poise in the criminal world, the protagonist of the metaphysical detective fiction, such as inspector Wallas, is unable to rely upon a linear, deducible, well-organised universe in which to operate. In his first postmodern detective novel, Robbe-Grillet depicts the main character as a doomed detective who, in a desperate attempt to unravel the criminal riddle, refuses to account for contingency and accidents, relying instead on the investigative methods employed by his mentor in the department. Similarly to Lönrot from Borges's "Death and the Compass", invariably taking pride in his intellect, belief in purely rational interpretations of the criminal enigmas, excluding chance and destiny, Wallas obstinately adopts the investigative strategies of his mentor, a celebrated detective, refusing to accept an accident or fate. However, the methods employed by both investigators lead to their failure.

By presenting the two doomed detectives, constituting ironic or caricatured successors of Dupin (Lönrot) and Marlowe (Wallas), Borges and Robbe-Grillet highlight the fact that metaphysical detection does not negate the viability of the British classic genre and the American hard-boiled crime genre detectives but in fact purposefully and flamboyantly doubles their precursors in order to challenge them. Thus, Wallas, albeit apparently epitomising an experienced professional investigator, is in fact devoid of the

self-assurance of the classic detective. In lieu of making an inexorable process in his examination, the protagonist spends plenty of time wandering through city streets, assuming roles for himself to enhance his confidence or performing roles prepared for him by others, acting like a suspect before he is one, or excusing his guilt before he becomes a culprit (Ewert 1999: 185).

As outlined in section 3.4., in the scrutiny of identity, fate and murder in *Les Gommès*, critics like Morrissette highlight the Oedipus structure and references in Robbe-Grillet's work. One cannot fail to notice that in the novel Wallas misses plenty of textual signs that implicate him in the demise of Professor Dupont, among others: the representation of the Oedipus story in public statues and window curtains; the rendez-vous with his stepmother, Dupont's spouse; his own recollections of an earlier visit to the city to meet his father; the inescapable conclusion that Dupont must have faked his own death after the initial attack; and ultimately the insinuation, made by another investigator, that the Professor was assassinated by his own son (Morrissette 1975: 38). In Robbe-Grillet's text, the protagonist, embodying a contemporary Oedipus, is a detective whose quest for knowledge turns out to be fatal. While searching for truth, Wallas belatedly realises that chaos is the norm and true detection impossible, which, as Lehman (1999: xiii) points out, is the most subversive thing occurring in the detective novel linked to the classical concerns of epistemology and hermeneutics.

Similarly to the main characters in the metaphysical detective stories, Wallas exemplifies a doomed detective whose desperate endeavours to shed light on the criminal mystery prove pernicious. Furthermore, his failure is augmented by the protagonist's inability or refusal to detect the signs betraying his involvement in the murder of his father. Consequently, the inspector meets the fate of Oedipus. In this regard, Robbe-Grillet confirms in this novel Bloch's statement according to which Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus*, "multifariously disguised..." is "this *primordial detective theme per se*" (Bloch 1988: 257; original emphasis). Nonetheless, it ought to be also observed that the French author removes from his text the tragic dimension saturating the Greek drama. Contrary to the classical Oedipus, Wallas is not guilty from the outset, his fate not sealed beforehand, and the crime is committed only at the novel's end. Hence, in lieu of "new Oedipus", Robbe-Grillet refers to Wallas as "anti-Oedipus", or "reversed Oedipus", the latter of which points to the fact that the French inspector does not reveal the truth but creates new facts (Schaefer 2013: 123; translation mine).

As seen from the above, a parodic inversion of the classic detective scheme is complemented by the reversal of the ancient tragedy genre. In *Les Gommés* the investigator's failed quest for truth reflects, at the subliminal level, the always structurally ambivalent references to Oedipus which do not permit him to convey a fixed meaning, thus clearly revealing postmodern features (Franken Kurzen 2017: 148). At the formal level, the parodic challenging of the classic detective story and Sophocles' tragedy is graphically illustrated by means of contradictory testimonies of the same investigators and the confusion around the circumstances of Dupont's murder. By depicting different characters' expressing their angst in long interior monologues along with mingling imaginary and real scenes without equipping the readers with any tools enabling them to discriminate between them, Robbe-Grillet shows imprecise, nebulous and brutal reality (Alberès 1971: 168). Both the protagonist and the readers become perplexed by the confusing blend of the reality and the imaginary, as seen in the following excerpt:

The scene takes place in a Pompeian-style-city – and, more particularly, in a rectangular forum one end of which is occupied by a temple (or a theatre, or something of the same kind), the other sides by various smaller monuments divided by wide, paved roadways. Wallas has no idea where this image comes from. He is talking – sometimes in the middle of the square – sometimes on stairs, long flights of stairs – to people he cannot distinguish from one another but who were at the start clearly characterised and individual. [...]. Immediately, everything has vanished, the people, the stairs, the temple, the rectangular forum and its monuments. He has never seen anything of the kind. (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 230; trans. Howard 1964)

The above fragment illustrates the protagonist's disorientation in the real-imaginary scene which he temporarily witnesses and in which he involuntarily participates. The oppressive, hallucinatory atmosphere of the place and the situation reinforces a mystifying, labyrinthine dimension of Robbe-Grillet's anti-detective narrative.

Robbe-Grillet's novel which purposefully undermines the classic detective story's belief in the world's order, victory of ratiocinative detection, triumph of knowledge and logical reasoning over bedlam and contingency in fact addresses the wider breakdown of faith in the stabilities of social progress, metaphysical presences, and the profundity, unity and significance

of the world (Harrison 2007a: 423-445, Romanillos 2008: 799). Thus, when set beside the process of clarification in the classic detective fiction, *Les Gommès* offers the readers the process of enigmatisation of reality. In the hazy ambience of investigation the central characters do not occupy single, fixed positions but reverse them. Among the main protagonists the figure of Wallas most profusely illustrates the inversion and alteration of roles, being both a detective and a criminal. In this postmodern reworking of the classic detective genre and the Greek tragedy the French author presents, on the example of agent Wallas, the impossibility of constructing single, unique and stable identities, hence his emphasis on depicting the destabilising shift and multiplicity of selfhoods. The dual identity and the inner chaos of the investigator makes him an alienated, marginalised detective devoid of self-confidence, poise and authority.

In the scrutiny of the alteration, exchange and distortion of the identity of the detective, the criminal and the victim in *Les Gommès*, critics like Dey (2013) and Ramsay (1999) raise the motif of voyeurism and invigilation in the author-protagonists-the reader power relations next to the motif of imprisonment in the investigative cell of postmodernism. In the majority of Robbe-Grillet's novels, especially in *Le Voyeur*, *La Jalousie* and *La Reprise*, the theme of watching, imprisonment, violence and murder come to the fore. In his first detective work, the politics of watching, sadism and victimisation, particularly addressed to women, are not as conspicuous as in his subsequent works. Nonetheless, the motifs of voyeurism, incarceration, power and control constitute focal points in the narrative of detection and crime, determining the relations between the protagonists, the narrator and the author. They reflect the postmodern labyrinth entrapping the main figures of the criminal drama.

In *Les Gommès*, exemplifying the metaphysical detective story, the investigator Wallas is incapable of imposing a meaning and unable to provide an explanation of the outside occurrences he is requested to solve and elucidate. As Tani emphasises, in the postmodern detective narrative "reality is so tentacular and full of clues that the detective risks his sanity as he tries to find a solution" (Tani 1984: 76). Similarly to other postmodern crime novels, in Robbe-Grillet's book agent Wallas's activity of authorised watching is seen to be deprived of any kind of revelation (Dey 2013: 15). Following Porter's observation, we may remark that in *Les Gommès*, like in other metaphysical detective stories, the ending offers "neither revelation, and the

relief of a concluded sequence nor, a fortiori, the return of order to a community and confirmation of human mastery” (Porter 1981: 246). Moreover, the critic later describes these postmodern metaphysical or anti-detective narratives as projecting a vision of a maze in the absence of a labyrinth-solving great ratiocinative mind:

If they (the post-modern investigators) find a path through the labyrinth, it is only to discover that the exit is really an entrance, that the labyrinth is no more than a labyrinth within a greater labyrinth. Problem-solving is shown to occur, [...] only within predetermined and therefore artificial limits. [...] There is, perhaps, pattern without design, symptoms without causes, fortuitous order. (Porter 1981: 256)

In Robbe-Grillet’s novel, Wallas is depicted as the authorised investigator and apparently an ordinary person. When set beside the reputable detectives endowed with extraordinary analytical skills and great logical reasoning which triumph over the world of criminal chaos, the position of this French investigator appears marginalised and his power of watching differs markedly from what is frequently seen in the heroic agents of surveillance. As previously emphasised by Porter, Robbe-Grillet’s narrative projects a vision of the labyrinth in the lack of a labyrinth-solving gear logical mind. Hence, it conveys an atmosphere of incertitude and dislocation in Wallas’s investigative jurisdiction. One can notice that this special agent’s authority and power are reduced and conditioned by the narrative as against any outstanding, omnipotent ability (Dey 2013: 16). The protagonist’s mediocrity is exposed in his customary observation of situations and events. His less than perfect status precludes him from penetrating the labyrinth of urban streets, gates, buildings and corridors which overwhelm him.

In *Les Gommages* Robbe-Grillet constructed his first labyrinth where the main character gets constantly lost and finds himself in the same place fortuitously on several occasions which recur. Analogously, the reader navigates through the same maze, finding continuously moments in time that are revisited, narrative paths which are discarded and the pathways to them retraced. This hallucinatory, enigmatic, repetitive climate makes Wallas and the reader paralysed and powerless.

The protagonist’s and the reader’s sense of disorientation and dislocation is enhanced by the narrative design which conveys the atmosphere of alienation and confinement. Paradoxically enough, the hallucinatory effect

enhanced by the narrative derives from its extraordinary clarity, and not from mystery or vagueness. Similarly to Modiano, and especially Kafka, both of whom were obsessed with details and exceptional accuracy combined with the trans-like ambience, Robbe-Grillet underlined that nothing is more fantastic, ultimately than precision. On Wallas's example one may observe that even what the protagonist is searching for disappears due to the obstinacy of his pursuit, his trajectories and movements; they alone are made evident, they alone are made real (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 165; trans. Howard 1964). Moreover, the landscapes and situations presented in this text, as well as in Robbe-Grillet's further novels, produce experiences that *wound* and stupefy the reader. The continuous doubting and an inordinate amount of perspectives to be articulated create nauseating spatial emotions, which both originate from and are productive of a radically unstable "subject" (Romanillos 2008: 813; original emphasis). Although this radically unstable subject determines mostly the narratives of his novels composed during the succeeding, more experimental phase of his literary output, like *Le Voyeur* or *La Jalousie*, it is still the focal point in *Les Gommés*. Similarly to, yet less noticeably than, in the aforementioned works, Robbe-Grillet's first detective novel offers the reader the emergent effects of these fragmented perspectives, depictions and repetitions which produce disturbing sensations.

Then novel's narrative design which incorporates purposeless and repetitive walking denotes the futility of the pursuit which culminates in nothingness and confused reasoning. According to Holquist, this narrative technique is a means to "use as a foil the assumption of detective fiction that the mind can solve all; by twisting the details just the opposite becomes the case" (Holquist 1971: 155). To this end, it can be pointed out that Wallas's quaint and searching winding walks through the city's mean streets do not culminate in sought-after destinations but reverberate to unsolved signs and mysteries that trap eternally the seeker of ontological knowledge (Dey 2013: 16). Like Peter Quinn in Auster's "The City of Glass", Oedipa Mass in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, Guy Roland in Modiano's *Rue des boutiques obscures* or Ambrose Guise in *Quartier perdu*, Wallas gets imprisoned in the labyrinthine interpretative walking and quest indicating only hallucination which questions his sanity. In his relentless pursuit of Dupont's assassin, his meticulous investigation aimed at explaining the arcana of the crime along with his titanic work to prevent the second attempt of murdering his father, Robbe-Grillet's agent becomes gradually disorientated, powerless, incapable

of deciphering arbitrary signs and decrypting hidden messages left in the narrative riddle. Wallas's wandering and his endeavours to watch and decode the signs and inscriptions emerging occasionally in the novel enhances his isolation in the solitary streets. Furthermore, his rationality is seen to get trapped in the illusiveness of the repetitions, circularity and continuity of the puzzle, as visible in the following fragment:

Wallas likes walking. In the cold, early winter air he likes walking straight ahead through this unknown city. He looks around, he listens, he smells the air; this perpetually renewed contact affords him a subtle impression of continuity; he walks on and gradually unrolls the uninterrupted ribbon of his own passage, not a series of irrational, unrelated images, but a smooth band where each element immediately takes its place in the web, even the most fortuitous, even those that might at first seem absurd or threatening or anachronistic or deceptive; they all fall into place in good order, one beside the other, and the ribbon extends without flaw or excess, in time with the regular speed of his footsteps. [...]. It is of his own free will that he is walking toward an inevitable and perfect future. In the past, he has too frequently let himself be caught in the circles of doubt and impotence, now he is walking; he has recovered his continuity here. (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 47-48; trans. Howard 1964)

From the above excerpt it transpires that the inspector initially regards himself as the master of his action, deciding freely about his operations, fully controlling the investigative process, and therefore proceeding towards order, coherence and precision. Nonetheless, Wallas's conviction that his "free will" will lead him toward a "perfect future" is erroneous, and that continuity and rationality with which he believes he has been integrated are contradicted by the circularity of the plot in which he is incarcerated.

Critics such as Ramsay argue that Wallas's disorientation and sense of claustrophobia closely reflect the cell motif that emerges in Robbe-Grillet's first novel and commences to develop in his later oeuvre. The slats of venetian blinds and the geometrical mazes that proliferate as metaphors of scientific investigation serve as metaphors of confinement and obsession. In fact, it is the author's employment of a series of geometries, one of them being a subjectively neutral spatial geometry whilst another constituting imagined spatial geometry, that determines a quality for the imagining subject. Robbe-Grillet dislocates his narratives by means of the superposition of these traditional and new geometries. In *Les Gommages*, where the curve of the new geometries complicates the straight line of Wallas's Euclidean trajectory, it is

imperfect symmetries and small discrepancies that change the investigator (writer, protagonist or reader) into the murderer. Thus, characters' roles and attributes are apparently redistributed or altered (Ramsay 1999: 202). In the book we read that Garinati, the hired assassin, tails Wallas, the agent, until the text indicates "that it is impossible to confuse Garinati any longer with this fiction: another, this evening, will replace him in his task" (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 99; trans. Howard 1964). Hence, the novel's narrative design intends to mystify the reader with regard to revealing the culprit's true identity. In *Les Gommages*, the name "Wallas" reminds Inspector Laurent of the name of the substitution assassin, André V.S. (W.S/V.S), therefore Wallas is twice mistaken for this shadowy second hired murderer. By embodying the Oedipal detective who by chance comes to kill and replace Dupont, the father figure and the homicide victim, the investigator affirms the nonexistence of the crime, only to discover the murderer in himself.

Robbe-Grillet's characters, being in fact mere doubles of their author, additionally fall prey to a *deus ex machina* (Ramsay 1999: 202). The perfectly operating machinery does not solely mirror the perfect crime and the detective genre. Above all, it is a reference to the writer-criminal who dexterously manipulates detective-story conventions in order to finally subvert them. The novelist closely associated with the *nouveau roman* devalues, or even evacuates a psychological and social character shaping the classic detective fiction. Robbe-Grillet situates the main protagonists of his drama – the detective, the murderer and the victim, being in fact the figures of the writer, in a frame that is simultaneously a secret room and a prison (Ramsay 1999: 199). As a place of confinement, a centre of factual and scientific "detecting", as well as a locus of creation, this prison, or a cell constitutes both a privileged topos of the novelist's metaphysical detective fiction and a metaphor of the postmodern.

Furthermore, *Les Gommages* stands in stark contrast to classic detective narratives in which the argumentation and success in solving the crime by the detective depend on his authority of watching and surveillance. In addition, his power legitimises his every single operation and access to almost any uncensored territories (Dey 2013: 17). This happens due to the fact that traditional detectives are supposed to reach the normative expectations that everything is interdependent, every single thing can be comprehended in time and that the detective "keeps moving forward one step at a time, tracking down the extraordinary" (Spanos 1972: 155). Contrastively, Wallas's

inspection of the circumstances of Dupont's murder appears to indicate no definite direction or bear no particular significance in the whole narrative design. It is evident that even after some period of his service in the police department, the protagonist is not offered any favourable position in his act of watching. Instead, he experiences growing alienation and is forced to frequently encounter obstacles which an ordinary citizen faces:

Wallas again considers the isolation of his situation [...]. Standing alone, leaning on a railing, he abandons this support as well as begins walking through the empty streets in the direction he has decided on. Apparently no one is interested in what he is doing: the doors remain closed, no face appears in the windows to watch him pass. Yet his presence on these premises is necessary: no one else is concerned with this murder. It's his own case; they have sent him to solve it.

The commissioner [...], stares at him with astonishment-hostility perhaps-and turns his head away: his role is already over; he has no access, on the other side of the brick walls, to the realm in which this story is happening; the sole purpose of his speeches is to make Wallas feel the virtual impossibility of entering it. But Wallas is confident. Though at first glance the difficulty is even greater for himself – a stranger in this city, and knowing neither its secrets nor its short cuts – he is sure he has not been asked to come here for nothing: [...], he will unhesitatingly advance toward his goal. (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 66-67; trans. Howard 1964)

As visible in the excerpt above, Wallas fully realises the hopelessness of his work situation, the futility of his efforts to solve the murder case, particularly his superior's condescending attitude toward his presence and any initiatives undertaken by him in the investigative process. The protagonist's failure as an investigator is also enhanced on the narrative level: it is the very author that denies Wallas access to the "crime story" he aspires to present and whose arcana he endeavours to explain. Being the character in the novel, even the main one, the agent has a single role to assume. Once he fulfils this role, the author decides to change his status by denying him any privileged position the protagonist enjoyed previously. As we read in the Epilogue, Wallas gets dismissed from the case of Dupont's murder after unintentionally committing the crime meticulously prepared by the author. Analogously to Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, Modiano's *Rue de boutiques obscures* or Borges's "Death and the Compass" in which the narrators and the main characters are refused access to the criminal case or are killed by the author, in

Les Gommès, agent Wallas becomes removed from the investigation as soon as the author decides his fate.

Nevertheless, from the foregoing fragment it also transpires that the protagonist-investigator tenaciously fights for his position in the criminal case and simultaneously in the narrative. By accentuating his self-confidence and poise as well as stating that his presence is indispensable in the investigative process, Wallas aspires to an enviable position of the British classic detective or American private eye saturating hard-boiled crime fiction. Although his fate of an agent and the character in the narrative is sealed by the author, Wallas steadfastly refuses, almost to the end, to surrender to the commissioner and the almighty author. It is this struggle between the main character and the author, or the clash between traditional and postmodern models of the detective genre that *Les Gommès* inaugurates. Moreover, when set beside the novels of Robbe-Grillet's second phase, fully reflecting the tenets of the *nouveau roman* and characterised by the writer and his critic as "subjective" rather than "objective", where the detective project becomes less explicit, more complex and self-conscious, *Les Gommès* is a transitional book clearly depicting the detective plot with yet a subversive denouement and a still "human" facet of the protagonist-investigator's struggle for esteem and recognition.

However, the defeat of the main character vividly illustrates Robbe-Grillet's departure not solely from the conventions of the classic detective story but also from the principles of the "objective", realistic writing which brings into prominence the godlike, omniscient narrator and the traditional protagonist – a hero believing the world is there to be conquered and controlled. On the example of Wallas's case it can be noticed that the authorised gaze through which the traditional detective narrative exposes truth and order turns out to be erratic and opaque. His vigilance is neither regarded as omnipotent nor omniscient; in addition, he lacks any superhuman ability (Dey 2013: 18).

The dual identity and the internal chaos of the main character closely mirrors the enigmatic narrative intention of designing a murder which purportedly never occurs and where even the assassin Garinati is not convinced whether his bullet hit Dupont fatally. The fact that the newspaper includes the information about Dupont's decease in fact comes as a surprise to the killer who states: "'It must be a mistake', [...] 'I only wounded him'" (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 98; trans. Howard 1964). In this context, the narrative

design of engaging a surveillance of a non-existent crime which ultimately turns abortive with the investigator being watched attempts to establish a negative hermeneutics of power where “authority” is transfigured into the “victim” (Dey 2013: 18). It can be observed that the narrative erases the distinction between the detective and the culprit through the evidence of the drunk who claims that he already knows Wallas since the former evening and that he had desired to murder him: “[...] yes, he met Wallas yesterday at nightfall, leaving this very café; he followed him, caught up with him and accompanied him, despite Wallas’s unfriendliness; the latter was wearing a pale-grey felt hat slightly too big for him and a tight raincoat with a small L-shaped rip on the ‘right’ shoulder” (Robbe-Grillet 1953: 116; trans. Howard 1964). In this respect, it can be pointed out that only several paragraphs before, the narrative acknowledges the fact that the drunk tails a tall man wearing a raincoat too tight for him and a pale-grey felt hat with the raincoat having a slight L-shaped rip on the “left” shoulder. Therefore, the situation can be regarded as the narrative design of creating an almost immaterial suspect as the agent’s presumed double and mirror image (Dey 2013: 8). The detective is considered to be isolated and removed from his familiar role of watching the culprit while in fact he turns a subject of supervision himself. The narrative objective of overthrowing the authorised role, in the case of Robbe-Grillet’s novel, the privileged status of the main character-detective, can be explicated by what Spanos discusses in his essay:

[...] the post-modern strategy of de-composition exists to generate [...] pity and terror: to disintegrate, to atomize rather than to create a community. In the more immediate language of existentialism, it exists to generate anxiety or dread: to dislodge the tranquilized individual from the “at-home of publicness”, from the domesticated, the scientifically charted and organized familiarity of the totalized world, [...] (Spanos 1972: 155)

In *Les Gommès*, each character plays up the role of another: inspector Wallas becomes involuntarily an assassin, eventually replacing Garinati, a would-be killer, whilst Dupont, an alleged victim, becomes an unwitting accomplice of his own murder. Hence, the positions of all the main actors of this drama turn out to be neither unique nor stable. Robbe-Grillet’s narrative purposefully entangles the identities of the murderer, the victim and the investigator, which, in view of Atwood (1983: 30), could be successively attributed to the roles of the writer, the reader and the critic. In this regard *Les Gommès*

accurately reflects the tenets of the metaphysical detective story which, by subverting such traditional detective story conventions as narrative closure and the detective's role as surrogate reader, intends to ask questions about mysteries of being and knowing and makes us aware of another world outside the text.

From the above analysis it can be concluded that, contrary to formal detective narratives, in Robbe-Grillet's postmodern text, the innocence, harmony and order of the community world are restored through the narrative design and intention of preconditioning the absolute power of surveillance to the dominant figure of the detective. The concepts of truth and knowledge, along with the notion of the official and non-official, are redefined by rejecting the standard notional labels. To this end, it can be noticed that the evidently innocent victim Dupont could in fact be the initiator of the hoax of his death in which he engages the state authority represented by the leader Roy-Dauzet. The fact that the potential victim becomes the conspirator, whilst the intended investigator turns out to be the killer, proves that order and discipline can be thwarted whereas power can be wielded by anyone gaining access to watching. On the example of the main characters it can be reasoned that Daniel Dupont's feigned death and a secret eye that follows Wallas entangle him in a web of plots. By depicting Wallas as the final scapegoat in the whole mystery of Dupont's murder, the narrative resolves to corroborate the fact that the power of watching no longer constitutes the independent apparatus of authority and order.

4.4.2. Double agents and counterespionage: exploration of identity in *La Reprise*

Perhaps identity, like hell, was merely other people.

(Patricia Highsmith, *Those Who Walk Away* 1967)

Similarly to *Les Gommages*, *La Reprise* is regarded as a postmodernist detective story, specifically, a postmodern variant of the espionage genre. The novel, written over fifty years after the publication of Robbe-Grillet's first book, and following eight years of the silence of the "Pape de *Nouveau Roman*" ("the "Pope of the *New Novel*") (Contat 2008), emerged to great anticipation in France and was marked as a "founding text" for the twenty-first century

literature. In the opinion of a number of critics and scholars, such as Betsy (2002) and Abramov (2008), *La Reprise* constitutes a cross between the espionage genre tradition and the theoretical issues postulated by the *nouveau roman*. With reference to Merivale and Sweeney's 1999 tentative genealogy of the metaphysical detective story, according to which Robbe-Grillet's works, next to Auster's and Modiano's novels, are examined, *Les Gommages* falls into the category of the Poe-to-Auster minimalist, labyrinthine line in which plural identities are reduced into one (centripetal-directing towards the centre), whilst the French novelist's other works, like *La Maison de rendez-vous* and *Projet pour une révolution à New York*, are part of the maximalist line which is carnivalesque in mode, maximalist in style, and centrifugal in structure (moving towards a periphery and accentuating proliferation of identities) (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 19). Owing to the transitional character of *La Reprise*, highlighting multiplied identities searching for their doubles and being lost in the textual maze, the work could be classified as a melange of the minimalist and the maximalist type of the metaphysical detective story, with yet a predominance of the minimalist elements bringing into focus labyrinth and quest in lieu of carnival, and underlining plural identities reduced to two instead of their multiplication.

Taking into account Merivale and Sweeney's categorisation of the metaphysical detective story as well as other critics' classification of *La Reprise* in the category of the espionage novel, one could clearly see that Robbe-Grillet's work abounds with gaps, inconsistencies and non sequiturs, built deliberately into the plot, such as incomplete disclosure and delayed resolutions, which make the hero remain finally unknowable and contradictory. This "generic defect" (Fletcher 1983: 25) reflects the novel's extending the boundary between the classic and postmodern crime fiction, particularly, espionage novel, and, more visibly, overstepping the boundary between detective fiction, myth and psychoanalysis. Regarding these intentional gaps in the labyrinthine, trancelike plot of *La Reprise*, critics like Wood (2008) point to the extra "unreliable unreliability", which he coins in another context. As opposed to most first-person unreliability which is reliably unreliable, we could claim that Robbe-Grillet's double unreliability – or unreliable unreliability, as will be further demonstrated – is enigmatic to the extent in which its only quality is attributed to its aesthetic effect, its "magic words" as Chandler puts it (Chandler 1981: 27, 59). On the other hand, this kind of unreliability of narration actually empties the plot of its

mysterious effect, since it serves as an inherent self-destructing element, a shock effect, which, rather than bewildering, proves to be principally entertaining or even impressive with its sheer intellectual refinement but it offers nothing more in terms of content (Abramov 2008: 171). This further view would arrive at a conclusion that in its feeding – “parasite-like, as so many post-modern creations do” – on a degenerated archetype of a popular genre, the new imitation novel converts its decay “into a new if somewhat fetid brilliance” (Fletcher 1983: 26).

This distinction between the ways in which the novel applies to the question of the genre, especially in the case of Robbe-Grillet's work, constitutes a division between what could be simply defined as the “modernist” and the “post-modernist” modes of literature's connection with the genre. Evidently, *La Reprise* falls into neither side of this divide, though its author has been considered by some theorists as the last esteemed representative of the modernist kind of detective fiction, or, alternatively as an outspoken advocate of the postmodernist variant of the genre (this could be Blanchot's interpretation of Robbe-Grillet)³². When inspecting closely *La Reprise*'s relationship to the detective story, specifically, to the espionage genre, the French writer seems immune to this taxonomy, as previously shown. While reading his work, both effects could be encountered simultaneously and the novel both feeds on the genre for an aesthetic effect and enables it to broaden it by introducing novel plot into it, by expanding it as genre.

Significantly enough, *La Reprise* is built upon a void, in particular, narratorial vacuity, which constitutes the centre line around which the novel's relationship to the genre to which it contributes and which it contests is organised. The main character of the book, the speaking “je”, Henri Robin, enigmatically states in the novel's Prologue's opening paragraph: “Here, then, I repeat, and I sum up” (Robbe-Grillet 2001:1; trans. Howard 2003). Thus, the haunting quality of the speaking I is inaugurated not only at the outset of the novel but prior to it since the beginning, it announces, is already a repetition. The reader is initially left reflecting on the identity of the speaking “je”, the act of narration, the idea of the repetition and its link with detection and spying. This mystifying “I”, the “je” of the *Prologue*, turns out to be even more dubious when, from the very beginning of the novel the authority of his voice and the

³² See: Blanchot, Maurice. (1980). *L'écriture du desastre*. Paris: Gallimard.

validity of his statements are called into question, by means of a variety of techniques, largely literary, formal ones³³.

The speaking “je” of *La Reprise*, similarly to the amnesiac narrator of *Travels in the Scriptorium* and the highly confused protagonist of *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, functions as an unreliable narrator. However, as opposed to Auster’s and Modiano’s homogeneous though wavering narrators, struggling to control and bring order to their narratives, the unreliability of the book’s speaking “I” is attributed to the fact that he exists in the text only in relation to an *Other* speaker, his double. The protagonist’s and simultaneously narrator’s double is given a voice and a stage in the footnotes. Recapturing the scarred post-war eastern-German landscape of the train journey in the Prologue, the footnotes apparently disfigure the text, splitting it up (Abramov 2008: 163; original emphasis). In the course of reading the text, we notice that some of the footnotes play the standard scientific, or academic role: they elaborate on, broaden, or call attention to what is in the text’s body. Nonetheless, their vast majority are at variance with the voice of the speaker, using a contentious and conspicuously patronising tone. Interestingly enough, for the most part the body text and the footnotes vie for ascendancy, for the reader’s assessment of the full and “true” version of events.

As for the footnotes, accounted, as it is revealed later, by Henri Robin’s (twin) brother, Walther, they commence by undermining Robin’s assertions, alleging they are historically and graphically imprecise. Adopting a scientific and condescending tone, they provide an academically corroborative account of Robin’s mistakes (“The narrator, himself unreliable... here commits a slight error”) (Robbe-Grillet 2001: 17; trans. Howard 2003), by correcting, for instance, his statements about Franz Kafka’s time spent in Berlin alongside Søren Kierkegaard’s visit to the city. Later, however, footnotes referring to the espionage plot, portray Robin as deliberately lying about details in his secret agent’s report, such as the type of the gun used in the murder, or the position of Kreuzberg in the French Zone (Robbe-Grillet 2001: 17, 18, 24).

It is only in the second half of the book that the identity of the footnotes’ speaker is disclosed (Robbe-Grillet 2001: 89). It is then that Walther for the first time uses the “je”, to remark on the twins’ shared bedroom and further

³³ As we can see, the whole prologue is narrated in the first-person; the shift from the first- to the third-person narration occurs in the “first” chapter, the novel’s “First Day”.

aspects of the family love affair with which Robin, now named Markus, having left home at such a young age, is unacquainted. This sudden and radical alteration of the narrative perspective, in which the second speaker with his point of view comes to the fore, disorients the reader, forcing him/her to question the validity of Robin alias Markus's narrative to which he/she has been so far accustomed. Needless to say, the reader's confusion proves to be even greater when, at the moment in which Walther's identity as the "reliable" narrator is exposed, his own relations of his sadomasochistic paedophilic outings, especially his kidnap and rape of Gigi, his half sister, or possibly daughter, present him in a less than honourable light. Taking into account Markus's recurrent sleeping spells, narcotizing, overall purposelessness and weakness of character on the one hand, and Walther's moral degeneration and overconfidence on the other hand, we gradually oppugn both speakers' credibility.

By questioning the two narrators' trustworthiness and their ability to control the narrative text, we are confronted by the dilemma regarding the speakers' authority over truth and the identity of the author who is supposed to have the final word in the text. Even if, as the novel shows at the end, he remains the only narrative voice, the problem of narrative authority is far from being solved, since after Walther's death Markus assumes his identity, yet he retains his own reporting voice (Abramov 2008: 164). As a matter of fact the struggle for dominance and truth is waged with regard to traditional textual topography and its concomitant assumptions; the readers are used to identifying the body text as presenting the main argument, whilst the footnotes serve as mere support. Nevertheless, the kind of continuous contentious commentary in the footnotes of the book leaves us puzzled. In his/her search for the narrative credibility which would help him/her to encode the hidden central message in the novel, the reader ought to assume the pre-existence of some agreement between these two voices, some form of understanding that allows them, despite their fierce (sibling) rivalry, to share the space on the page. However, it is this contract, actually reflecting the inseparability of their co-existence, that is closely linked to the figure of authority that constructs and determines these relationships, namely the author of this very duplicity.

Considering miscellaneous readings of *La Reprise*, including the psychoanalytical interpretation, the unreliable double narrator functions as a passing visitor who witnesses his private consciousness that becomes

subjected to the dictates of the novel's imaginary universe (Morrisette 1975: 86). With respect to the detective story rules, being a point of departure for the analysis of Robbe-Grillet's work, the narratorial doubleness and his problematic subjectivity mirror a void which in fact constitutes the centre line around which the novel's relationship to the espionage genre to which it contributed and which it subverts is organised. One cannot fail to notice that in Robbe-Grillet's book, the secret agent's task, being the quintessence of a generic espionage plot, is missing ("And what is my mission to be, from now on?") (Robbe-Grillet 2001: 25; trans. Howard 2003). Robin's only instruction consists in observing the death of a man who we in due course are led to presume is his father. Besides passive witnessing, this spy has no mission to perform. Paradoxically enough, Robin is left without any task in Berlin, the unrivalled espionage capital, despite possessing all necessary "espionage equipment", such as false passports, several identities and an operator. Ultimately, facing the absence of any order save the command to disappear (30), Robin starts to follow his own track only to later discover that he is tailing his double who had actually devised for it to be so.

Analogously to *Les Gommages*, presenting a pseudo-investigative hide-and-seek game between a confused inspector Wallas, his superior, Daniel Dupont and a disorientated reader, we are lost in *La Reprise*'s labyrinthine espionage plot. In fact, both novels, progressively evidencing the analogy between the process of investigation or espionage and the pursuit of one's double, reflect back on the detective and espionage genres, expanding their realm. In fact, the books' employment of the motif of the double and the "doubling" technique, conspicuous especially in the latter, is part of Robbe-Grillet's method to break away from the detective genre's enclosure (Abramov 2008: 175). Hence, *Les Gommages* and *La Reprise*, the novelist's works most visibly dealing with the theme of espionage, investigation and doubleness, constitute counter-espionage novels, postmodern variants of the espionage genre or metaphysical mystery novels.

The scrutiny of the double identity of the spying subject in Robbe-Grillet's 2001 counter-espionage novel is inextricably connected with the examination of tragedy and psychoanalysis, both cultural paradigms the writer had declared obsolete in the past. By incorporating them both, he aesthetically feeds on their crucial contribution and simultaneously exposes them to potential derision. In his usage of tragedy and psychoanalysis, Robbe-Grillet creates his own phase of the counter-espionage genre, and its new

model of double agent. As Abramov (2008: 176) emphasises, the novelist's inclusion of both the mythic and the psychoanalytic creates an Echenozian ironic distance, or a Brechtian alienation. This is clearly illustrated, as evidenced in the previous sections (3.4.2 and 4.4.1), in his extensive reference to the story of Oedipus. *La Reprise* invariably alludes to Sophocles' tragedy, most importantly, in the opening of the narrative with a statement of repetition which may well be interpreted as a return to the ancient text. However, considering the nature of the repetition which is non linear, the novel's reconfiguration of the myth is so unreliable that it makes it dubious as a method for interpretation.

While examining *La Reprise's* relationship to *Oedipus Rex*, it is worth referring to the protagonists' names and their functions, both in Sophocles' tragedy and Robbe-Grillet's novel. The first of them is Jo Kast, whose name is evocative of Jocasta, yet she is actually reminiscent of Phaedra since she sleeps with her twin step sons, being perfectly aware of their role in this family romance. Subsequently, Gigi, whose name Walther explains in the footnotes, derives from the old Prussian name Gegenecke, assumes the role of the Greek Antigone. Regarding the book's further links with the ancient text, we later read that Walther, analogously to Ascher, has an affair with Jo Kast, their younger step mother, and, at the novel's end he marries her. Nonetheless, this obvious Oedipal allusion is brought to naught since Ascher admits to doing so in order to justify his romance with her daughter.

As for the father-son relationship, being paramount in *Oedipus Rex's* reading of *La Reprise*, in the novel we learn that Markus (Ascher) does not know his father, in spite of the fact that he recollects that as a child he used to come to Berlin to seek "family relatives". Although the contact he comes to establish with the von-Brücke family appears to him arbitrary, the reader is informed by Walther (in the footnotes) that his meeting these family members is by no means accidental. According to his relation, Walther, being partially blind from a war injury, is on the secret service pay roll and has arranged for Markus to be involved in Danny von-Brücke's murder. In fact, in the universe of *La Reprise*, it is Walther that wields the power of destiny by being accountable for the fateful, allegedly chance meeting between father and son. Thus, Markus embodies the "Sphinx", which is also the name of the night club in which Gigi works, and in which he is managing the business, yet, contrary to the finalization of the mythical creature's destiny's plan, his devious scheme is thwarted (Abramov 2008: 178). To take the analogy

between Robbe-Grillet's novel and the ancient text further, the two brothers personify not only different aspects of Oedipus himself but also of his sons, Eteocles and Polynices, whose battle over Thebes can be won by only one of them. When Walther strives to murder Markus in his hotel room, the latter, nearly escaping death, admits that "one of us two is one too many in this story" (Robbe-Grillet 2001: 155, 221; trans. Howard 2003). As a result of the duel, none of them is being killed, however, Gigi's intervention pulls this through: similarly to Antigone's action, she supports Markus/Polynices, the outsider, and Robbe-Grillet's book ends by killing Walther/Eteocles, the insider who preserves family values.

The study of this brotherly rivalry and the patricide leads us to the use of Oedipus in its psychoanalytic reading of *La Reprise*. In fact, the "psychoanalytic" facet of the Oedipal story as it is presented in the novel reflects the hostility between the two brothers, a "fierce rivalry", according to the police inspector, "of an openly Oedipal character" (Robbe-Grillet 2001: 149, 213; trans. Howard 2003). It has been argued that the rivalry between the brothers could be interpreted as a reflection of the tension between the Sophoclean and the Freudian versions of the story (Abramov 2008: 178). In view of this reading, Ascher stands for the Sophoclean brother, removed from the family circle in childhood and deemed dead. Destined to rejoin the family without his knowledge, Ascher, like Oedipus, endeavours to investigate the circumstances of the homicide he witnesses unknowing that the dead man is his father. However, Walther's version of the story adheres to the Freudian scheme, as he falls in love with Jo Kast, a mother figure who is his father's spouse and bears a strong resemblance to his own mother from the childhood. While further studying the Freudian reading of Robbe-Grillet's work, we come to notice that Walther vies for her sexual favours with his "detestable" father, Danny von Brücke, for whose murder he manipulates Markus to be accountable to allow him to conquer the mother and remain intact.

Repetition of the tragic and psychoanalytic versions of the Oedipus story greatly contributes to the building of meaning in the novel which represents a counter-genre-novel (Abramov 2008: 179), specifically a counter-espionage novel, a *nouveau roman* espionage novel, or a metaphysical variant of the detective story. As stated in the preceding section, "the name of Oedipus has passed into the language to designate those who can solve enigmas and obscure questions" (Rey-Debove and Rey 2006: 1769). The necessity to repeat the Oedipal way of solving the riddle in *La Reprise* next to

the repetition of the fateful actions in the plot make the reader advance in their interpretative desire and self-evident literary clues leading inevitably to the anti-climactic closure. As a matter of fact, instead of helping to form a coherent interpretative narrative structure, the reader faces the lack of simple correlation between the prior versions of the story and this new one. The strictly Oedipal nature of the von-Brücke family history fails to contribute to resolve its enigmas, making them, instead, more impenetrable and ambiguous.

As Robbe-Grillet had frequently argued in his theoretical works, the history of the novel had gained an accumulated meaning over time, a constricting framework of signification. In this novel's structure, it is possible for characters to obtain comprehensibility only by creating an appearance of profundity and in consequence ambiguity, the last of which the French author calls "doubling". As the novelist further claims, this indispensable tragic structure, which he actually ridicules, had become the requirement of meaning in contemporary literature. According to Robbe-Grillet:

Everything I contaminated... It seems, though that the favourite domain of tragedy is the narrative complication, the Romanesque. From all mistress-turned nuns to all detective-gangsters, by way of all tormented criminals, all pure-souled prostitutes, all the just men constrained by conscience to injustice, all the sadists driven by love, all the madmen pursued by logic, a good 'character' in a novel must above all be double. (Robbe-Grillet 1963: 62; trans. Howard 1989)

In the light of the writer's above statement, the truly convincing literary characters are the ones endowed with ambivalence, incoherence and double-sidedness. Indeed, this ambivalence, or double-sidedness, in Robbe-Grillet's view, determines the contemporary meaning of tragedy.

With regard to the above assertion, *La Reprise* aims at "repeating" an archetypal tragedy and simultaneously eschewing the contemporary configuration of what tragedy had become in the modern novel, an evolution the novelist ideologically deprecates. More significantly, doubling, or rather counter-doubling, is the technique he uses so as to produce this effect. The protagonists in *La Reprise*, being not characters in the traditional sense, are not, in fact, ambiguous. They are devoid of depth and therefore cannot have internal contradictions. Having no "personality", they cannot be ambivalent. Since they have no effect, it would be difficult to regard them as having a psychology of the kind which provides the "old" type of doubling. Instead, the

novelist really doubles them. Hence, we encounter two, or even three such un-double-able characters instead of one (Abramov 2008: 181).

The idea of the double and doubleness, reflecting the process of the proliferation of identities, leads us inevitably to the examination of the relationship between the characters, the author and the reader. As pointed out before, the reader is lost in the labyrinthine counter-espionage plot presented in *La Reprise*, and struggles to understand the mechanism and acts of espionage performed by the protagonists. Interestingly enough, in Robbe-Grillet's novel, there are not only two but in fact three un-double-able characters, three narrators, the third one being the author who acts as a passing visitor or a traveller. As Robin relates his return to the current manuscript after a break:

And so I am returning to that manuscript after a whole year... only a few days after the destruction of a notable part of my life, finding myself in Berlin after another cataclysm, under another name, assigned a false occupation and carrying several false passports and performing an enigmatic mission always on the verge of collapsing, nevertheless continuing to struggle in the midst of doublings, ineffable apparitions, recurrent images in reiterating mirrors. (Robbe-Grillet 2001: 82; trans. Howard 2003)

The above citation graphically illustrates the very author visiting his text, analogously to Hitchcock's cameo appearances on his movie sets. Robbe-Grillet is inserting a short passage of what a traditional version of a narrative-autobiography would read like, a convention of writing the self he had objected to for many years of his literary output (Abramov 2008: 166). Needless to say, the author's intrusion, his attempting to follow tradition does not last long. With his double passport, Robbe-Grillet "finds himself in Berlin" joined by Boris Wallon/Henri Robin who "at this moment" keeps going his own way. Significantly enough, "at this time", referring to 1949, the book's narrative time, and to 2000, the time of Robbe-Grillet's writing the novel in Normandy, the writer visualises being a secret agent on a patricidal search, killing the tradition of which he temporarily forms part, conquered by an instantaneous seduction, to reveal a "real" self.

In *Pour un Nouveau Roman* (1964), Robbe-Grillet announced: "Je n'en jamais parlé d'autre chose que de moi"/"I never talked about anything other than me" (Robbe-Grillet 1985; translation mine). In the light of this declaration, *La Reprise* could be considered part of this autobiographical literary project.

In an interview he gave for the *Magazine littéraire* around the time the novel was published, he announced the book “autobiographical”, or, as he added, no less so than the *Romanesques* – the three-volume autobiographical enterprise which preceded it (Robbe-Grillet 2001: 21; original emphasis).

In view of this wide-ranging concept of the *nouveau roman* idea of an “autobiography”, as encompassing the “imaginary”, alternative possible lives as they are revealed in one’s literary work to be a crucial part of one’s real autobiography, it is worth returning to the examination of the three first-person speaking voices in *La Reprise*. The co-speaking of a number of “I”s in this novel addresses the question that is essential to its form of study: from its outset, *La Reprise*, even when it uses the first person, discards the myth of the “I” as a homogeneous and lasting totality. Although the author speaks of himself, the self, being his preoccupation, remains essentially “other”, a subjectivity that never accepts the claim of direct connection between cause and effect in the traditional Bildungsroman story of the self. This theorem has a specific function in the context of *La Reprise* as a *nouveau roman* espionage novel. Abramov (2008: 168) puts forward a hypothesis about a contiguity between the author and the display of his “other life”, that of the secret agent, here the emphasis being laid on the potentiality that unlocks doubleness. The novel suggests not one’s life as a secret agent, but one’s imaginary creative oeuvre as a space of imagination and play occupied by double-agents, speaking with the voice of a wavering author. There are three “je”s combined together in *La Reprise*, constituting the same autobiography, with its both real events and imaginary ones which are and should be regarded as real. In fact, no ontological divide exists between authors and characters since imaginary and real are part and parcel of the same story (Abramov 2008: 168). The critic’s assertion is supported by the novelist himself who states in the Epigraph: “I don’t want to be bothered with eternal complaint about inexact and contradictory details. This report is concerned with objective reality, not with some so-called historical truth”. (Robbe-Grillet 2001; trans. Howard 2003). Indeed, this expansion of possibilities of the “objective reality” of the imagination which the writer strongly advocates in his theoretical writings turns into the double life of the secret agent. In *La Reprise*, the double agent constitutes a literary creation, or a product, as well as the creator of reality, a story, or literature. Hence, he embodies a secret agent and an author.

La Reprise is a vivid illustration of the doubleness of the speaking “I” and the espionage tradition. In the course of reading the book one can see

a correlation between the acts of espionage and the chase of one's double which takes the form of "repeated" identification between the spy, his twin brother and the intruding author himself. Indeed, the proximity in the narrative between the absence where "a task" should have been carried out (as has been noticed, Robin has no mission to accomplish, no task to fulfil), and the traumatically conquered landscape of Normandy designing the act of writing itself, makes such an analogy apparent. The missing task of the spy corresponds to the absence steering the act of writing, both of which send the spy/author on a journey resulting in his uncovering his double and becoming complicit in his father's murder. The agents of the plot, both the literary and the secret ones, are double and doubled. They are double due to their loyalty to more than one authority and their simultaneous reporting to more than one receiver. At the same time they are doubled because their motivation is attributed to contrasting drives, like concealment and display, tradition and the break from it, or its challenging, the desire to have the father and to murder him. They speak present alternative narratives and speak from distinct locations on the page, and, above all, they vie for the authenticity of the "je" (Abramov 2008: 174).

From the above examination we may deduce that the link the novel establishes between the "double" and "doubled" enables us to understand the relation between the central void and the book's relationship to the genre: the lack of the spy's task or genuine mission allows the plenitude of aesthetic aims and speaking voices. Since *La Reprise* exemplifies a counter-espionage novel, its relationship to the espionage genre ought to be adequately called a counter-relationship, wherein counter signifies not opposition but "dependent and other". Robbe-Grillet's response to the genre of espionage with a time, by definition unrepeatable (since it will never be part of a genre) counter-espionage novel is the one which is dependent on the existing tradition and rules that oppose them. The novel uses the author's double as a double agent. Provided that the author's task which consists in creating and narrating the mystery of the absence or void constituting, according to Robbe-Grillet, a generator of the text, and the spy's task which involves chasing the double and unearthing the secret of patricide, are identical or parallel, then we might assume the author is indeed a double agent, in his secret service designation. As has been demonstrated so far, the secret of *La Reprise* is evidenced in doubling as countering, more specifically, doubling the genre without repeating it, basing on it without making it absurd, using its

tradition not solely to derive aesthetic pleasure. It is the potentiality of this counter-relationship that permits Robbe-Grillet to reflect back on the genre of espionage, or a detective story in general, and extend its territory.

4.5. Conclusion

From the above analysis it transpires that the themes of incarceration, the hyperreal locked room, power hierarchies, duplicity and empty narration closely reflect Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's rumination on the labyrinthine and highly ambiguous nature of identity, as evidenced in their novels. In their works delineating various forms of authorial and narrative oppression, alienation and existential angst, the writers, especially Auster and Modiano, highlight the significance of the characters' and narrators' struggle, though an unsuccessful one, to build their identity and autonomy. On the other hand, as illustrated in Robbe-Grillet's experimental narrative structure, the characters are doomed to fail in their investigative quest, becoming subjected to the dictates of their authors and the requirements of the novels' imaginary universes. Needless to say, irrespective of Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's different attitudes towards their protagonists and the narrative world they present, in their depiction of double, exchanged and multiple identities, the three novelists reflect the shared view on destabilisation of identities in the postmodern detective story where the figures of the detective, the criminal and the victim are interwoven and where the reader becomes complicit in the narrative conspiracy neatly organised and suddenly exposed by the author. Furthermore, all the four works, particularly *Travels in the Scriptorium*, *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* and *La Reprise*, invite alternative interpretations and a constantly open dialogue between the author, narrative subjects and the reader. As exemplary postmodern variants of detective fiction, representing Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's mature metaphysical mystery and crime novels, the books stress the fluid relations between the defeated sleuth, the writer-cum-amateur private investigator, the missing person and the disorientated reader as well as raising in-depth issues about the characteristics of reality, interpretation, the limitations of knowledge, subjectivity, and narrative.

Conclusion

Reading is a majority skill but a minority art. Yet nothing can replace the exact, complicated, subtle communion between absent author and entranced, present reader.

(Julian Barnes, *A Life with Books* 2012)

Beginning my conclusions with this citation from Julian Barnes's well-known book, I wish to underline the role of the reader as a key component of any literature, detective fiction in particular. In postmodern detective fiction, the status of the reader by all means corresponds to that of the author's; it is the reader that commences providing the meaning of the story and fulfilling any textual lacunae as soon as the author stops writing. This book, devoted to postmodern crime literature, has shown that these lacunae, gaps, loopholes and narrative breaks constitute the essence of the reading process.

The analytical frameworks applied in this book dedicated to spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths are to a large extent based on my reading of North American and French critical discourses. Thus, the responsibility for any possible deformation is entirely mine. I do hope, nonetheless, that this American-French perspective, extended into Anglophone, Italian and Hispanic crime critical studies, might foreground some aspects of the examined texts and therefore contribute to transformative reflection.

There is no denying that the present monograph dedicated to Paul Auster's, Patrick Modiano's and Alain Robbe-Grillet's texts, preceded by crucial theoretical assumptions about the metaphysical detective story, principally in the context of space, time and identity, being three distinctive elements of the story's rhizome labyrinth, invites further and broader discussion on postmodern detective fiction. I hope my book will contribute to further systematic analysis of the condition and function of contemporary

prose and the role of a writer in the face of existential distress, next to chaos and entropy in postmodern critical thoughts at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Reading the metaphysical detective story in the contexts of existentialist ideas, especially the problem of identity and self, the limits of knowledge and the nature of existence, as well as in the contexts of spatial/textual and temporal maze allows me to accentuate the multifariousness and ambiguity of this genre and to offer an alternative reading of the crime genre that brings its transgressive, cryptic nature and ambivalent reading into focus.

Although the present book has focussed predominantly on the existential angst of the protagonists, ontological and epistemological uncertainty and insecurity reflected in Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's novels, such a perspective is by no means the only accepted interpretation of the American and French works. Similarly to a rhizome structured around multiple roots and infinite possibilities, postmodern detective fiction offers manifold, at times contradictory, reading potentialities. Thus, a relatively pessimistic, at times distorted and nauseating, vision of the life and world that I outlined on the basis of my reading of the American and French novels and crucial theoretical assumptions underlined by prominent scholars and critics could be broadened to a more optimistic, spiritual or even humorous insight into their texts. Nonetheless, such an interpretation of Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's works, as well as other postmodern detective story writers, requires separate extensive research studies.

It is worth underlying that the examination of the metaphysical detective story, its theoretical background and major constituents, which preceded the scrutiny of spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths in the eight selected American and French texts, encompassed the theories of miscellaneous critics and scholars, most notably Patricia Merivale, Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, Michael Holquist, Michael Cook, Jeanne Ewert, Stephen Bernstein and others. Nevertheless, the analysis only partly included other innovative approaches to detective fiction of such authors as Antoine Dechéne and Elana Gomel. The work by Dechéne, having established the "metacognitive mystery tale" which illustrates a corpus of texts depicting undecipherable mysteries subverting traditional detective story conventions and offering a multiplicity of motifs, like the overwhelming presence of chance, the unfulfilled quest for knowledge or the urban stroller lost in a labyrinthine text, undoubtedly generates a vast array of epistemological and ontological uncertainties and

thus constitutes an invaluable contribution to a new and innovative reading of detective fiction. However, the reason for the lack of inclusion of this critic in this monograph is twofold. Firstly, Dechêne distinguishes the metaphysical detective fiction from the mystery story, the latter coming under scrutiny. Secondly, when set beside all the previously-mentioned critics, most visibly Merivale, Sweeney and Cook who focus on the late 19th-century, 20th-century and 21st-century detective fiction novelists, the French critic brings into prominence only 19th and 20th century writers which significantly narrows the research field into the classic and modernist detective novels (apart from chapter five dedicated to Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*). As for my perfunctory glance at Elana Gomel, it is crucial to state that her essay is a substantial contribution to the postmodern mystery, especially her analysis of the "ontological detective story". On the other hand, however, one cannot fail to notice reading the critic's text particularly in the light of the notions of apocalypse, utopia and globalisation, which in turn constitutes another chapter in the critical examination of crime and science fiction³⁴.

Moreover, in the study of critical approaches to metaphysical detective fiction, particularly French detective novel after World War II, the context of French-American detective genre influences and complex relations has not come under exhaustive critical examination in this monograph due to several main reasons. Firstly, as previously remarked, a relatively small number of French detective fiction critical studies have been conducted in recent years which reflects the angst over the cultural legitimacy of the genre and its critical evaluation. In fact, many a distinguished postmodern French writer, such as Georges Perec, Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Patrick Modiano and Didier Daeninkx, recurrently employ detective fiction elements though subverting its formulas, however, they usually refuse to be labelled as detective or crime literature novelists. Hence, the scarcity of a thorough critical evaluation of such texts under the category of detective fiction studies. Added to that, as pointed out in the present monograph, various critics and scholars, among others Deleuse (1991), Mesplède (1992-1995), Peltier (1998), Gorrara (2003) and Platten (2011), assess predominantly the social and political impact of detective fiction, especially its postmodernist variant, making a perfunctory analysis of its aesthetics and accentuating political

³⁴ See: Kim, Julie H. (ed.) (2020). *Crime Fiction and National Identities in the Global Age*. Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc.

disengagement. A social and political perspective has been particularly visible in the French writer's use of the hard-boiled crime fiction as the imitation and simultaneously negative reaction to the American crime literature which has been transformed into a number of French cultural narratives illustrating the anxiety over the national identity at a time of escalating tensions after 1945. In this respect, the assessment of a purely aesthetic value of French postmodernist detective novels and their relations with the American texts have been neglected or even marginalised. In the light of the above, the present book hopefully widened the horizon of American-French detective fiction studies into a more in-depth critical examination of the literary dimension of the French and American detective narratives. Furthermore, I believe the monograph threw a new light on Anglophone and Francophone detective fiction generic research, especially postmodern American and French detective novels' thematic correspondence and stylistic juxtaposition.

Having studied eight texts by Auster, Modiano and Robbe-Grillet, I attempted to disclose a miscellaneous dimension of spatial, textual, temporal and identity labyrinths, in particular, fragmented narratives, urban maze, temporal distortion, alongside deformed portraits of the criminals, the detectives and the victims, and the entangled, ambivalent relations among protagonists, narrators, author and reader. Despite the fact that the three novelists are barely regarded as emblematic detective story writers, the pivotal components of this genre, specifically, its metaphysical variant, allow us to place their texts within a detective story tradition, basically its minimalist postmodernist model. All eight books, exemplifying experimental, speculative and existential types of detective fiction, encourage vigorous debate on the literary value of the detective genre in the contemporary culture. As an illustration of postmodern detective books, all these analysed American and French texts emphasise incompleteness, flexibility, contradiction, heterogeneity and difference, in contrast to the classic British and American modernist crime narratives accentuating progress, social holism and the dominance of universality. Regardless of thematic and technical distinctions, the novels by Auster, Modiano and Robbe-Grillet reflect the dominance of diversity over generality and coherence as well as the presence of the fragment in lieu of the whole.

The American and French men of letters excel at linguistic experimentation, stylistic innovation and at employing sundry metafictional techniques, largely intertextual references by means of which they engage in

a constructive literary and philosophical dialogue with other writers, critics, reviewers and scholars on the one hand and the reading public on the other hand. As exemplary postmodernist writers, Auster, Modiano and Robbe-Grillet underline non linear, disruptive narrative timelines in which the division between the “real” and “unreal” gradually decreases and collapses and where the characters and their narratives are frequently allowed to spiral out of the control of their creators. By introducing the dialogue between the narratees (embodying mostly amateur detectives, detectives-philosophers or detective story writers and speculative thinkers), the readers and the author, the novelists bring into prominence the “postmodern condition” of a man which contests a modernity’s confidence in the faculty of reason to determine any philosophical “truth” and its devotion to the progress of science and technology to improve the human condition (Lyotard 1984: 4). Auster, Modiano and Robbe-Grillet’s texts mirror their protagonists’ failure to provide a solution to the crime or mystery, based on the Enlightenment’s belief in reason, ratiocination, social order and advancement. In fact, their novels “dramatize the void” (Holquist 1971: 155) or absence of meaning which is symbolised by the impossibility for the detective to reach a cathartic ending. It is epistemological anxiety, further exploration of the philosophical possibilities of the quest for truth and knowledge, not crime or murder, that constitutes the driving force of their works.

Needless to say, on account of their structural and narrative experimentation and inventiveness, combined with the plethora and heterogeneity of literary allusions and influences, scholars and critics find it difficult to circumscribe not only the boundaries between detective and non-detective components of their works but to detect direct structural links between their American and French texts as well. This proves, in fact, that the postmodern variant of the detective genre is not a monolith but a hybrid genre encompassing heterogeneous, at times contradictory forms and reflecting the plurality of experience that helps to make sense of reality in ways not imagined by a modernist ideology reflected in the classic whodunnits and American hard-boiled crime fiction.

Spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths in Auster’s, Modiano’s and Robbe-Grillet’s novels, being the subject of comparative research study in this monograph, will hopefully contribute to the critics’ and scholars’ future exploration and recognition of some pivotal connections between their novels in the light of postmodern crime writing, existentialist studies as well

as memory and trauma theory. More importantly, by reflecting on Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's such recurrent motifs as the randomness and chaos of the fictional universe, a fortuitous dimension of investigation, a sense of imminent disaster, depiction of an ascetic life of a writer or a detective, self-reflexive and self-referential storytelling and a metafictional game between the author, characters and the reader, I attempted to highlight a transatlantic aspect of the metaphysical detective story studies, in particular, its American – French context. Although my book does not inaugurate the transatlantic research on the metaphysical detective story and postmodern crime writing, I hope that a penetration of the maze-like spatial, textual, temporal and identity relations in selected Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's texts will encourage a profound critical reflection on American and French contribution to the theoretical assumptions of this detective subgenre and the foundations of postmodern crime writing in general. Despite an increasing number of international, transnational, frequently multi-ethnic, critical contribution to contemporary crime studies, it is the Anglophone, chiefly British detective story writers whose works are the subjects of special scrutiny of miscellaneous critics, scholars and detective genre's aficionados. This book is expected to shift a perspective of the Anglophone, largely British-privileged status of detective studies, in favour of the comparative critical research into American and French postmodern detective fiction.

It is also worth pointing out that the metaphysical detective story, especially its American and French variants, remains one of the most obscure and unrecognisable subgenres of detective fiction in Poland. In comparison with the popularity and critical recognition of the gothic novel, the British classical detective story tradition and partly American hard-boiled crime fiction, this postmodernist detective subgenre is in fact minutely explored by Polish critics, scholars and reviewers³⁵. This situation might be attributed, to

³⁵ Among recent Polish publications dedicated to hard-boiled fiction suffice it to mention Ziębiński, Robert, Juliusz Wojciechowicz i Marek Zychła. (eds.) (2015) *Antologia nowel neo-noir hardboiled*. Wydawnictwo GMORK. Nonetheless, this anthology is usually defined as fantasy, not detective fiction. Other Polish books exploring Anglo-American and French detective and crime literature include (among others): Cegielski, Tadeusz. (ed.). (2015). *Detektyw w krainie cudów. Powieść kryminalna i narodziny nowoczesności 1841-1941*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WAB; Dalasiński, Tomasz and Tomasz, Szymon Markiewka. (2015). *Kryminał. Gatunek poważ(a)ny?* Toruń: Seria Wydawnicza "Epilog". Needless to say, none of them

some extent, to the difficulty in acknowledging and interpreting the very nature of the metaphysical detective story, its complex, ambivalent, labyrinthine narrative structure. On the other hand, most of the themes and motifs incorporated in this subgenre, as evidenced in Auster's, Modiano's and Robbe-Grillet's novels, closely reflect thoughts and concerns of Western Europe and North America. When juxtaposing Polish cultural and literary background, still marked by fostering the romantic and patriotic tradition of World War II, next to social, cultural and political reaction to the communist regime, American and French novelists' experimental, speculative and provocative fiction, mirroring the criticism of capitalism, placing accent on existential angst, examination of self and subjectivity, alongside metafictional playfulness, hyperrealism, fragmentation and quixotic sense of humour, may still be considered foreign and outlandish to our culture despite Poland's constantly increasing contacts with Western culture and its literary world.

However, despite a relatively small popularity of experimental and speculative detective fiction in Poland, novelists such as Paul Auster are regarded as one of the most iconic American writers in Poland. Interestingly enough, the author of *The New York Trilogy* is considered in Europe to be the most European of all American writers, whereas in America he is regarded as the most "typical" New York novelist. On the other hand, in Poland, Paul Auster has a reputation of the most iconic American novelists³⁶. Taking into account little recognition and critical attention the metaphysical detective story has received in Poland up to now, it is worth noticing particularly little research into French postmodern detective fiction. In opposition to the British and American crime novels and film studies, the French detective literature tradition, especially its postmodern movement, remains, with the

explore the arcana of the metaphysical or anti-detective fiction, particularly its philosophical, aesthetic and narratorial aspects.

³⁶ See: Żakowski, Jacek (2018) "Paul Auster najbardziej kultowym amerykańskim pisarzem w Polsce", *Polityka*. 11 June, 2018. DOA: <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/klasykipolityki/1751956,1,paul-auster-najbardziej-kultowym-amerykanskim-pisarzem-w-polsce.read>. See also: Żakowski, Jacek (2004) "Piszę na papierze w kratkę". Rozmowa z Paulem Austerem". May 2004. DOA: <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/klasykipolityki/1751954,1,pisze-na-papierze-w-kratke.read>. For more information about Paul Auster's reception in Poland see: "Paul Auster gościem festiwalu Conrada w Krakowie". *Dzieje.pl. Portial historyczny*. 20.05.2014. DOA: <https://dzieje.pl/kultura-i-sztuka/paul-auster-gosciem-festiwalu-conrada-w-krakowie>.

exception of small groups of French literature and film critics, teachers and scholars, an uncharted territory in our country. As for Patrick Modiano, his oeuvre became translated into Polish and widely read after he had received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2014³⁷. Moreover, in the majority of Polish publications dedicated to the French novelist, critics bring into focus Modiano's interpretation of French war and post-war history, whilst barely mentioning the aesthetic and philosophical dimension of his novels³⁸. However, certain prominent scholars, essayists and critics have thrown some more light on both cultural-political and literary facets of Modiano's novels, mostly in the context of French and Polish assessment of his texts³⁹. In contrast to the author of *Quartier perdu*, *Dora Bruder* and *Pour que tu ne perdes pas dans le quartier*, Alain Robbe-Grillet remains obscure and little recognised in Poland, except for narrow circles of academic scholars, literary and film critics. An illustration of this fact is the scarcity or even lack of translation of some of his books, including *Projet pour une révolution à New-York* (1970) and *La Reprise* (2001). In fact, when set beside the popularity of Modiano mostly as a writer and partly as a scriptwriter in our country, Robbe-Grillet became more known as a film director and a scriptwriter⁴⁰. One of the most prominent forerunners of the *nouveau roman* died relatively unnoticed

³⁷ For more information see: Kichelewski, Audrey "Patrick Modiano albo sztuka pamięci". (tłum. APK). *Kultura Liberalna*, No 301 41/2014, 14 October 2014. DOA: <https://kulturaliberalna.pl/2014/10/14/patrick-modiano-sztuka-pamieci/>. The French Nobel laureate was also mentioned in the Polish radio whose novel *Willa Triste* was interpreted by Andrzej Mastalerz ("*Willa Triste* – powieści na antenie". In *Polskieradio.pl*. 1 January 2015). <https://www.polskieradio.pl/Patrick-Modiano/Tag173174>).

³⁸ See: Krzemiński, Adam "Rozrachunki Patryka Modiano z francuską historią". *Polityka*. 6 January 2015. DOA: <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/historia/1604471,1,rozrachunki-patryka-modiano-z-francuska-historia.read> and "Modiano: pisarz, którego fascynuje historia". *Dzieje.pl. Portal historyczny*. 9 October 2014. <https://dzieje.pl/kultura-i-sztuka/modiano-pisarz-ktorego-fascynuje-historia>.

³⁹ See: Adam Zagajewski „Patrick Modiano spodoba się polskim czytelnikom”, Regina Gręda „Powieści Patryka Modiano cechuje atmosfera tajemnicy”, Wiesław Kroker „Patrick Modiano to pisarz cieszący się wielką popularnością w swoim kraju” and Krzysztof Jarosz „Modiano pisał o żydowskim ojcu, wojnie i okupacyjnym Paryżu” In „Patrick Modiano laureatem Literackiej Nagrody Nobla”. *Rzeczpospolita*. 9 October 2014. <https://www.rp.pl/artykul/1147708-Patrick-Modiano-laureatem-Literackiej-Nagrody-Nobla.html>.

⁴⁰ See: "Film w prasie polskiej. Allain Robbe-Grillet. Film: (1946-1973)". *Filmpolski.pl*. 1961, no 51-52, p. 21. <http://www.filmpolski.pl/rec/index.php/rec/18057>.

by the public opinion and most academic scholars in Poland. Paradoxically enough, it was only after his death that some light has been shed on Robbe-Grillet's literary output⁴¹. In view of the above, I hope the present monograph will constitute a small step in inaugurating critical discussion on French contribution to postmodern crime studies and its impact on the so far Anglophone-dominated literary realm, specifically its influence on American metaphysical detective story.

There is no escaping the fact that the present book explores only a small group of American and French authors, which constitutes a selective research branch of the metaphysical detective story's broad and manifold genre category. I am fully cognizant of the fact that comprehensive examination of this detective subgenre is an inexhaustible literary, cultural and philosophical territory necessitating further exploratory research into postmodern literary theory, psychoanalytical criticism, existentialist philosophy and trauma theory, to name only a few pivotal approaches to the metaphysical detective story. Although this book is devoted solely to the analysis of spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths in selected texts of the American and French authors, it cannot claim to issue any definite solutions.

Furthermore, it ought to be emphasised that all the examined texts are of male authorship, which is not an isolated phenomenon of this variant of the detective story, being mostly attributed to male writers and critical thinkers. Correspondingly, in my book which fails to mirror a diversity of perspectives, mostly female voices, due to a space limit, I endeavoured to reflect on eight selected male-authored works also including a female perspective (Atwood's reading of violence in male detective texts, being a particular case of Robbe-Grillet, Ewert's analysis of identity crisis, Merivale and Sweeney's general introduction to, and analysis of, the subgenre) on the one hand, and on some male critics' comments on the crisis of masculinity and men's gradual social exclusion in the contemporary female-dominated world, on the other hand, which may create some cultural dialogue between genders⁴².

⁴¹ See: "Alain Robbe-Grillet. Francuska powieść". *Interia Encyclopedia*. DOA: <https://encyklopedia.interia.pl/literatura-swiatowa/news-alain-robbe-grillet-francuska-powiec,nId,2326645>, Głowacki, Paweł "Być jak Alain Robbe-Grillet". *Polskie Radio Dwójka*. 19 October 2018. DOA: <https://www.polskieradio.pl/8/2576/Artykul/2204458,Byc-jak-Alain-RobbeGrillet>].

⁴² In Poland, one may also witness a small circle of female crime authors, such as a debut *noir* and psychological thriller writer Magda Stachula, the author of *Idealna*

Ultimately, it is worth stating that my book's research on labyrinths of space, time and identity, scrutinised in the context of a metaphysical and existential dimension of crime, may lead to further studies on trans and multi-identity as well as millennial anxieties and civilisation fears. In the era of geopolitical instability, ethnically divided world and ecological crisis, the concepts of identity, urban maze and time relativity come to the fore in the metaphysical detective story which raises the question about the nature of crime and the purpose of existence on earth, as well as mirroring the increasing social chaos of the post-1945 world. Hence, the investigation of spatial, temporal and identity labyrinths in the transatlantic American-French model of the metaphysical detective story will hopefully map the territory of this postmodern variant of the detective story in relation to the mystery story, the neo-noir novella, alongside the existentialist novel and trauma fiction.

(2016) or *Trzecia* (2017). The novelist is frequently compared to Paula Hawkins, the author of *The Girl on the Train* (2015). Other writers worth mentioning are: Marta Guzowska (*Ofiara Polikseny*) (2012), Gaja Grzegorzewska (*Topielica*) (2011), Katarzyna Kwiatkowska (*Zbrodnia w błękicie*) (2011), Katarzyna Bonda (*Sprawa Niny Frank*) (2007) and Joanna Jodełka (*Polichromia. Zbrodnia o wielu barwach.*) (2009)).

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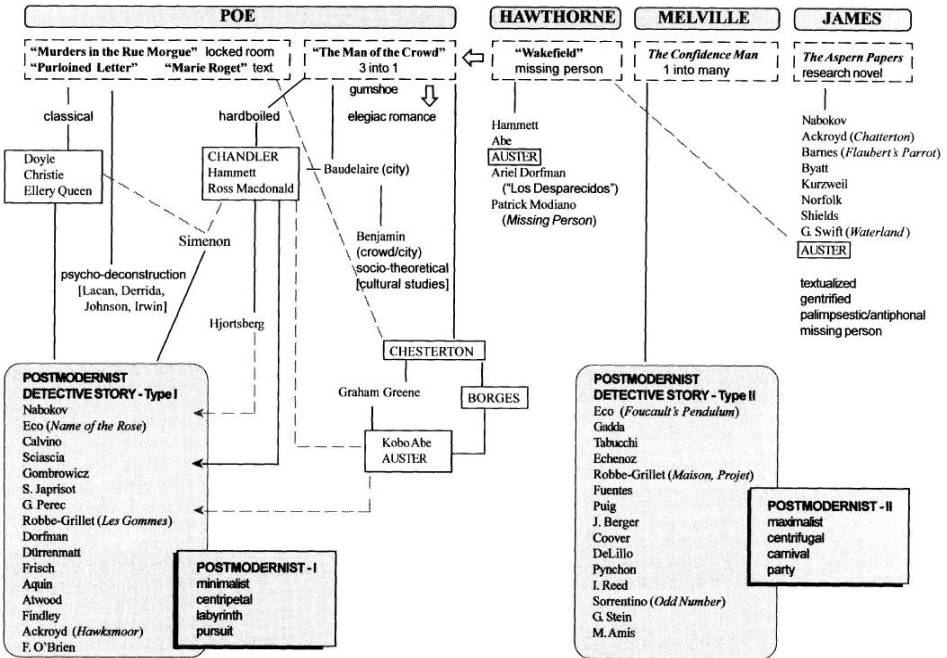
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Appendix

The methaphysical detective story: a tentative genealogy (Merivale, Sweeney 1999: 18)



Streszczenie

Labirynty przestrzeni, czasu i tożsamości w amerykańskich i francuskich metafizycznych powieściach detektywistycznych

Rozprawa *Labirynty przestrzeni, czasu i tożsamości w amerykańskich i francuskich metafizycznych powieściach detektywistycznych* poświęcona jest studium koncepcji labiryntu, w szczególności jego kłączowej struktury jako kluczowej dla odczytania relacji przestrzennych, czasowych i tożsamościowych w metafizycznej powieści detektywistycznej. Do analizy w niniejszej monografii wybrano teksty jednego pisarza amerykańskiego i dwóch pisarzy francuskich: *Trylogię nowojorską* (1987), *Księgę złudzeń* (2002) i *Podróże po skryptorium* (2007) Paula Austera, *Ulicę ciemnych sklepików* (1980), *Zagubioną dzielnicę* (1984) i *Żebyś nie zgubił się w dzielnicy* (2014) Patricka Modiano oraz *Gumy* (1953) i *La Reprise* (2001) Alaina Robbe-Grilleta. Powieści te odzwierciedlają labirynty przestrzeni, czasu i tożsamości w różnych konfiguracjach, stanowiących znaczące problemy interpretacyjne w zakresie procesu dochodzenia, śledztwa, interpretacji tekstu, głównie w kontekście badań literatury postmodernistycznej dotyczącej zbrodni i wykrywania, komparatystyki literackiej, literatury eksperymentalnej i egzystencjalnej. Książki amerykańskich i francuskich pisarzy, odzwierciedlające indywidualne doświadczenia bohaterów odnośnie miejsca, przestrzeni tekstowej oraz fragmentaryczne postrzeganie czasu w procesie dochodzeniowym zachęcają do wnikliwej dyskusji na temat stanu badań dotyczących tradycji literatury kryminalnej w Stanach Zjednoczonych i we Francji, zwłaszcza jej postmodernistycznych wariantów. Główny akcent położony jest na analizę estetycznego, filozoficznego i apolitycznego wymiaru amerykańskiej i francuskiej powieści detektywistycznej. Celem niniejszej pracy jest ukazanie, z jednej strony, analogii tematycznej i strukturalnej między powieściami Austera, Modiano i Robbe-Grilleta, a także różnych teorii literackich i szkół

filozoficznych, które ukształtowały ich autorów, a z drugiej strony złożonych, czasami opozycyjnych, relacji między poszczególnymi tekstami amerykańskimi i francuskimi.

Rozprawa składa się ze Wstępu, jednego rozdziału teoretycznego i trzech rozdziałów analitycznych, oscylujących wokół wybranych utworów Paula Austera, Patricka Modiano i Alaina Robbe-Grilleta analizowanych pod kątem różnych postmodernistycznych wariantów literatury detektywistycznej, w szczególności amerykańskiego modelu „hard-boiling metaphysics,” powieści egzystencjalnej oraz francuskiego gatunku *noir*, *neo-noir* oraz *nouveau roman*. Wszystkie powieści studiowane są w kontekście różnorodnych aspektów labiryntu przestrzeni, czasu i tożsamości, stanowiącego nieodzowny element metafizycznej powieści detektywistycznej.

W rozdziale pierwszym zarysowano tło historycznoliterackie rozprawy. Ta część stanowiła teoretyczne zaplecze do badań nad metafizyczną powieścią detektywistyczną oraz preludeum do analizy gatunkowej, strukturalnej i tematycznej tekstów Paula Austera, Patricka Modiano oraz Alaina Robbe-Grilleta. W początkowej sekcji rozdziału omówiono stan badań poświęconych metafizycznej powieści detektywistycznej, odwołując się do takich teoretyków i krytyków, jak Patricia Merivale, Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, Howard Haycraft, Michael Holquist, William V. Spanos, Stefano Tani czy Antoine Dechéne. Dwie kolejne części rozdziału dotyczyły perspektywy historycznoliterackiej tegoż wariantu powieści detektywistycznej, głównie, ale nie wyłącznie w odniesieniu do genezy modelu amerykańskiego i francuskiego oraz wybranych szkół i podejść krytycznoteoretycznych, powstałych w drugiej połowie XX wieku oraz na początku III tysiąclecia. Analizując genezę metafizycznej powieści detektywistycznej, autorka zwróciła uwagę na szczególną rolę Edgara Allana Poe w kształtowaniu gatunku detektywistycznego we Francji, zwłaszcza w powieściach Emila Gaboriau oraz Eugena Sue, jak również na wpływ amerykańskiego pisarza na twórczość Charle’a Baudelaire, Stephana Mallarmé oraz Paula Valéry. W dalszej kolejności przedstawiono istotne warianty i odgałęzienia postmodernistycznej powieści detektywistycznej, kładąc szczególny nacisk na podział na tzw. model minimalistyczny (tzw. linia od Poe do Austera), najgłębiej odzwierciedlający labiryntowy wymiar metafizycznej powieści detektywistycznej, oraz model maksymalistyczny, uwypuklający elementy karnawału i generowanie wielu tożsamości. Analizując metafizyczną powieść detektywistyczną z punktu widzenia krytycznoliterackiego, autorka zwróciła uwagę na studium porównawcze angielskiej i amerykańskiej powieści

kryminalnej przedstawione przez Malmgrena (2001), które stało się punktem wyjścia do komparatystycznych badań dotyczących anglofońskiej, w szczególności amerykańskiej, i francuskiej powieści kryminalnej w okresie międzywojennym i powojennym. Odnosząc się do wielu krytycznoliterackich prac komparatystycznych, m. in. Platten (2011) i Gorrary (2003), autorka zwróciła uwagę na stosunkowo niewielką liczbę badań dotyczących gatunku kryminalnego we Francji oraz podkreśliła brak systematycznych amerykańsko-francuskich studiów porównawczych w zakresie estetycznego, filozoficznego i apolitycznego wymiaru postmodernistycznej literatury detektywistycznej. Dwie ostatnie części rozdziału pierwszego zostały poświęcone koncepcji labiryntu i jego typologii w literaturze detektywistycznej w oparciu o teorie Borgesa, Eco, Deleuze i Guattari. Motywem przewodnim analizy labiryntu w metafizycznej powieści detektywistycznej były pojęcia przestrzeni, czasu i tożsamości, stanowiące preludeum i teoretyczną podstawę do badań nad tekstami Paula Austera, Patricka Modiano i Alaina Robbe-Grilleta.

Założenia teoretyczne przedstawione w rozdziale pierwszym odzwierciedlone są w strukturze rozprawy. Drugi, trzeci i czwarty rozdział analityczny przedstawiają koncepcję labiryntu w tematycznych konfiguracjach przestrzeni, czasu i tożsamości w wybranych powieściach pisarza amerykańskiego i dwóch pisarzy francuskich. Rozdział drugi i trzeci poświęcony jest odkrywaniu elementów tekstowo-przestrzennych oraz czasowych w wybranych pięciu powieściach Paula Austera, Patricka Modiano i Alaina Robbe-Grilleta. Autorka podkreśla w pracy jedność czasu i przestrzeni, w myśl teorii chronotopu Bachtina, jednakże omawia je oddzielnie wyłącznie w celach analitycznych. Rozdział drugi jest zanurzaniem się w sferę przestrzeni w narracji oraz sferę tekstu i intertekstualności z jednej strony, jak również odkrywaniem tożsamości poprzez przestrzeń i czas z drugiej strony. Kluczowe kwestie poruszane przez autorkę w odniesieniu do *Trylogii nowojorskiej* Paula Austera to labirynt tekstowy i przestrzenny z punktu widzenia narratorów, ucieleśniających detektywów amatorów, czytelnika i pisarza. Na plan pierwszy wysuwają się koncepcje przestrzeni metropolitalnej (metropolis), odzwierciedlającej i determinującej kierunek poszukiwań zaginionej osoby i odkrywania własnej tożsamości, pojęcie zamkniętego pokoju, intertekstu oraz metafikcyjnej gry autora z bohaterami i czytelnikiem, obalającej zasady klasycznej powieści detektywistycznej. W tej części rozdziału autorka zwraca uwagę na tzw. „niepokój interpretacyjny” powieści Austera jako

postmodernistycznej przestrzeni intertekstualnej. Podkreśla rolę procesu pisania jako aktu tworzenia oraz próby przełamania procesu wyobcowania i zagubienia w przestrzeni metropolitalnej. Druga część rozdziału jest poświęcona analizie odkrywania utraconej tożsamości w kontekście czasowego i przestrzennego labiryntu w odniesieniu do *Ulicy ciemnych sklepików* Patricka Modiano. Tutaj uwaga skupia się na problematyce związku między hermeneutyką czasu i przestrzeni, a dokładniej, na napięciu między hermeneutyką czasu a bardziej nowoczesną hermeneutyką tzw. „dochodzenia” lub „wykrywania przestrzennego” („spatial detection”). Mimo iż autorka zgadza się z tezą Bachtina o jedności czasowo-przestrzennej, nieodłącznym elementem interpretacji tekstu Modiano staje się także stwierdzenie Foucault, zestawiające badanie tożsamości za pomocą „tradycyjnej” czasowości, podkreślającej chronologię i liniowość, i odzwierciedlającej tradycyjną strategię epistemologiczną, z badaniem za pomocą hermeneutyki przestrzeni, odnoszącej się m.in. do pamięci i dokładności przestrzennej. Ostatnim etapem analizy *Ulicy ciemnych sklepików* w kontekście labiryntu przestrzennego jest interpretacja powieści Modiano jako tekstowej heterotopii, odsłaniającej koncepcję wielu przestrzennych możliwości ontologicznych.

Przedmiotem badań trzeciego rozdziału rozprawy jest studium różnych obliczy labiryntu czasowego w wybranych powieściach Paula Austera, Patricka Modiano i Alaina Robbe-Grilleta, uwzględniające w szczególności koncepcje cykliczności czasu, relatywizmu i złożoności czasowej. Pierwsza część rozdziału to krytyczna refleksja na temat czasu w kontekście poszukiwania zaginionej tożsamości i konstruowania nowej podczas aktu pisania w powieści *Księga złudzeń* Paula Austera. Szczególna uwaga zwrócona jest na idiosynkratyczną narrację amerykańskiego pisarza, ukazującą złożony i ambiwalentny charakter poszukiwania i odzyskiwania utraconej tożsamości, a przede wszystkim ilustrującą labirynt poziomów i płaszczyzn czasowych oraz związane z nim niepokoje epistemologiczne i ontologiczne. Kolejna część rozdziału stanowi rozważania na temat wybranych poziomów czasowych narracji w powieści *Zagubiona dzielnica* Patricka Modiano, opartych na klasyfikacji porządku narracyjnego dokonanej przez Genette'a (1972) oraz poszerzonych o badanie uporządkowania czasowego przeprowadzonego przez Kawakami (2000). Teorie Genette'a i Kawakami to próby spojrzenia na porządek czasowy w tekście Modiano odzwierciedlające osobiste doświadczenia narratora z czasem opartym na geografii zamiast chronologii i ilustrujące cykliczność

jego narracji. Narracja i schematy czasowe w *Zagubionej dzielnicy* przedstawione przez powyższych krytyków są punktem wyjścia do badania zaburzeń czasowych ukazanych w eksperymentalnej powieści detektywistycznej Robbe-Grilleta *Gumy*. W przeciwieństwie do powieści Austera i Modiano, odzwierciedlających przede wszystkim indywidualne traktowanie czasu przez bohaterów w ich śledztwach nieuchronnie prowadzących do odkrywania traumatycznej przeszłości i zagubionej tożsamości, *Gumy* podkreślają destabilizujący i halucynacyjny wymiar czasu, powodujący wyobcowanie głównych postaci dramatu. Jednakże, niezależnie od różnic zarysowujących się między tekstem Robbe-Grilleta a tekstami Austera i Modiano, każda z tych powieści stanowi unikalną ilustrację podejścia i traktowania przez trzech pisarzy koncepcji labiryntu czasu, jego egzystencjalnego i metafizycznego wymiaru.

Labirynt przestrzeni i czasu znajduje dokładne odzwierciedlenie w burzliwych relacjach tożsamości stanowiących centralny punkt analizy rozdziału czwartego. Będąca złożoną i wysoce ambiwalentną koncepcją w postmodernistycznej powieści detektywistycznej, tożsamość, jest rozpatrywana przez autorkę z różnych perspektyw w czterech powieściach Austera, Modiano i Robbe-Grilleta. Wspólnym mianownikiem tekstów pisarza amerykańskiego i pisarzy francuskich jest analiza tożsamości, jej dualizmu, hierarchizacji złożoności w kontekście motywu zbrodni i śledztwa. W *Podróżach po skryptorium* Paula Austera na plan pierwszy wysuwa się idea zamkniętego pokoju w świetle koncepcji hiperrzeczywistości Baudrillarda jako wyznacznika ludzkiej egzystencji oraz postmodernistyczne odczytywanie hierarchicznych relacji między autorem, narratorem, bohaterami powieści i czytelnikiem. Ukazanie przez amerykańskiego pisarza enigmatycznych, wieloznacznych i „niebezpiecznych” związków między autorem, bohaterami i czytelnikiem, odzwierciedlających ściśle, choć nie wyłącznie, relacje między przestępcą, ofiarą i detektywem, ma zasadnicze znaczenie dla odczytania powieści Modiano. Podobnie jak *Podróże po skryptorium* ukazują niejednoznaczną, często podwójną rolę narratora i bohaterów, powieść francuska *Żebyś nie zgubił się w dzielnicy* odzwierciedla destabilizację tożsamości bohaterów, narratora, jak też autora i czytelnika, w szczególności odwrócenie ról detektywa, przestępcy i ofiary i wzajemne przenikanie ich tożsamości. Odnosząc się do założeń Kawakami oraz teorii Boisdeffre'a (1980), autorka zwraca uwagę na koncepcję tzw. pustego narratora jako symbolu walki wyobcowanej jednostki ze współczesnym światem oraz ilustrację ironii procesu śledztwa przeprowadzonego przez nie profesjo-

nalnego, oderwanego od rzeczywistości pisarza-detektywa. Dwie ostatnie sekcje rozdziału czwartego poświęcone są studium relacji władzy i podwójnej tożsamości w dwóch powieściach Robbe-Grilleta, *Gumy* i *La Reprise*. Odwołując się do teorii krytycznych Morrisette'a (1975), Ewert (1990, 1999), Ramsay (1999) i Dey (2013), autorka poddaje analizie hermeneutykę władzy i autorytetu, hierarchię relacji bohaterów i związany z tym motyw uwięzienia tożsamości w postmodernistycznym tekście detektywistycznym. Rola podwójnych agentów i ambiwalentne akty szpiegostwa omawiane w pierwszej powieści Robbe-Grilleta stają się przedmiotem bardziej wnikliwych badań autorki w odniesieniu do jednej z ostatnich książek pisarza, *La Reprise*. Ta powieść stanowi niewątpliwie jedną z najbardziej eksperymentalnych form gatunku szpiegowskiego i jedną z najbardziej wyjątkowych postmodernistycznych powieści kryminalnych. Charakteryzuje się ona uwydatnieniem podwójnej tożsamości narratorów ucieleśniających podwójnych agentów, przestępców i ofiary.

Rozprawa *Labirynty przestrzeni, czasu i tożsamości w amerykańskich i francuskich metafizycznych powieściach detektywistycznych* bada różnorodne oblicza powieści Paula Austera, Patricka Modiano i Alaina Robbe-Grilleta w świetle złożonych i ambiwalentnych relacji czasowo-przestrzennych, (inter)tekstowych i tożsamościowych oraz szeroko rozumianego pojęcia zbrodni, prześladowania, wyobcowania i konfliktu osobowości, zarówno w kontekście literacko-filozoficznym, jak i społeczno-kulturowym. Jednocześnie celem książki jest ukazanie sposobów i stopnia przekraczania przez pisarza amerykańskiego i pisarzy francuskich granicy między postmodernistyczną powieścią detektywistyczną i antydetektywistyczną oraz poszukiwania i odkrywania przez ich twórców nowych, wciąż nieznanymi obszarów literackich. Na końcu autorka chciałaby zaznaczyć, że rozprawa, choć poświęcona prozie amerykańskiej i francuskiej, wykracza momentami poza wąski kontekst amerykańsko-francuski, przyjmując perspektywę transnarodową i globalną w odniesieniu do literatury postmodernistycznej, egzystencjalnej, fenomenologii, krytyki historycznej i psychoanalitycznej.

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