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1. Introduction

Presumably we expect a degree of suspense in almost any work of prose, be it a novel, a short story or a play. Indeed, even a poem will tend to have some ingredients that whisper to the reader, “go on, don’t stop reading here!” A work of literature which fails to arouse any questions or expectations in the reader is hard to imagine. (Bonheim 1)

Yet there seems to be a deep-rooted prejudice concerning a general lack of suspense in postmodern literature (cf. Wenzel 24).

The present thesis analyses suspense in two postmodern detective stories, namely in Martin Amis’ Night Train and Paul Auster’s City of Glass. The thesis will show that at least these two postmodernist narratives are full of suspense.

Prior to the in-depth analysis of the two novels a short overview of the concept of suspense will be provided. Different types of suspense and related phenomena such as curiosity and surprise will be discussed. Moreover, the creation of suspense on the discourse level and via the narrator-narratee contract, which posits that both the narrator and the narratee have to be in cahoots in order to generate suspense, will be briefly examined. Syntactic, text-pragmatic and lexico-semantic devices creating tension and suspense will be discussed as well. Finally, a brief overview of suspense in postmodern narratives and of the postmodern variant of detective fiction, the anti-detective novel, will be given before Night Train and City of Glass will be looked at in detail.

2. Suspense

2.1. Terminology

It is important to note that the German term ‘Spannung’ is broader than the English term ‘suspense’. Under the German concept of Spannung both suspense and tension can be subsumed (Langer 17). Suspense can be defined as “[a] state of uncertainty, anticipation and curiosity as to the outcome of a
story or play, or any kind of narrative in verse or prose” (Cuddon 937). Suspense is “an anticipatory stress reaction, prompted by an initiating event in the discourse structure, and terminated by the actual presentation of the harmful outcome event” (de Wied 111).

Tension, on the other hand, is a “more static form of Spannung between opposites” (Langer 17; own translation). While suspense leads readers to ask, “What happened then?”, tension entails the question of “What is the import of this event?” (Bonheim 8).

2.2. “The nature of suspense”¹

Suspense arises out of uncertainty (Wieser 167) or an information deficit of the reader as concerns the outcome of a story (Yanal 146). The reader is confronted with an open question at the beginning of the narrative typically concerning the fate lying in store for the protagonist. The reader is left in the dark as to how the story will unfold (Wenzel 23). If he is familiar with its final ending, he will theoretically not be able to feel suspense - or not a large amount of it (Yanal 146). The narratee craves knowledge. He does not want to remain in a state of ignorance. In order to overcome this information deficit he will go on reading in the hope that the missing information will be provided in the unfolding narrative (Wieser 167).

However, an essential prerequisite would be that the open question has to be of vital importance to the reader (Carroll 74). The reader has to care about the answers provided in the narrative. Otherwise, he will not be kept in suspense. The open questions must hold a certain fascination for the narratee (Wenzel 24). The significance of these questions strongly depends on the recipient's personality, human impulses (crimen, fructus, and sexus), and on expectations regarding the genre of a text and well-known schemata (Wenzel 24). For instance, a young woman will probably invest a high degree of interest in the

¹ Carroll 74
question of whether the heroine of a romance will succeed in winning her Prince Charming.

It is important to note, however, that there should only be a limited array of answers available to the open questions posited by the text. Some critics even argue that only two alternative answers or solutions guarantee a high level of suspense. Will the hero succeed or will he fail in his quest? No third option is available (Wenzel 23). Another important suspense-increasing aspect would be that these alternative solutions have the same probability of occurrence. The hero, in principle, must be as likely to fail as he is to succeed. However, this hypothesis only holds true as long as the reader does not favor one of the potential answers to the open question posited by the text. If the recipient strongly identifies himself with a character in the text, a low probability of the favored solution will lead to a particularly high level of suspense. If the beloved character the reader identifies with and for whom the reader feels is in grave danger and it seems highly unlikely that the hero will survive, then suspense will be at a height (Wenzel 24). One has to say that “suspense is an uncomfortable emotion” (Yanal 152) that - as Prieto-Pablos (106) puts it - “occurs when the outcome of a specific situation involves a likely and yet undesirable alternative but we hope for an unlikely and yet desirable resolution”.

In general, the greatest amount of suspense will be felt by a narratee when it appears highly unlikely that the character he identifies with - most often, if not always, the protagonist of the narrative - will be successful in his endeavors (e.g. in marrying his sweetheart, or in winning his battle against evil forces). The longer the narratee has to fear for his hero’s safety and happiness, the more intense will his experience of suspense be (de Wied 111). Suspense presupposes that the recipient feels concern for the well-being of the protagonist. If the author fails to evoke concern for the fate of his characters, suspense will not set in (Carroll 77). Ensuring that a “significant consequence” (Jose and Brewer 912) (e.g. death) lies in store for the hero, will contribute to the creation of suspense.
As regards the intensity of suspense, character valence (i.e. the portrayal of a character as either good or bad) would be another defining factor. A character who is depicted as being inherently good will be liked by readers, while the bad characters will, in general, be disliked. If one is fond of the protagonist, one is bound to feel for him and fear for his well-being. As a consequence, the amount of suspense increases (de Wied 110). Carroll (79) sees character as “a critical lever for guiding the audience’s moral perception of the action”. If a character is perceived to be morally upright and above board, a decent human being, the audience will root for him, and not for the evil villains in the narrative (Carroll 79).

Another prerequisite would be the identification of the reader with at least one of the characters (e.g. with the hero or heroine of the narrative). In any case, the reader needs to be curious about the outcome of the story. If he is not, the most gripping narrative will not be able to generate feelings of suspense in a disinterested reader. Moreover, it has been suggested that only a solution, which is in line with the general moral code of society and which appears to be highly unlikely, generates suspense - an assumption one might not necessarily agree with (Yanal 146).

Brewer (108-110) has suggested three theories explaining the phenomenon of the reader experiencing suspense although he is perfectly aware of the fact that what is happening to a character is only happening within the confines of a book. The deadly peril the protagonist faces is only a figment of the writer’s imagination. Nevertheless, the reader holds his breath and fears for the protagonist.

The first theory posited would be ‘reader involvement’. According to the renowned literary catchphrase coined by Coleridge, the narratee willingly suspends all disbelief and “become[s] absorbed in the events of the fictional world” (Brewer 109). A reader lends himself to “[t]he [i]llusion of [b]eing [t]here” (Zillmann 289). Owing to the recipient’s entirely losing himself in make-belief situations, he is able to experience ‘real’ emotions aroused by fictive events and

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2 Beecher (262) argues that the suspension of disbelief is by no means a conscious decision of the reader. No actual wiling suspension is taking place - rather an unconscious mental process.
characters. A necessary prerequisite, however, would be that the narrator describes the world he brings to life in sufficient detail. Otherwise the reader might not succeed in suspending all disbelief – consciously or unconsciously (Brewer 109).

Identification theories, on the other hand, posit that “the reader of fiction identifies with the character and thereby comes to feel the emotions that are being felt by the fictional character” (Brewer 109). If both the narratee and the character belong to roughly the same age group and have the same gender, the narratee tends to identify with the fictive character more easily. Similarity alleviates identification. Another important aspect to consider in this context would be character valence: the reader will, in general, identify with the morally good character rather than with the villain or antagonist in the book (Jose and Brewer 912).

Identification theories, however, have a serious flaw. A reader identifying with the protagonist would inevitably need to experience identical emotions to those felt and displayed by the fictional character. This hypothesis can easily be refuted, however. If one pictures, for example, a guileless and unsuspecting character about to imbibe a poisoned beverage, one would surely assert that the fictional character will not be in a state of suspense at all owing to his total ignorance of his impending fate. The narratee, on the other hand, who is fully aware of the perilous situation, will certainly be gripped by suspense. If one follows the premise that the reader closely identifies with the protagonist and is, therefore, only able to live through the same emotions as the fictive character, then the reader will theoretically not be able to experience any feelings of suspense. As this is clearly not the case in the example provided above, one should be cautious as regards the application of identification theories (Brewer 109).

Consequently, one should rather speak of empathy for a character. Empathy can be defined as “an affective reaction [which] is a response along with a person, or […] a response to the observed or anticipated expression of emotion in another person” (Zillmann 288). To evoke this feeling of empathy, however,
the reader must – once again – be able to identify with the character, like the character, or, at least, show a positive disposition towards him. Identification with the protagonist is not an absolute prerequisite. Liking a character provides sufficient grounds for eliciting an emotional response in the recipient of the narrative (Wieser 170). Carroll (80) suggests that rather than identify with a character, the reader pities the fictional character as identification is often not possible due to an overall lack of similarities between character and recipient. Brewer (109-110) speaks of sympathy theories in this context. In contrast to the identification theories discussed above, the reader and the character do not necessarily experience identical emotions. The reader feels sympathy for the character as he would feel sympathy for the plight of a fellow human being in real life.

Last but not least, the perspective-taking model would be yet another explanation why readers feel for fictional characters and are, as a consequence, able to enter into the excitatory mind state of suspense. The reader might not identify with the character; he might not even feel empathy for the character in question. Nevertheless, he might be in suspense as it suffices that he takes over the perspective of the hero or heroine (Vorderer 248). This is only possible, however, if the narrator shares the innermost feelings, the thoughts and inner turmoil of the character with the narratee (Wieser 171). Moreover, the reader should be made familiar with the hero’s background. There is no need for identical emotions (Vorderer 250).

2.3. Categorization

The following subchapter is dedicated to the differentiation between various forms of suspense and related concepts. The categorization is mainly based - with the exception of surprise and thrill - on the distinction between groups of suspense proposed by Ackermann (43-44).
2.3.1. Was-Spannung, Wie-Spannung and Warum-Spannung

One can distinguish between two main types of suspense, namely Was-Spannung and Wie-Spannung\(^3\) (e.g. Pütz 15 or Langer 14). As the German term suggests, Was-Spannung can best be described via the question of “What will happen?” (Langer 14; own translation), while the concept of Wie-Spannung entails the question of ‘How will the end come about?’ (Langer 14-15). Was-Spannung presupposes that the reader or viewer does not know how the story will end. This type of suspense derives from an information deficit the narratee longs to overcome. He does not know whether the hero will be successful in the end, whether he will survive all imminent threats. In the case of Wie-Spannung, on the other hand, the recipient is familiar with the principal ending of the narrative, movie or play. As a consequence, his attention is riveted towards the way the ending is brought about. He is perfectly aware of the fact that the protagonist will eventually overcome all difficulties and that he will be successful in weathering all the dangers he encounters in the fictional world. The recipient will wonder how the hero will succeed and how he will overcome the adverse conditions the narrative has in store for him (Pütz 15). One should be careful, however, not to confuse Was- and Wie-Spannung with suspense and mystery as they are not interchangeable concepts. Both suspense and mystery can be construed as either Was-Spannung or Wie-Spannung respectively (Langer 14-15).

A third question may arise in this context, namely the question of why something happened. This issue would be especially important regarding mystery. The narratee might, for instance, be compelled to wonder why the murderer committed the dreadful deed. This question would then lead to another possible type of suspense, namely Warum-Spannung. This form of suspense is mainly concerned with the psychological workings of a character, his aims and motivations for his actions and the deeds committed (Langer 15-16).

\(^{3}\) Lugowski (40) speaks of Ob-überhaupt-Spannung and Wie-Spannung.
2.3.2. Mystery vs. suspense proper

Another important distinction to be made would be the one between suspense proper and mystery, which both aim at evoking the interest of the reader (Junkerjürgen 66) by constructing an information void (Wenzel 28). However, in the case of suspense proper the reader is allowed to obtain a comparatively high amount of information, while in the case of mystery the reader is granted relatively little information at the beginning of the story. The prototypical genre which relies on suspense in the form of mystery would be the detective story (Junkerjürgen 66-67).

In general, a mystery entails a larger number of potential solutions presented to the reader than suspense proper would. In a detective story the number of suspects available delineates the number of possible solutions. If seven people were present at the time of the murder, for instance, seven potential solutions are presented to the reader, who is, in turn, compelled to find out who the actual murderer is. Suspense proper, on the other hand, is characterized by a binary set of possible solutions. The hero either survives or dies; he wins or loses (Wenzel 28). The only question to be asked is if the hero will succeed or not. Will he get the girl or not? In the case of a mystery, on the other hand, a large array of questions arises. Apart from the prototypical question of *whodunit*, one would also be compelled to wonder about the motives for committing the crime, for example (Junkerjürgen 66).

Furthermore, mystery is concerned with past occurrences (e.g. a murder committed in the past), while suspense proper is concerned with future events and future questions (Junkerjürgen 67; Wenzel 28). One might ask, for instance, whether or not the hero will be able to marry his sweetheart in the future or whether he will die before he is able to do so. In a murder mystery, on the other hand, the murder has already been committed and the detective strives to unravel the past and past occurrences (Junkerjürgen 67).

“[M]ystery […] does not thrive on apprehensions about negative outcomes for protagonists” (Zillmann 294); there already is a body. Consequently, there is no need for the reader to fear for a character’s life. The reader is not compelled to
wonder if the murder will be solved - on the contrary, he fully expects it to be solved in the end. Instead, a mystery reader wonders who the perpetrator is and why he decided to kill the victim (Zillmann 294). As a consequence, no feelings of fear or apprehension are evoked, which would be typical of suspense proper. Instead, the narratee is curious about who committed the murder and why (Junkerjürgen 67). He is ultimately “drawn into speculation” (Carroll 75) developing his own set of hypotheses as to who the culprit could have been and what his ulterior motive might have been for committing a criminal transgression.

As far as suspense proper is concerned, the reader is not faced with any “cognitive hurdles” (Junkerjürgen 68; own translation) as regards chronology and causality of the narrated events. Therefore, he can invest his emotions into the story and identify with the main character more easily – or, at least, take over the hero’s or heroine’s perspective more easily. In the case of a mystery, there is an inversion of chronology to some extent as the reader learns about the outcome of the story, the murder, at the beginning and finds out the identity of the murderer, his motives, and his modus operandi at the end of the story. Vital information is withheld from the reader through the course of the story. As a result, he is not able to establish the proper causality of events and solve the murder (Junkerjürgen 68).

Literary scholars have suggested that there are two stories interwoven in a detective story: the murder or any other crime to be solved by the detective and the ensuing investigation to be conducted by the sleuth (Junkerjürgen 66-67). A reader of detective fiction is more or less compelled to work as a detective himself. He “selects information from the text and combines it in order to be able to personally solve the crime” (Junkerjürgen 67; own translation). A detective story poses an “intellectual incentive” (Junkerjürgen 67; own translation) to its readers.

However, the reader does not normally identify with the fictional detective; the detective is rather the “personification of the question in which the reader is interested” (Junkerjürgen 68; own translation). He might admire the detective for
his brilliance, his 'little grey cells'; he might even grow fond of him. Readers
cannot help but like Hercule Poirot and his trademark little quirks, for instance.
Some readers might even try to compete with the detective. They might
endeavor to solve the mystery themselves. If they manage to correctly infer who
the murderer is, how he committed the deed and why he did it, they might be
inclined to “celebrate their own brilliance” (Zillmann 295). The majority of
readers, however, will probably accept that in most mysteries they hardly stand
a chance in competing with the clever and, in some cases, almost omniscient
detective. After all, murder mysteries are designed to keep the reader in the
dark as regards relevant information for solving the crime. Therefore, they will
wait for the detective to solve the mystery for them and present them with his
clever findings at the end of the narrative (Zillmann 295, 298).

2.3.3. Curiosity

Curiosity can be defined as “[t]he desire or inclination to know or learn about
anything, esp. what is novel or strange; [or as] a feeling of interest leading one
to inquire about anything” (OED (online version)). Comparing curiosity to
suspense, it is noticeable that both evoke an “expectant restlessness and
tentative hypotheses” (Sternberg 65) stemming from an informational void.
Similar to the experience of suspense, curiosity incites the narratee to continue
reading as a means of filling the unpleasant gap of information he faces. While
suspense is future-oriented regarding the sought-after information (i.e. the
reader wants to know how the story will end), curiosity pertains to events in the
narrative past (Sternberg 65).

The narrator ensures that the reader realizes that he is denied a vital piece of
information and that the narrator keeps a secret from him. Fully aware of his
information deficit, the narratee gets curious about the information so blatantly
kept from him (Brewer and Lichtenstein 366). Typically, the narrator supplies
the missing information step by step which enables “the reader to reconstruct
the missing event” (Brewer 112). If a narrative begins as follows: ‘He was killed
with a single shot."\(^4\), the recipient is bound to wonder who the pronoun refers to; who killed ‘him’ and why. The reader’s lack of information pertaining to the events leading up to the tragedy is evident. Curiosity should be awakened. The information he longs for clearly belongs to the narrative past mentioned above.

Luelsdorff (11-13) argues that curiosity is a constituting element of suspense\(^5\), especially in a *whodunit*. Wenzel (28) even equates his mystery schema with Brewer’s concept of curiosity. If one looks at definitions of suspense, it has been argued that suspense is created via “acts of concealment” (Batty 70) and that the reader is faced with uncertainty. Uncertainty may lead to the arousal of curiosity, which, in turn, may generate suspense. One has to bear in mind, however, that a narratee might be curious but not in a state of suspense at all. To induce feelings of suspense, on the other hand, the narratee has to be curious about the proceedings in the narrative. One criterion suggested as a means of differentiating between curiosity and suspense might be “the degree of [one]’s desire to know” (Luelsdorff 13).

### 2.3.4. Surprise

*The OED* (online version) defines surprise as “an unexpected occurrence or event” or as “[t]he feeling or emotion excited by something unexpected, or for which one is unprepared”. Surprise will set in if expectations are thwarted. Readers have a tendency of anticipating oncoming events in a narrative. If something unforeseeable happens in the narrative world which was not indicated or hinted at beforehand, the reader will be surprised (Cupchik 193).

Surprise presupposes that the narratee does not have the faintest idea that he has been denied valuable information earlier in the narrative. A curious reader, on the other hand, is fully aware that relevant information has not been disclosed and he waits for and expects full disclosure in the course of the narrative (Brewer and Lichtenstein 366). Surprise forces readers to reassess

\(^4\) The example given is modeled on the one provided by Brewer and Lichtenstein (366).

\(^5\) In this instance, suspense would surely encompass both mystery and suspense proper.
earlier events in the story and to reevaluate information given prior to the surprise according to the newly obtained fragments of information. A reader caught by surprise might wonder whether he has overlooked a vital clue earlier. Studies have shown that, as a result, readers taken by surprise were better able to remember the storyline prior to the surprising developments owing to the ensuing reassessment (Hoeken and van Vliet 280, 286).

Suspense, on the other hand, is future-oriented, while surprise pertains to the present. “Suspense builds gradually over time in accordance with the author’s manipulation of information and, hence, of uncertainty. Surprise is immediate and reflects a disorientation produced by the contrast between facts and expectations” (Cupchik 193). Therefore, both suspense and surprise depend on uncertainty on the part of the reader and on the evocation of disorientation (Cupchik 193). Surprise is sudden and brief, while suspense lasts longer and takes its time to build up (Wenzel 27).

Surprise is often used by writers of mystery stories. The detective revealing the true identity of the culprit at the end of the narrative comes as a surprise to most readers. The reader typically does not have the slightest inkling of who the murderer could be (cf. Junkerjürgen 72). A typical example of surprise would be Hercule Poirot presenting to his flabbergasted audience the true identity of the murderer at the end of the novel. Every seasoned mystery reader expects to be surprised at the end. The murderer tends to be the least expected character and the mystery buff knows that he is in for a surprise at the end of the narrative (Hoeken and van Vliet 280).

2.3.5. Thrill

Thrill denotes “intense, but pleasurable feelings, including physical ones that predominantly set in as a reaction to the description of violence and sex” (Späth 155; own translation). In other words, especially intense feelings of suspense paired with bodily reactions (e.g. sweating, accelerated heartbeat) are characteristic features of thrill (Wenzel 24). Readers might experience thrill as
“[a] subtle nervous tremor caused by intense emotion or excitement” (*OED* (online version)). They seek thrill in a narrative out of “a desire for fear and titillation” (Mikos 37-38). Prerequisites of thrill would be

- a certain fear that is characterized by a loss of control;
- the consciousness of external danger;
- conscious confrontation of this fear and thereby of the correlated danger;
- the hope of being able to make a quick return to safety; and
- the possibility of enjoying the thrill through participation and observation (Mikos 39).

Reading a novel or watching a movie the recipient is able to experience danger, violence and fear without being in danger himself. Nevertheless, the reader or viewer lives through these emotions. The danger, however, is only fictional, a mere figment of the imagination. Critics speak of ‘delightful horror’ in this context – a phrase originally coined by Edmund Burke (Wenzel 26).

Three main human instincts can be identified as potential suspense- and thrill-‘creators’, namely *crimen*, *fructus*, and *sexus*. Many literary motifs can be attributed to them (Wenzel 25). Koch (*Spannung* 14) speaks of “drives or bioprograms for survival [which] motivate or arouse Spannung and subsequent action”. *Crimen* - as the impulse having the highest potential for suspense creation (Wenzel 25) - denotes all acts of aggression (Koch, *Biology* 155) and flight from danger (Wenzel 25). In literature, *crimen* can typically be found in detective stories or thrillers: someone is murdered, for instance; the hero or heroine needs to flee from an attacker; or the protagonist fights for his life. Moreover, the duel between two archenemies would be another prime example of *crimen* often to be found in historical romances (Wenzel 25).

The second suspense-inducing human impulse would be *fructus*, which encompasses the notion of nutrition and “the feeding and upbringing of one’s offspring” (Wenzel 25; own translation). Examples of the incorporation of *fructus* in narrative texts would be the kidnapping of children or conflicts between parents and their offspring (Wenzel 25).

Last but not least, *sexus* describing the human impulse of reproduction comprises the search for a compatible partner to ultimately preserve one’s species. In literature, the human impulse of *sexus* can be detected in any love
story. Two men fighting for a woman or an incestuous relationship would be illustrative examples of sexus-motifs (Wenzel 25).

If a narrative touches upon deep-set fears and urges stemming from more than one of these bioprograms, an especially high degree of thrill will be felt by the reader. Oedipus committing patricide and entering into an incestuous relationship with his mother would be a prime example of this phenomenon. The impulses fructus and crimen would be relevant concerning the murder of his father. As regards the forbidden relationship to his mother, fructus and sexus are addressed. Other classic examples in which the boundaries between these thrill-inducing motifs are blurred would be vampire stories (sexus and crimen) or gothic villains lusting after beautiful and innocent young damsels in distress (crimen and sexus) (Wenzel 25).

2.4. The paradox of suspense

Uncertainty of the reader is an indispensable precondition for a reader’s ability to experience suspense during a narrative. If a reader is familiar with the outcome of a story, he will, in theory, be no longer able to feel suspense due to his lack of uncertainty. However, rereading a novel or watching a film repeatedly does not necessarily entail a total absence of suspense - an issue which has been taken up in the theory of the paradox of suspense (Yanal 147-152). Three statements have been proposed to outline this paradox, namely that “(i) [r]epeaters experience suspense regarding a certain narrative’s outcome. (ii) Repeaters are certain of what that outcome is. (iii) Suspense requires uncertainty” (Yanal 148).

Various solutions have been suggested by critics explaining the fact that readers are nonetheless able to experience suspense when rereading a story or watching a film they have already seen before and are, therefore, certain of the outcome. One theory proposes that the ‘repeater’ pretends that he is not familiar with the ending of the novel or film. He puts himself into a state of ‘quasi-uncertainty’. He plays a game of “make-belief” and pretends that he is
ignorant of the ending (Yanal 148-149). Brewer (120) speaks of a “[w]illing [s]uspension of [m]emory” or “[v]oluntary [a]mnesia”.

Another explanation offered would be that a repeater is not able to use any prior knowledge about a narrative during a rereading or ‘re-viewing’ of a film. Gerrig (Resiliency, 100-104) has labeled this phenomenon ‘anomalous suspense’, which can be defined as “an illusion in the sense that our expectation of uniqueness only makes us think we do not quite know what is coming next when we in fact do” (Yanal 151). When reading a narrative for a second or even third time, the experience is no longer a unique one. Nevertheless, the reader is in a state of suspense. One explanation provided would be that the reader is not able to retrieve the information stored in his mind during the actual reading process (Yanal 150). Gerrig (Reply 172) emphasizes that anomalous suspense is not caused by “an accidental retrieval failure”. Instead he claims that it is a characteristic feature of memory processes that information will not become automatically available to the reader lost in the narrative world. The reader’s “attention is riveted […] to the unfolding of the story on a moment-to-moment basis” (Carroll 90). The reader will not wrestle himself away from a gripping narrative and back into the real world only to search his memory for any prior knowledge about the narrative (Gerrig, Resiliency 103).

An alternative theory posits that a repeater feels sympathy for the characters of a novel or film and, therefore, rereads the narrative or repeatedly watches the film. Skulsky (13) asserts that uncertainty is not a prerequisite of experiencing suspense. As long as the repeater feels sympathy for the protagonist, he will be able to enjoy the narrative. However, he does not explain the correlation between suspense and sympathy. Skulsky’s theory merely suggests why people potentially enjoy rereading a novel; it does not offer an explanation as to why repeaters are still able to feel suspense (Yanal 152).

Yanal (152-153, 157), on the other hand, suggests that repeaters may confuse suspense with another type of emotion – concern for the protagonist, anxiety, empathy, or amusement. “[R]ecidivist reader[s]” (Carroll 87) do not experience any discomfort – a characteristic feature of suspense. As a result, one might
conclude that repeaters are not able to feel suspense. Instead, “[a] true repeater is in a state of anticipation” (Yanal 157). He might eagerly await a favorite scene but he is not in suspense. However, Yanal (153, 156) is careful to differentiate between repeaters and ‘true repeaters’. The latter has a comprehensive and detailed knowledge about the narrative; one might say he knows the narrative almost by heart. There is no place for uncertainty in the case of a true repeater and, therefore, he cannot be in suspense. Yanal (153) claims that a true repeater is confronted with a “fear of the known”. Being perfectly aware of the ensuing events in the narrative, he experiences anxiety and concern for the fictional characters.

However, the most convincing explanation would be that repeaters tend to forget bits and pieces of information, details, or even part of the storyline. Human memory is limited. Therefore, suspense can also be felt by a repeater (Yanal 156). In this context, Brewer (122) distinguishes between memory-forgetting, memory-capacity limitations, and ‘memory-how’. In general, most readers will reread a book only after a considerable amount of time has passed. Therefore, it is perfectly understandable that repeaters will only vaguely remember the plot of the narrative. They will probably have forgotten a vast amount of pertinent facts about the narrative over time; they might even be oblivious of the final outcome. Consequently, they should be able to experience suspense. An alternative explanation would be that human memory is limited in the sense that “readers simply cannot retain all the information in a book after a first reading” (Brewer 122). As a result, the repeater will be in a state of suspense owing to his inability to remember every last detail about the narrative. However, the intensity of suspense will be lower for the repeater. Last but not least, ‘memory-how’ predicts that repeaters will recall the principal outcome of the story and the overall storyline but not every minor detail. Suspense will set in owing to the reader’s ignorance of “the details of how the outcome was achieved” (Brewer 122).
2.5. Suspense on the discourse level: Suspense schemata

The following subchapter deals with the generation of suspense on the discourse level. While the event structure denotes “the chronological sequence of events”, the discourse structure describes “the order in which events are presented in the narrative” (Brewer and Lichtenstein 363). Depending on the particular order of events on the discourse level, the reader will feel surprise, suspense, or curiosity⁶ (Jose and Brewer 911-912).

2.5.1. The surprise schema

Surprise will be created when “a significant underlying event or expository information” is left out of the discourse at the beginning of a story (Brewer and Lichtenstein 366). The reader has to be completely unaware of the fact that he lacks valuable information – information he would need in order to be able to accurately assess the fictional events (Brewer 111). As a result, he will be caught completely unawares and, thus, be surprised if something unforeseeable and wholly unexpected happens in the narrative. As vital information has not been disclosed beforehand, the reader will inevitably be surprised (Brewer and Lichtenstein 366) (cf. chapter 2.3.4).

Wenzel (27) argues that the surprise schema may only lead to diffuse suspense – if it leads to any suspense at all. Suspense can only set in if the reader knows that there might be a surprise in store for him. Therefore, diffuse suspense might only be created if a reader has, for instance, already read stories by the same author, which habitually contained a surprising event. As a result, the reader anticipating a surprise in the narrative will be in a state of suspense.

An example⁷ of a surprise discourse structure would be: (1) Two men, Mr. A and Mr. B, are walking along the Thames. (2) Mr. A offers Mr. B a sip from his flask. (3) Mr. B accepts and takes a sip. (4) Mr. B keels over and dies. Vital information is omitted from the discourse. The reader is bound to be surprised.

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⁶ Curiosity corresponds to Wenzel’s (28-30) Rätselspannungsschema.
⁷ The example is modeled on the one provided by Brewer and Lichtenstein (366).
as no previous intimation can be found in the narrative that the content of the flask is laced with deadly poison.

2.5.2. The suspense proper schema

Adapting the example given in the preceding subchapter, a very basic suspense schema would be the following: (1) A puts poison into a flask. (2) A and B are walking along the Thames. (3) A offers B a sip from his flask. (4) B accepts and takes a sip. (5) B keels over and dies (cf. Brewer and Lichtenstein 366). Event structure and discourse structure run parallel. The reader’s interest is sparked by the introduction of poison into the narrative. He instantly begins to wonder who will be poisoned. Will A kill himself? Will A poison somebody else? The reader is confronted with uncertainty and concern – essential prerequisites of suspense. One might add that, in theory, suspense results from parallel event and discourse structures. In most cases, however, authors resort to flash-forwards and allude to future narrative events, especially at the beginning of a text, to heighten the level of suspense. Consequently, parallel event and discourse structures are not an absolute precondition for the creation of suspense (Brewer 113).

Wenzel (30-32) has developed a more elaborate suspense schema consisting of five phases: The first phase, the introductory phase, contains “an initiating event in the discourse that has the potential to lead to [a] significant outcome for one of the characters” (Brewer 119), to conflict and danger (Wenzel 31). This initiating event serves as a means of arousing the narratee’s concern for the fate of the protagonist (Brewer 113). A characteristic feature of the introductory phase would be hints in the text foreshadowing imminent danger. These hints might be dropped by the narrator or the ensuing peril might be alluded to via ominous and foreboding descriptions in the narrative (Wenzel 31). The initiating event in City of Glass, for instance, would surely be the ominous phone call in the middle of the night. The mysterious caller fears for his life – there could hardly be a more significant outcome for a fictional character.

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8 Wenzel (30-32) uses the term Konflikt- und Bedrohungsspannungsschema.
The second phase is dedicated to “the arousal of sympathy” (Wenzel 31; own translation) via targeting the emotions of the reader. The narratee should ideally be able to identify with the protagonist or to, at least, develop substantial feelings of empathy. Otherwise, a reader might not rate a text as especially suspenseful. Means of achieving or alleviating the identification of the narratee with a fictional character would be the description of events from the protagonist’s perspective and the use of emotionally charged language (Wenzel 31).

The third and central phase can be characterized by an “interplay of despair and hope” (Wenzel 31; own translation) destined to keep the reader enthralled. The reader is constantly reminded of the fact that there are only two binary opposed solutions available: the victory of the hero or his failure. The narratee is taken on an emotional rollercoaster ride (Wenzel 31-32). He repeatedly believes his beloved fictitious character to be safe only to realize that yet another danger is lurking behind the corner.

In the following phase, the final decision is postponed. The reader hungers for a solution and for the ensuing resolution of suspense. Often authors introduce the aspect of time during this phase of the narrative to increase suspense - be it via a ticking time bomb or an ultimatum, for instance (Wenzel 32). The hero is running out of time one way or another. The captivated reader keeps his fingers crossed hoping the hero will succeed in winning the race against time.

The final phase, the resolution phase, is dedicated to providing the answers to the open questions posited at the beginning of the narrative. All uncertainty is removed. To fuel suspense once more before its ultimate resolution, a common narrative device would be the introduction of a last minute crisis (Wenzel 32).

One has to bear in mind that in most cases narratives cannot be neatly divided into the individual phases introduced above. Rather than being clearly separable, the phases occasionally overlap and merge. The same is true for the mystery schema to be discussed in the following subchapter (Wenzel 28).
2.5.3. The mystery schema

Wenzel (28-30) uses the term *Rätselspannungsschema*, while Brewer (112) speaks of curiosity and argues that “curiosity is produced by including a crucial event early in the event structure”. The reader is perfectly aware of the fact that valuable information has not been disclosed. As a consequence, curiosity is evoked. The narratee yearns to know what has happened; he wants to solve the enigma and play detective himself. At the end of the narrative he is finally given the missing information “allow[ing] the reader to reconstruct the missing event” (Brewer 112).

Adapting the example provided earlier, the respective curiosity – or mystery – schema might be illustrated by the following sentence: (1) B keels over and dies. The reader is bound to wonder why B should suddenly die; he longs to find out about the cause of B’s death, about the person responsible, their motives and their modus operandi (cf. Brewer and Lichtenstein 366).

Wenzel (29-30) proposes a far more elaborate narrative schema. His typical narrative schema of a mystery, or “analytic suspense” (Wenzel 29; own translation), can be divided into five phases, namely an introductory phase, a phase concerned with reflection, the analytic phase, the blocking phase, and the solution. In the first phase, the mystery is introduced (Wenzel 29). A murder is discovered or the theft of a valuable piece of jewelry is noticed by its owner. In *Night Train*, the body of Jennifer Rockwell is found and the detective has serious qualms whether the manner of death can be ruled a suicide.

The second phase would then be dedicated to the reflection upon the crime. Characters are bound to voice their horror concerning the atrocious deed done; they are puzzled about how the murder could possibly have been committed (e.g. in a-locked-room scenario), or how the jewels could have been stolen; they are surprised, bewildered and scared (Wenzel 29). In *Night Train*, every character is baffled by the question as to why Jennifer should have committed suicide. There simply seems to be no discernible motive. The intensity of emotions conveyed in the narrative are bound to proportionately affect feelings of suspense experienced by the reader. Wenzel (29) further argues that the
reader undergoes a process of identification with the characters during this phase, which, in turn, leads to a higher level of curiosity. However, other critics (e.g. Junkerjürgen 68) propose that the reader does not identify with the characters in a detective story at all; he rather identifies with the attempt at finding a solution to the riddle.

The next phase, the analytic phase, is characterized by the presentation of various potential solutions, suspicions, and theories. The reader is repeatedly led down the wrong path; ‘red herrings’ appear again and again in the story (Wenzel 29). The following fourth phase, the blocking phase, is concerned with obstacles the detective (and the reader) encounters, which are intended to impede or complicate the arrival at the final solution of the case, and is destined to increase suspense. The longer this blocking phase lasts, the more urgent will be the reader’s need to eventually arrive at the solution to the riddle. In the final phase the reader will, then, be presented with the solution to the case. One should not forget, however, that the reader counts on the narrator’s willingness and ‘promise’ to provide a solution in the end (cf. narrator-narratee contract) (Wenzel 30).

2.6. Suspense and style

The following subchapter is dedicated to the discussion of a selection of suspense creating devices stemming from the syntactic, lexico-semantic and text-pragmatic level. As a rule, one might say that narrative suspense can only be created via linguistic means (Fill, Aspekte 221). Fill (Aspekte 221) also differentiates between ‘formal linguistic Spannung’ and ‘content-related suspense’.

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9 Langer (18-19) briefly touches upon the issue of ‘subliminal suspense’ as a form of non-plot-related suspense. One might be led to conclude that these linguistic devices lead to a variant of suspense taking an intermediate position between tension and suspense proper. I would argue, however, that it strongly depends on the linguistic device whether tension or suspense is generated.
2.6.1. Suspense and syntax

Effective means of inducing suspense and tension would be the deviation from syntactic rules and the postponement of syntactic elements (Fill, Prinzip 36-37). Examples of the delay of important syntactic constituents would be the delay of the main clause or parenthesis leading to an even longer period of retardation. The reader is kept waiting for "syntactic relaxation" (Fill, Devices 266), which is brought about by the final introduction of the main clause (Fill, Devices 265-266).

An unusual word order may serve as an illustrative example of the deviation from syntactic rules. Most sentences are constructed according to the predominant syntactic schema of 'subject - predicate - object'. If a sentence does not adhere to this rule, it is likely to generate a higher level of tension. A question, for instance, typically inverts the aforementioned syntactic rule. Consequently, an interrogative clause tends to induce more tension than a mere statement (Fill, Prinzip 38, 41). Fill (Devices 266) labels a question as "an 'open' sentence [...] requir[ing] an answer which syntactically (and often semantically too) gives the relaxation of the tension created in the question". The same would be true for elliptical sentences in contrast to full sentences. Ellipsis makes a sentence appear vague and uncertain. The reader is left guessing to some extent, which would evoke a state of tension (Fill, Prinzip 41-42).

Moreover, ‘structural suspense’ can be generated via the alternate use of different types of sentences (i.e. via the alternate use of interrogative clauses, imperative clauses, and statements). Last but not least, varying sentence lengths may lead to a specific rhythm of a text, which may, in turn, contribute to an increase in tension (Fill, Prinzip 41-42).

\[\text{Fill (Devices 266) speaks of tension in connection to questions. The same should be true for ellipsis or any other kind of deviation from established syntactic rules.}\]
2.6.2. Suspense and lexico-semantics

On the lexical level, one has to bear in mind that constant repetition induces boredom rather than suspense. Therefore, the use of synonyms would positively affect the level of suspense (Fill, *Prinzip* 31). Some words practically lend themselves to generating suspense and tension. Fill (*Devices* 269) lists as examples “danger, anticipation, suspicion, unsuspecting”. The lexical items given “point at some crucial event in the future” (Fill, *Devices* 269). The reader remains in the dark as to what this crucial event might be. As a result, the narratee will be in a state of suspense (Fill, *Devices* 269).

Furthermore, lexical items denoting horror or pertaining to the field of crime or police work have a high potential for creating suspense (Fill, *Devices* 269, Fill, *Prinzip* 75). Examples would be “gruesome, strange tale, visitation”, or “terrifying, ghastliness, supernatural, stealthy, horrifying” (Fill, *Devices* 269). Tantalizing words such as these can often be found in the title of a narrative. They are used to rivet the reader’s attention, while syntax only plays a minor role in most titles (Fill, *Devices* 269). The title of a narrative can be equated with a “promise of suspense” (Fill, *Prinzip* 73; own translation). Examples of thrilling titles would be Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River*, or John Fowles’ *The Enigma*. The noun phrases in question are destined to grab the reader’s attention and to arouse his curiosity.

Metaphors would be another suspense-generating mechanism. “[C]oncepts from different ontological areas” (Fill, *Devices* 270) are used as a means of “comparison of two distinctly different, yet similar, things” (Norgaard, Montoro and Busse 107). “[V]ehicle’ and ‘tenor’ [...] are contrasted, they interact, but do not merge” (Fill, *Prinzip* 32; own translation). The more distance there is between the vehicle and the tenor, the more suspense a metaphor will be able to create. Moreover, it is important to note that new metaphors generate a higher level of suspense than frequently used or dead metaphors (Fill, *Devices* 270, Fill, *Prinzip* 33). Goatly (32) speaks of “degrees of conventionality” in this context. As a rule, one might say that dead metaphors have lost almost all of their suspense-creating potential over time, while active metaphors possess the highest potential for inciting suspense (Fill, *Devices* 270, Fill, *Prinzip* 33). A
dead metaphor might be characterized as “ha[ving] become so ingrained in a
given language by extensive popular use that interlocutors do not think of it as
metaphorical any longer” (e.g. “‘table leg’ [or] ‘bottleneck’”) (Norgaard, Montoro
and Busse 107). If a reader does not notice anything out of the ordinary,
feelings of suspense or tension will not be generated. An example of an
unconventional and, therefore, potentially suspense-inducing metaphor might
be “the organ tree, with its strange fruit” (NT11 25). The metaphor compares
human organs to fruit. There seems to be enough distance between the vehicle
(fruit) and the tenor (organs) of the metaphor to render it a source of suspense
and tension.

In general, I would argue that it strongly depends on the type of metaphor used
whether suspense or tension is created. The aforementioned examples seem to
generate tension rather than suspense. The respective type of Spannung might
also depend on how easily vehicle and tenor can be identified by the reader.
The metaphor of the red notebook in City of Glass, for instance, might serve as
an example of a metaphor creating suspense rather than tension. It is never
made clear in the narrative what the actual tenor of the metaphor is. The reader
is drawn into speculation; he is faced with uncertainty and is kept wondering
throughout the narrative. Therefore, one might posit that the metaphor leads – if
not to suspense proper – at least to a close variant of actual suspense.

Other lexico-semantic devices for the creation of tension would be semantic
contrast (oxymoron), unusual collocations, neologisms, foreign words or
loanwords (Fill, Devices 269-270, Fill, Prinzip 31, 75). In the case of semantic
contrast and unusual collocations, the narratee’s curiosity is awakened; he
“want[s] to know how this contrast is resolved or at least explained later in the
text” (Fill, Devices 270). An example of an unusual collocation leading the
reader to wonder about its import would be “a look of hilarious humiliation” (NT
122). Neologisms and foreign words are bound to work in a similar way. They
form a certain contrast towards the language used in the narrative and,
therefore, create a state of tension. Examples of words from a foreign language

11 NT is used as an abbreviation for Amis’ Night Train.
incorporated into the text can repeatedly be found in Night Train (e.g. “Haec est corpus. This is the body” (NT 59)).

2.6.3. Suspense and text-pragmatics

The final group of devices for creating suspense “rel[ies] on the uses and effects of Cohesion and Coherence\textsuperscript{12} in texts” (Fill, Devices 271). Referentless pronouns, narrative point of view and intertextuality are examples of text-pragmatic devices of suspense creation (Fill, Devices 271-272, Fill, Prinzip 49, 56, 58).

First of all, referentless pronouns may contribute to the amount of suspense experienced by the reader. Pronouns are usually used anaphorically. Referentless pronouns, on the other hand, are used cataphorically. They can often be found at the beginning of poems, novels or short stories. Referentless pronouns lead to “indeterminacy and suspense” (Fill, Devices 271). Suspense is generated as a result of “the tension between these two functions” (Fill, Devices 271) – a tension resulting from the use of basically anaphoric elements as cataphoric. By initially suppressing the referent, vital information (i.e. the referent) is concealed from the reader. Referentless pronouns as a prime example of nonsequential sequence-signals\textsuperscript{13} “serve to pique the reader’s curiosity about [the referent’s] identity” (Backus 69). The suspense increases with the length of postponement. The text entices the reader to continue reading while he is waiting for the referent to be revealed (Fill, Prinzip 49).

In addition, referentless pronouns used at the beginning of a narrative “can help to plunge the reader \textit{in medias res} in order to give him a sense of immediacy or involvement” (Backus 69). The personal pronoun ‘it’ particularly lends itself to the creation of suspense and is often used “to introduce a scene” (Backus 74).

\textsuperscript{12} “While cohesion refers to the linking of sentences into text […], coherence concerns the appropriateness of a given text […] in its communicative context” (Norgaard, Montoro and Busse 53-54).

\textsuperscript{13} A sequence-signal can be defined as “any word indicating that the sentence in which it appears (the “sequence-sentence”) both follows another sentence (the “situation-sentence”) and depends upon that preceding sentence for its full meaning” (Backus 67).
If there are several references to a specific occurrence without revealing what has actually happened, the reader will be in suspense (Backus 74). *City of Glass* (3), for instance, begins with the following clause: “It was a wrong number that started it”. The reader instantly wonders what the second “it” could possibly refer to and, as a result, suspense will set in.

Furthermore, narrative point of view may foster the creation of suspense. Critics have argued that the amount of information given to the text’s recipient is strongly determined by the narrative perspective used. “[A] restricted narrative perspective creates more suspense because it withholds information from the reader which an omniscient narrator would have to give” (Fill, *Devices* 272). The incorporation of multiple perspectives would lead to an even higher degree of suspense and tension, namely to “suspense which works ‘in different directions’” and to “tension between different paths of suspense” (Fill, *Devices* 272). An epistolary novel, for instance, provides an insight into the thoughts and feelings of various characters in their letters. Multiple perspectives are introduced into the narrative leading to the aforementioned tension and suspense working in different directions. The more difference there is between characters in a narrative regarding their background or their station in life, for instance, the more suspense will be created (Fill, *Prinzip* 79-81).

Another possibility to increase suspense would be an abrupt interruption of the flow of narration by the insertion of flash-forwards, flashbacks, or digression. These narrative devices are often to be found at points of heightened suspense in a text. Slow motion and time-lapse shots are characteristic features of especially suspenseful scenes in movies. By delaying the relaxation period they achieve a further increase of an already comparatively high level of suspense (Fill, *Prinzip* 81). One might wonder, however, if a digression might not be counter-productive to the creation of suspense. On the one hand, it postpones information the reader hankers for. On the other hand, if a digression is too long-winded, the reader might grow bored. Moreover, a digression might tempt the reader to skip over the passages in question and resume reading only when
the actual story line restarts. The narrator has to “counteract[…] the reader’s natural inclination to dash forward” (Sternberg 162-163), which might prove challenging in the case of digressions.

Finally, intertextuality would be another means of increasing suspense and tension. Intertextuality - a common feature of postmodernist texts (Broich 249) - “denote[s] the interdependence of literary texts” (Cuddon 454). A narrative refers to another, earlier narrative. The author counts on the reader to recognize the reference (Broich 250). I would argue that tension as a static variant of suspense develops due to intertextuality. The respective texts serve as opposites leading to a source of tension. Fill (Prinzip 58; own translation) posits that the level of suspense increases “the more distance there is between the texts in question”. Moreover, a reader will experience a higher level of suspense if the intertextual reference is not easily discernible. Consequently, well-known quotations and allusions to famous speeches or literary texts do not entail a high degree of suspense. Fill speaks of “intertextual suspense” (Fill, Prinzip 58; own translation) which is produced via the distance of the respective texts on both the temporal and the linguistic level as well as via the distance between the different genres the texts can be assigned to (Fill, Prinzip 58). One might claim that intertextual suspense is a double-edged sword as well. An intertextual allusion should not be too obvious; otherwise hardly any tension will be created. On the other hand, if an intertextual reference is too hard to discern, intertextual suspense will not set in as readers will not be able to recognize the allusion to another text.

2.7. Suspense as a “conspiracy”15: The narrator-narratee contract

The work is a tissue of fictions: properly speaking it contains nothing that is true. However, in so far as it is not a total deception but a verified falsehood, it asks to be considered as speaking the truth: it is not just any old illusion, it is a determinate illusion. We will be tempted to say, since it must be accepted literally, that it assumes the reader’s uninterrupted

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14 A similar argument can be found in Sternberg (162) who regards narrative measures of retardation as “double-edged weapon[s]”.
15 Stratmann 179
assent. In so far as the author must rely on his faith and confidence, without which his work would not be read, it is tempting to talk of a pact, a tacit agreement which recognizes the self-determining power of fiction. (Macherey 78)

This tacit, yet “tenuous” agreement (Batty 74), the ‘narrator-narratee contract’, posits that both the reader and the narrator of a text have to fulfill a number of ‘contractual’ obligations to render a text suspenseful (Stratmann 177). “Where the narratee offers attention in exchange for information, the narrator sacrifices the information for some form of attention” (Chambers 51).

It is vital that both parties are willing to heed the stipulations of this metaphorical contract. The author16, in particular, has to observe three ‘rules’ when writing a story. The first one would be that he has to insert a mysterious ingredient - an enigma - at the beginning of his narrative. His plot might, for instance, commence with a dangerous, threatening situation or an open question the reader is desperate to get answered. All these initial problems present the starting point of a process - a process whose end appears uncertain at the outset of the narrative. However, the narrator is allowed to present the reader only with a limited number of possible solutions. For instance, it is common in detective stories that only a limited number of murder suspects is available. The narrator has to bear in mind that a ‘trigger’ is needed at the beginning of his story - be it a mystery or a promise. Otherwise the reader might not be tempted to continue reading if the narrator has not succeeded in evoking any feelings of suspense in the reader (Stratmann 177-178).

The second stipulation of the contract would be for the narrator to create as long a period of retardation as possible. The longer this period is the higher will be the intensity of suspense experienced by the reader. If a mystery is solved on the second page of a book, for instance, there will be no point for the reader to finish the whole novel. If he is presented with a solution, the suspense evaporates. This retarding period manifests itself in the numerous detours, red herrings, and story sidelines a narrator resorts to in order to taunt a reader, who

16 While the terms ‘narrator’ and ‘author’ certainly do not denote the same thing, in light of the narratorial contract discussed here, I have used both terms synonymously owing to the nature of the contractual duties.
is desperate to arrive at the final solution. One might even label this tendency sadomasochistic: the narrator tortures the reader as long as possible by withholding essential information and by refraining from providing closure at the earliest opportunity in order to maximize the reader’s feelings of suspense. If the reader finally gets closure, if he has arrived at the ultimate solution, he is no longer able to experience suspense (Stratmann 178-179).

Last but not least, the narrator has to provide closure to the reader. His contractual obligation to the reader has to be fulfilled (Stratmann 179). Suerbaum (26-27; own translation) defines suspense as “temporary [...] not-knowing coupled with the certainty of the ensuing solution”. Therefore, the narratee has to be able to rely on the narrator’s preparedness to actually provide this solution in the end. If the reader is denied a final solution - as is often the case in postmodernism, for instance - he might deem himself wronged and deceived by his partner to the contract (Stratmann 179).

The reader, on the other hand, has to fulfill certain duties stemming from the narrator-narratee contract as well. First and foremost, the reader has to be prepared to deactivate any prior knowledge, omnipresent schemata and frames in order to be able to experience feelings of suspense during the consumption of a narrative. He should be willing to put himself into a state of ‘quasi-uncertainty’, or as the literary catchphrase mentioned earlier says he should engage in a ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ (Stratmann 176-177).

It has, for instance, been argued that the average reader is perfectly aware of the fact that the most obvious suspect will ultimately not be the murderer in an Agatha-Christie-style detective story. Otherwise, the narrative would not be able to provide much opportunity for suspense. Readers of romances lend themselves as another example of this deactivation of schemata and frames to allow for the experience of suspense. The typical romance schema would be for the nice and inherently good heroine, with whom the female reader can immediately identify, to fall in love with a young and good-looking man. This man will inevitably be pursued by another woman as well - a woman who is cold-hearted and unpleasant and the prototypical villain (cf. character valence).
The reader is perfectly aware of the fact that the heroine will ultimately succeed in winning the man’s heart as this would be in line with the common schema of a romance. Nevertheless, the reader experiences suspense throughout the whole text due to the reader’s willingness to suspend all disbelief and to deactivate any prior knowledge about romances in general (Stratmann 176-177). One might argue, however, that the suspense is not due to the reader’s craving for the final solution here, i.e. the definite knowledge that there is a happy ending to the love triangle, but to the suspense evoked by the reader longing to know how she succeeds in winning his heart, and not so much if she succeeds at all (cf. de Wied 108). This would, of course, also be a typical example of Wie-Spannung.

2.8. Suspense in postmodernism

As regards suspense in postmodernist narratives, one should note that postmodernist writers have succeeded in appropriating common suspense strategies and genre conventions (e.g. conventions of detective stories, or romances) to be found in popular literature for high literature (Stratmann 184). The postmodern reader is still led to believe that he will get closure and a solution at the end of the narrative according to the rules of the narrator-narratee contract. Furthermore, the postmodern narrator still strives to delay the solution via numerous detours and variations - in other words, the stipulation that the period of retardation should last as long as possible remains in effect. However, postmodern authors often do not fulfill their contractual obligation of providing closure to the story. “As a consequence, the suspenseful plot loses its purpose; […] it becomes an end in itself, […] a mere game” (Stratmann 180; own translation).

Moreover, two basic approaches to suspense in postmodern narratives can be identified. On the one hand, authors resort to a seemingly never-ending retarding period which results in an ultimate lack of closure. On the other hand, they deconstruct the narratorial contract via its over-fulfillment through parody. Stratmann (181) argues that the reader is bound to lose the ability to put himself
into a state of quasi-uncertainty if he knows beforehand that no closure will be provided at the end of the narrative. He needs to be able to experience feelings of uncertainty, while he simultaneously expects all his questions to be answered at the end. In postmodern narratives, however, closure is not a given and if it is missing, the feeling of suspense created throughout the whole narrative is bound to suffer (Stratmann 180-181). As a consequence, postmodern literature is often said to be boring and tedious rather than rife with suspense (Wenzel 24).

Another common feature of postmodern texts, which might influence the level of suspense experienced by the narratee, would be unreliable narration. An unreliable narrator (e.g. the anonymous narrator in *City of Glass*) either chooses not to or is unable to provide a truthful account of events (Ligensa 59). Accordingly, one might differentiate between untrustworthy and fallible narrators (G. Olson 104). It has been suggested that in some cases unreliable narration might prove to be an almost traumatic reading experience for the unsuspecting reader (Ligensa 67). The narrator seems to taunt the narratee with grossly misleading information or deliberately ambiguous hints. Even if the narrator does not tell outright lies, he might lure the narratee into forming hypotheses, which are bound to be wrong owing to the narratee’s lack of correct information (Ligensa 60). “When narrators are untrustworthy, their accounts have to be altered in order to make sense of their discrepancies. Fallible narrators by contrast make individual mistakes or leave open informational gaps that need to be filled in” (G. Olson 104). In both cases the reader constructs new hypotheses, which constitutes a “central cognitive process” (Ligensa 63; own translation) a narratee has to go through in order to experience suspense. He is compelled to constantly adapt, reinterpret and reject former hypotheses according to the information obtained throughout the narrative (Ligensa 63). The reader will grow increasingly skeptical (G. Olson 102), he will contemplate and analyze earlier provided information – sometimes even after having already finished the narrative (Ligensa 67). Moreover, postmodern unreliable narration often goes hand in hand with a lack of closure. No state of relaxation can set in (Ligensa 64). Catharsis can only be achieved “in the ensuing reflection [on] and discussion” of the narrative (Ligensa 67; own translation). If one reflects upon
the narrative after having already closed the book, one might claim that suspense is, thereby, prolonged.

3. Postmodern detective fiction: The anti-detective novel

The postmodern world is characterized by fragmentation, disorientation, a prevailing sense of insecurity and the denial of absolute truth. These aspects led to the development of the postmodern strand of detective fiction, the anti-detective or metaphysical detective story. The anti-detective novel can be seen as “a parody of the genre” (Holzapfel 23). It plays with the traditional conventions of the genre, deconstructs them and confounds the expectations of the reader. Postmodern writers appropriate the traditional narrative structure of detective stories and incorporate the well-known ingredients (e.g. the character of the detective, an array of potential suspects, a heinous crime and its ensuing investigation) into their texts. The reader encounters these elements and, as a result, expects a traditional detective story. However, as the narrative unfolds he is bound to notice that these classical elements are used merely as a means of parody (Holzapfel 22-24).

Merivale and Sweeney (8) have drawn up an inventory of typical elements of postmodern detective stories, namely

(1) the defeated sleuth, … (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.18

While the classical detective – “the essential metaphor for order” (Holquist 141) - uses his ‘little grey cells’ and ratiocination to unveil the murderer or thief, the

17 Mise en abyme might be defined as “[a]ny diegetic segment which resembles the work where it occurs” (Ron 436). An example would be the discussion of Don Quixote in City of Glass (Musarra-Schroder 226).

18 The following chapter will discuss in detail whether these features can be found in Night Train and City of Glass.
anti-detective, or defeated sleuth, is not able to offer the desired solution (Holzapfel 24). For the classical detective “[t]here are no mysteries, there is only incorrect reasoning” (Holquist 141). One might say that for his postmodern counterpart there are only mysteries and heaps of incorrect reasoning. As a consequence, it is hardly surprising that postmodern sleuths are not able to provide a proper and satisfying solution to the mysteries they encounter. Instead, they leave chaos and irrationality in their wake (Holzapfel 26).

Moreover, while the traditional detective story concerns itself with the investigation of murder and death, “in the new metaphysical detective story it is life which must be solved” (Holquist 155). The anti-detective has to confront his inner demons. Incapable of carrying out his investigations objectively, he attempts to solve the enigma of his own life and identity (Holzapfel 24, Merivale and Sweeney 2).

As regards the structure of anti-detective novels, the narration no longer comes full circle owing to the lack of a final solution to the crime. The postmodern structure might even be compared to “a cracked circle or [to] a labyrinth without exit” (Holzapfel 25). The metaphysical detective story no longer follows a teleological plot structure. It refrains from providing “a neat ending” (Holquist 153); the questions posed by the narrative remain unanswered. The reader will remember its open ending; he will not forget it as easily as the ending of a conventional detective story which provides answers to all the questions raised earlier in the narrative (Holquist 153).

4. Suspense in postmodern detective fiction – An analysis

The following chapter is concerned with the analysis of suspense in two postmodern detective stories, namely in Martin Amis’ Night Train and Paul Auster’s City of Glass.
4.1. Martin Amis’ *Night Train*

4.1.1. *Night Train* – A postmodern detective story

At first glance, *Night Train* contains all the key elements of a classical detective story. A female police detective, Mike Hoolihan, sets out to solve “the worst case” (NT 1) of her career - the mysterious death of Jennifer Rockwell (cf. Norman, *Killing* 41). A limited number of suspects is presented to the reader step by step. Mike attempts to solve the mystery of Jennifer’s death by conventional means such as the interrogation of suspects, the perusal of the autopsy report, or the drafting of a list of “[s]tressors and [p]recipitants” (NT 75), for example. As a consequence, the reader expects another run-of-the-mill detective story adhering to the conventional formula. However, the novel “emerges as its very antithesis” (Norman, *Nothing* 3), as “a parody of the murder mystery” (Dern 145) playing with the classic conventions.

Mike Hoolihan’s first-person narrative is reminiscent of both Raymond Chandler’s and Dashiel Hemmet’s hard-boiled detective fiction (Freitas) and of police procedurals (Oertel 132) and their portrayal on American television crime programs (Finney 94, 136). However, in contrast to most hard-boiled detectives Mike is a woman – yet a very masculine one (Oertel 133). Gender boundaries are blurred. Finney (133) even labels Mike “ungendered”.

Several of Merivale and Sweeney’s (8) typical characteristics of postmodern detective stories (cf. chapter 3) can be found in *Night Train*. First of all, Mike appears to be the epitome of the defeated sleuth. She is able to rule out the possibility of murder but remains clueless as regards Jennifer’s possible motive. Her utter defeat becomes apparent at the very end of the novel when it transpires that Mike is about to commit suicide herself. Instead of being able to reestablish order, Mike further adds to the chaos left behind by Jennifer’s demise. She is “taking a good firm knot and reducing it to a mess of loose ends” (NT 139). A possible reason for her failure might be that the case is highly personal: she has known Jennifer since her childhood and Jennifer’s father acts as a substitute father figure for Mike. As a consequence, Hoolihan is not able to
keep the neutral stance required from a detective of Poirot’s or Holmes’ former
caliber.

Some critics have posited that Mike does not fail as a detective. After all, she is
able to establish Jennifer’s modus operandi and eventually learns the truth
about her death. However, “[i]n Amis’s version of the classical formula, finding
the truth is infinitely more disturbing than failing to find it because the truth has
no meaning. […] The detective cannot explain what Jennifer did, she can only
repeat it” (Martínez-Alfaro 118).

As regards the crime, a seasoned reader of detective fiction would inevitably
jump to the conclusion that Jennifer was murdered. He will immediately search
for suspects – especially for the least likely one. Throughout the novel the
reader is kept wondering whether Jennifer did not, in fact, meet a violent death.
Even after having finished the book the reader can hardly reconcile himself with
the fact that Jennifer shot herself in the head three times.

In line with the traditional formula, a variety of suspects is presented in due
course: Jennifer’s lover as the most obvious suspect, Jennifer’s boss, a chance
stranger she met in a bar, or Jennifer’s father. Amis openly parodies the
classical convention of the least likely person to be the perpetrator in the
following dialogue between Jennifer’s boyfriend and Mike:

“Hey, I got one for you. Tom did it.”
“Did what?”
“Killed Jennifer. Murdered Jennifer.”
“Come again?”
“He’s the least likely guy. So it has to be him. Come on, we can cook this
shit up. All you need is a little irresponsibility. It’s like redecorating the
bedroom – you can do it a hundred ways. Miriam did it. Bax Denzinger
did it. You did it. But let’s stick with Tom. Tom did it. He waits till I leave.
Then he sneaks in and does it.” (NT 114)

However, none of the suspects is ultimately the guilty party. One might argue
that the least likely person turns out to be the culprit after all as nobody would
suspect the murder victim to be the actual perpetrator.

Another prominent postmodern anti-detective story feature would be the vast
amount of ambiguous and ultimately meaningless clues. The evidence Mike
accumulates seems to point in multiple directions. The clues planted by Jennifer indicate suicide as the cause of death, while the remaining clues turn out to be a result of pure chance and are essentially meaningless.

As she headed toward death she imprinted a pattern that she thought would solace the living. A pattern: Something often seen before. Jennifer left clues. But the clues were all blinds. Bax Denzinger’s mangled algorithm? A blind [...]. The paintings she bought? A blind – an indolent afterthought. The lithium was a blind. Arn Debs was a blind. (NT 145)

Jennifer seemingly orchestrated Mike’s investigation to provide as much solace and comfort as possible to her loved ones. Critics have compared Jennifer to a “creative artist” (Freitas) who stages her suicide as a work of art.

All evidence unerringly points towards suicide, while the motive remains obscure. “But with homicide, now, we don’t care about motive. We never give it a second’s thought. We don’t care about the why. [...] That’s homicide. This is suicide. And we all want a why for suicide” (NT 107-108). Mike does not succeed in finding Jennifer’s motive. The best she can come up with is: “Sir, your daughter didn’t have motives. She just had standards. High ones. Which we didn’t meet” (NT 147). Critics have posited that “Night Train, though it engages with the challenges of postmodernity, is not reducible to ludic intellectual gratification, but explores and probes the human costs of that ‘nothing’ which threatens to nullify our efforts at finding purpose and logic in our existence” (Norman, Nothing 1). One might argue that Jennifer as a highly intelligent human being is painfully aware of the overwhelming absence of purpose and logic and considers suicide to be her only means of escape. In addition, the blatant absence of a motive – a pillar of the traditional detective story – serves as a further means of highlighting the “artificiality of the genre” (Finney 62).

Furthermore, the postmodern characteristic feature of double and unstable identities can be spotted in Night Train, although, admittedly, not as prominently as in Auster’s City of Glass. As Mike’s investigation proceeds, Jennifer increasingly serves as an identification figure for Mike. She is drawn into Jennifer’s world of existential fears and utter desperation (cf. Finney 60). Jennifer might be read as “an idealized equivalent of the fallible Mike” (Finney

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19 Also quoted in Freitas, for instance.
Martínez-Alfaro 112). Finney (61) speaks of “honorary sisters”. Mike is haunted by the ghost of Jennifer. From a realist perspective, one cannot help but wonder whether Mike is under the influence of alcohol and is hallucinating as a result. “Jennifer Rockwell is inside of me, trying to reveal what I don’t want to see” (NT 67). Jennifer’s ghost has seemingly infiltrated her mind forcing Mike to acknowledge uncomfortable truths, which might cause her ultimate breakdown.

While no discernible reason can be found to explain Jennifer’s suicide, myriads of possible explanations could be given for Mike’s (e.g. sexual abuse, the abandonment by her mother and her childhood in state care, alcoholism, a series of less than ideal relationships with men, or a job given to seeing the worst atrocities). Jennifer, on the other hand, as the perfect antithesis to Mike seems to have it all: a loving family, a perfect boyfriend, a stellar career. Mike increasingly seems to play with the idea of taking Jennifer’s place: “I’ve never wanted a kid. What I’ve wanted is a father. So how do we all stand, now that Colonel Tom doesn’t have a daughter?” (NT 87). In addition, she contemplates changing her first name to Jennifer (cf. NT 105; Finney 61 or Martínez-Alfaro 113) and admits to having a crush on Trader, Jennifer’s boyfriend (cf. NT 111).

Moreover, the possessive pronoun used in the following quotation is slightly ambiguous: “My death scene has been destroyed” (NT 111). On the one hand, the detective would speak of the death scene as hers in the sense that she worked and investigated the scene. On the other hand, one might also read it - if one were to take a certain amount of interpretational freedom - as further proof of Mike’s growing identification with Jennifer.

Another almost eerie instance illustrating a strong identification with the victim or even the assumption of Jennifer’s role would be the passage in which Mike reads out Jennifer’s suicide note to record it on tape. “I waited till I heard the door. I huddled down over the tape recorder. I tried to raise my voice above a whisper – and I couldn’t. I had to use the volume control on the machine, because mine just wasn’t working” (NT 116-117). The narrator might have intended the narratee to misunderstand the scene. Mike has just received Jennifer’s suicide note – yet no clear indication is given that Mike is only reading
Jennifer’s letter. The hair-raising passage ends with the following remark: “And so it went on, over the page to the end of the sheet: I’m sorry” (NT 118). Only then does the narratee realize that Mike does not compose a note of her own in Jennifer’s stead. Moreover, the end of the suicide note uncannily echoes the beginning of Mike’s narrative (cf. NT 5, also argued in Martínez-Alfaro 119). “Little by little, Mike falls apart and ends up becoming one with the victim by doing exactly what Jennifer is supposed to have done: taking “the night train”, the novel’s recurrent metaphor for suicide” (Martinez-Alfaro 111).

As regards the absence of closure, Freitas argues that nobody gets closure at the end of the narrative, neither the reader nor the characters. This profound lack of closure is highly frustrating – for all the parties involved but especially for Mike. On the other hand, one might argue that closure is, in fact, established. Jennifer’s death can unequivocally be identified as suicide – “the ultimate act of closure” (Norman, Nothing 4). Mike’s, Colonel Tom’s and the reader’s longing for a proper motive and, thus, a neat ending remains unfulfilled. Mike’s semi-explanation does not seem to make sense at all. It leaves the reader feeling disappointed and cheated. Mike’s mounting frustration culminates in yet another suicide. At least, the reader might infer her resolve from the concluding paragraph of the novel:

There – finished. All gone. Now me I’m heading off to Battery and its long string of dives. I want to call Trader Faulkner and say goodbye but the phone’s ringing again and the night train’s coming and I can hear that dickless sack of shit bending the stairs out of joint and let him see what happens if he tries to stand in my way or just gives me that look or opens his mouth and says so much as one single word. (NT 149)

Mike has a history of alcoholism; a relapse to her former drinking habit is bound to kill her due to the bad state of her liver. One might say that she is about to commit suicide on rates, killing herself slowly with alcohol as her weapon of choice (cf. e.g. Dern 145). “The ending leaves Mike’s fate undecided, but the sound of the approaching night train of the title is indicative” (Finney 61).

Last but not least, it has been argued that “Night Train enacts [suicide] at the level of form” (Norman, Killing 42). Classical detective fiction begins with murder and returns to it at the end by explaining who is responsible, how he did it and why he committed the deed. The detective dispels all doubts, eliminates the
chaos caused by the murder and restores the world to its former order. Jennifer’s mysterious suicide, on the other hand, might constitute an allegory, “an act of resistance to the restrictive tyranny of the detective form with its demands for logical solutions and other conventions. If Jennifer kills herself physically, then Night Train performs a narrative suicide” (Norman, Killing 43). Amis’ novel denies the reader the satisfaction of restored order and normality. Instead, “it forces the reader into a far-reaching process of reflection on such disquieting issues as our claim to know others, and ourselves; suicide as an ethical or unethical act; what counts as motive; what cannot be put into words; the needs and the risks inherent in self-reflection” (Martínez-Alfaro 125).

4.1.2. Suspense in Night Train

4.1.2.1. Some general observations

Suspense is a highly subjective phenomenon. While some readers will find a text highly suspenseful and thrilling, others might not like the book at all. Reviewers of Night Train, for example, hold diametrically opposed views regarding the question whether or not Night Train is a book full of suspense. De Haven, for instance, states that “there’s nothing here that remotely resembles suspense”, while Kakutani asserts that “Amis has created a quicksilver narrative that grabs the reader and refuses to let go”.

The very first paragraph of the novel is destined to entice the reader into the fictional world of the “noirish mystery” (Kakutani).

I am a police. That may sound like an unusual statement – or an unusual construction. But it’s a parlance we have. Among ourselves, we could never say I am a policeman or I am a policewoman or I am a police officer. We would just say I am a police. I am a police and my name is Detective Mike Hoolihan. And I am a woman, also. (NT 1)

Diedrick (162) claims that the opening sentence already indicates that there will not be a proper ending to the story. Similar to the omitted end of the noun phrase, the ending of the story seems to have disappeared as well. Owing to the incompleteness of the first sentence “the reader feels a vague unease, a
sense of thwarted expectation” (Diedrick 162). The opening paragraph instantly grabs the reader’s attention and arouses curiosity. The narratee, who feels compelled to fill in the blank left by the structural incompleteness, will resume reading.

Another conspicuous suspense-inducing ingredient to be found here would be the fact that no name is provided at first. The reader does not even learn if the first-person narrator is male or female. Only at the end of the paragraph is the name of the narrator stated. The reader is kept in suspense – if only for a relatively short period of time. However, the name provided is deceptive. The first name Mike would suggest a man – yet in the following sentence we learn that Mike is female. The expectations of the reader are clearly thwarted. Moreover, her surname almost sounds like ‘hooligan’ (cf. Norman (Killing 55) who also identifies a pun concerning Mike’s surname). The reader is made to wonder about the possible implications of a speaking name for the ensuing narrative.

After this period of short-term suspense established in the opening paragraph, which plunges the narratee into the realms of the narrative, suspense is immediately aroused again in the following paragraph when Mike begins her account of “the worst case [she] ha[s] ever handled” (NT 1). The seemingly endless repetition of the lexical item ‘worst’ leads the reader to seriously consider what the term ‘worst’ could possibly denote for a seasoned police detective. As a consequence, the narratee will probably expect a particularly gruesome tale.

The narrator masterfully retains vital information to achieve maximum suspense. Aficionados of the genre immediately want to have answers to the manifold questions arising at the beginning of the narrative. The most pressing questions would regard the identity of both the victim and the perpetrator, the latter’s modus operandi and motive. Due to well-established schemata the reader does not harbor the slightest doubt that he will be offered a convincing solution in the end. Moreover, the open questions are of sufficient importance to the reader, he cares about the outcome. Human impulses and deep-set fears
are played upon (cf. *crimen*) as well. The high level of suspense created at the beginning of the narrative hardly diminishes in the course of the unfolding narrative. The burning question whether the case can be categorized as suicide or murder remains relevant and at the back of the reader’s mind even after it has become abundantly clear that Jennifer committed suicide.

As regards empathy as another vital prerequisite of suspense, the narratee is bound to feel pity for Mike when she reveals her disastrous childhood and her alcohol addiction (cf. Finney 132). “A stream-of-consciousness reveals the vulnerability of Mike’s feelings” (Puschmann-Nalenz 208). She might have a “brute exterior” (Dern 141), yet she is sensitive and kind. The reader trusts Mike. One might claim that the reader is to some extent manipulated into instantly liking the narrator. The colloquial language and short sentences convey the impression that Mike engages in a dialogue with the reader. Mike’s quasi-conversational partner begins to care about her and, as a consequence, he cares about the outcome of her story as well, which would, in turn, contribute to the generation of suspense.

Mike’s intention to commit suicide at the end of the novel catches the reader by surprise. He will reassess the events depicted earlier in the narrative looking for clues indicating Mike’s plan to take her own life. Perusing the novel for a second time, the reader will find ample clues as to her growing desperation. On a first reading, however, the narratee is unlikely to interpret them correctly as the notion of the death of the detective would be virtually unheard of in classic detective fiction.

4.1.2.2. *Was-Spannung, Wie-Spannung* and *Warum-Spannung* in *Night Train*

The predominant forms of suspense in the narrative seem to be *Wie-Spannung* and especially *Warum-Spannung*. *Was-Spannung* plays only a minor role in *Night Train*. The reader encounters *Was-Spannung* only at the very end of the narrative. He is compelled to wonder whether Mike really commits suicide or if
somebody succeeds in preventing her from taking her own life. After all, Trader arrives back home just in time. Moreover, Colonel Tom seems to have realized that Mike is on the verge of a nervous breakdown or relapse into her former alcohol addiction. There are flickers of hope that Mike will, in fact, be saved. The reader can never be sure, however. No relaxation period is able to set in. The suspense felt will never be resolved.

Wie-Spannung, on the other hand, is to be found in the first part of the narrative. Both the reader and the detective are engaged in finding out whether Jennifer’s death has been suicide or murder. The narratee works from the premise that the detective will eventually solve the case. He counts on the mystery being explained in full detail. The mystery buff will strongly suspect that he has encountered a clear-cut case of murder. He assumes that he knows the principle ending of the story – the revelation of both the culprit and his motive. In so far, he is only interested in the way this revelation is achieved, i.e. the investigation of the crime, the formulation of hypotheses and the pursuit of possible leads.

However, the initial Wie-Spannung develops into a manifestation of Warum-Spannung in the second half of the book. Having successfully established that Jennifer committed suicide, Mike starts to look for a possible motive trying to establish why her friend should have voluntarily taken her own life. The whodunit changes to a whydunit (cf. e.g. Finney 133 or Oertel 134). The mystery aficionado caught up in the traditional conventions of the genre might be reluctant to drop the notion that Jennifer was murdered. He might still be captivated by Wie-Spannung during the second half of the novel, desperately hoping that a murderer will finally appear on the scene. As a result, it might be suggested that his experience of suspense alternates between Wie-Spannung and Warum-Spannung.
4.1.2.3. Thrill and human impulses in *Night Train*

Thrill as a particularly strong feeling of suspense can be experienced at numerous points in the novel. A variety of motifs attributable to *crimen*, *fructus* and *sexus* have been incorporated into Amis' narrative. First of all, *crimen* would provide the main source of thrill as the prototypical detective story motif. *Night Train* is concerned with the demise of a beautiful young woman. However, as she is already dead at the outset of the narrative, the potential for suspense creation would appear to be negligible.

Colonel Tom’s inability to come to terms with his daughter's death addresses the human impulse of *fructus*. Suspense is mainly generated via empathy and pity. The same would be true for Mike’s abuse by her own father, which can be categorized both under *fructus* and *sexus*. Simultaneously addressing multiple human impulses will generate a comparatively high degree of suspense. Mike’s short account of her unhappy childhood touches the reader’s heart. He is appalled by the cruelty of Mike’s parents and is filled with pity for the poor woman.

At the very end of the narrative a notable amount of thrill is generated during the phone call to Colonel Tom. The culmination of suspense is based on the combination of *fructus* and *crimen*. Colonel Tom acts as a surrogate father for Mike, which would address the notion of *fructus*. *Crimen*, on the other hand, comes into play when it becomes increasingly evident that Mike has decided to commit suicide. Noticing the urgency conveyed by Colonel Tom’s side of the conversation, the narratee will hold his breath hoping against hope that the beloved fictional character will not come to harm. Jennifer’s father realizes that something is wrong with Mike and, thus, provides a vital clue for the reader before Mike admits that she is “heading off to Battery and its long string of dives” (*NT* 149).

Finally, *sexus* is used as a potential creator of thrill in the narrative as well. Examples of allusions to the third human impulse would be Mike’s relationship with Tobe or her crush on Trader. In addition, the description of the crime scene might serve as an example of the blurring of boundaries between *crimen* and
sexus: “Curtains half-drawn against the moonlight, orderly dressing table, tousled sheets, and a faint smell of lust” (NT 10). Thrill is generated by the seemingly erotic description of the crime scene. The autopsy would be yet another instance of the generation of thrill based on crimen and sexus, the latter by comparing an autopsy to rape. All the gory details of an autopsy are provided. Dern (142), for instance, suggests that the portrayal of the autopsy illustrates “Amis’ love for minute, often gory detail”. The sensitive reader might cringe and hurry to read on trying to avoid contemplating the horror depicted.

4.1.2.4. Narrative schema, suspense and structure of Night Train

The following chapter is concerned with the question in how far Amis adheres to the conventional mystery schema to be found in most classical detective fiction. The first phase of a mystery narrative is mainly dedicated to the introduction of the enigma or mystery (cf. mystery schema). Night Train commences with an extensive introduction of the character of the detective who also functions as the narrator. The lengthy description of Mike’s prior work history might serve as a means of establishing Mike as a reliable narrator. “[H]er tone indicates a solid balance of emotion, honesty and intelligent devotion to procedure” (Dern 143). The narratee is compelled to trust Mike and to grow fond of her. Diedrick (163) argues that “the reader is brought under the spell of Hoolihan’s voice”.

In the second paragraph of the narrative the reader is already presented with the mystery of Mike’s “worst case” (NT 1). No further specifics are initially provided. The reader is kept waiting with bated breath for more information. Moreover, the narrator ascertains that the reader is made perfectly aware of the fact that the seasoned policewoman has seen the most atrocious deeds imaginable in the course of her work. She has investigated “maybe a thousand suspicious deaths” (NT 4). Yet the present case qualifies as the worst case ever. As a result, the text is bound to elicit a high amount of suspense.

“As of today – April second – I consider the case “Solved”. It’s closed” (NT 4). The narrative does not start according to the traditional schema with a body and
the ensuing criminal investigation. Instead, the novel opens with a solved case. The reader infers that the detective already knows the identity of the murderer and assumes that she will reveal it in the course of the story. “These papers and transcripts were put together piecemeal over a period of four weeks. [...] I apologize for the outcome. I’m sorry. I’m sorry, I’m sorry” (NT 5). The reader might find it slightly puzzling that the narrator feels the need to profusely apologize. As a consequence, he might wonder whether the outcome will be an extremely gory or cruel one. Oertel (134) posits that at “the beginning of the novel there are some giveaways anticipating the end, but on a first reading these are likely to be misconstrued”.

The narrative then resumes in the form of a diary (also argued in. Oertel 132) starting with March 4th – the day of Jennifer’s death. Mike’s chronological narration begins with a phone call from a colleague asking her to notify Colonel Tom Rockwell of the demise of his daughter. The reader finally learns what Mike’s worst case is about. She instantly voices her doubts whether Jennifer’s death can really be ruled a suicide. “This was definitely not a yeah-right suicide. This was a no-wrong suicide” (NT 8). The narratee will instantly suspect foul play and will be in suspense regarding the questions of who killed Jennifer, what were the killer’s motives and how did he manage to stage the murder as suicide. I would argue that the introductory phase ends at this point in the narrative with the final introduction of the mystery.

The following phases of Wenzel’s mystery schema cannot be as easily applied to the narrative as the initial phase. The reflection phase, the analytic phase, and the blocking phase seem to merge in Night Train. As discussed earlier, the reflection phase, as the name suggests, is concerned with the reflections of the characters upon the criminal transgression. They articulate their surprise, disbelief, consternation and fear. In Night Train, every single character voices their sheer disbelief that Jennifer should have killed herself (e.g. Jennifer’s father (“This is nuts” (NT 13) or Jennifer’s boss who is “[c]onsternated and devastated” (NT 94)). Her boyfriend reacts with “hostile disbelief” (NT 32) trying to hit the detective bearing the bad news. In general, suspense depends on the depth of emotion conveyed by the individual characters. As emotions run high in
the narrative, suspense is generated on a large scale. Especially Colonel Tom and Trader are devastated by Jennifer’s demise. However, the character most affected by her death seems to be Mike herself. The reader is bound to develop feelings of sympathy and pity for the fictional characters, which would contribute to the level of suspense experienced.

The third phase in Wenzel’s schema, the analytic phase, is dedicated to the uncovering of various potential solutions and to the identification of suspects. In Night Train, the second and the third phase seem to be tightly interwoven. Colonel Tom asks Mike to find a solution to the crime that he “can live with” (NT 19) and accordingly she sets out to prove that Jennifer was murdered in the first part of the book. She watches a tape of the autopsy, “work[s] the phones” (NT 28), interviews the neighbors, and interrogates Jennifer’s boyfriend Trader – the prime suspect offered on a platter to Mike and the reader: “There’s evil in him, Mike” (NT 41). Trader remains the chief suspect almost until the very end of the novel – at least in the reader’s mind. Mike discards him as a potential suspect fairly early in the narrative even though there seems to be condemning evidence against him. “He looks up slowly. And his face is clear. His expression is clear. Complicated, but clear. And suddenly I know two things. First, that he’s innocent. Second, that if he wants to, he can prove it” (NT 56). No explanation is given to the reader why she should suddenly trust him. Mike’s behavior seems puzzling and more than a little troubling if one considers her crush on Trader, which becomes evident at a later point in the narrative. The reader feels frustrated; he has to rely on Mike’s instinct – an instinct schooled by years of investigating horrible crimes. Furthermore, Trader’s interrogation ends in an extremely curious way: “Suspect and interrogator have joined hands on the table. Both are shedding tears” (NT 58). The narratee is unsure what to make of this scene. If one takes the end of the novel into account, one is bound to wonder whether this is not a clear indication of Mike’s impending breakdown, of Mike starting to unravel before the very eyes of the reader. Consequently, one is bound to wonder how reliable the following narrative will be.

The first part of the narrative – the search for a murderer – ends with the autopsy report, which is presented in a rather peculiar way. The autopsy with its
Latin introduction of “[h]aec est corpus” (NT 59) is reminiscent of a sermon in church\textsuperscript{20} as well as of a doctor talking to his patient. Jennifer herself is addressed. “Jennifer, you killed yourself. It’s down” (NT 59). There is no doubt that it was suicide. “[E]veryone now knows for sure that Jennifer Rockwell committed a crime on the night of March fourth” (NT 59). The case is closed, there seems to be no need for further investigation.

The second part of the narration, which I would argue commences a little earlier than the actual part two of the novel, is kick-started by the request of Jennifer’s mother: “[W]e were looking for a why. And I guess we found one. But suddenly we don’t have a who. Who was she, Mike?” (NT 64). After having been able to establish an apparent motive for suicide, Jennifer’s next of kin begin to wonder if they really knew their loved one at all. Martínez-Alfaro (116) argues that “the story suggests that it is impossible to put the “who” back in the whodunit, that, in other words, no amount of information can reveal who other people are”.

Part two of Night Train is titled “Felo de se” (NT 67), which can be translated as “intentional self-murder” (Finney 61). An actual translation of the Latin phrase is not provided in the narrative, however. Regarding suspense, a reader not fluent in Latin will not be able to feel any suspense if he does not know what the phrase actually means. Readers fluent or semi-fluent in Latin might be able to translate the phrase into their native tongue. However, whether the neutral heading of ‘suicide’ might conjure up a high amount of curiosity and suspense remains doubtful. The first part of the narrative managed to clearly establish that Jennifer killed herself. The informational void has apparently been filled; the open questions have been answered. The neutral heading of the Latin phrase – although foreign words, in general, do have the potential of contributing to the creation of tension on the text-pragmatic level of a text (cf. suspense and style) – seems to have little effect as regards suspense. The case has already been closed, there seems to be little point to the narrative now. As a consequence, suspense should theoretically falter. However, the metaphor of the night train at the very beginning of part two instantly re-hooks the reader and plunges him back into the world of the postmodern noir.

\textsuperscript{20} Puschmann-Nalenz (207-208) has identified allusions to the Christian religion in a number of other passages as well.
The ensuing narrative is no longer presented in the form of a diary. The text is divided by a number of subtitles. Some of them sound as if they stem from the scientific realm (e.g. “The Psychological Autopsy” (NT 67), “Stressors and Precipitants” (NT 71)) or as if they pertain to Jennifer’s work as a scientist. It seems almost as if Jennifer herself has overtaken the narrative. Puschmann-Nalenz (206) argues that “Part 2 […] tries to deal with Jennifer’s death on an abstract, systematic level, interrupted by scenic presentations of discussions, flashbacks and reflections”. Factual data about suicide is provided and Jennifer is repeatedly discarded as a likely candidate for suicide. One might argue that an elaborate and extensive blocking phase according to Wenzel’s mystery schema commences at this point in the narrative. This phase can, in general, be characterized by the detective facing numerous obstacles hindering and deterring him from solving the case. Mike has, in theory, already arrived at the correct solution regarding Jennifer’s death. However, she still encounters various ‘red herrings’ that render suicide increasingly improbable. This reinforces the steadfast belief of the narratee that Jennifer’s death has, in fact, been murder despite the title of “Felo de se”. As the narrative has obviously not ended yet, the reader harbors strong suspicions that the revelation of a murderer might still be in the offing. The conventions of the classical detective story are strongly ingrained in the reader’s mind leading to his apparent inability to accept suicide as the solution.

Furthermore, this hankering of the reader for a different solution is catered to by another major discovery conducive to suspense, namely the discovery of Jennifer’s datebook containing only a single, mysterious appointment after her death. Various suspense strategies are set into motion. First of all, merely initials are provided followed by a question mark. The initials incite suspense as they entice the reader to wonder what they could possibly stand for. The question mark adds to the mystery even further. Moreover, the appointment is supposed to take place the very next day. A sense of urgency is introduced as Mike does not have much time to find out what the initials stand for or for whom. While Mike assumes that she has unearthed a clue pertaining to a second boyfriend and a convincing reason for suicide, the reader, unwilling to allow for
any other possibility than murder, immediately casts Jennifer’s mysterious date in the role of the murderer.

Another suspense episode would be the phone call from Jennifer’s supposed ‘other boyfriend’, Arn Debs. He calls Mike to confirm his appointment with Jennifer. Suspense peaks as the reader yearns to know why Arn Debs happens to have dialed Mike’s number of all people’s. The narratee’s curiosity is evoked. He wants to learn more about Arn Debs and about his relationship to Jennifer. However, the reader is kept on his toes as he has to read through a deeply shocking account of Mike’s childhood first. A fairly long period of retardation is introduced into the narrative before ‘the other boyfriend’ theory is finally rejected and Arns Debs is revealed as merely another ‘red herring’.

The last phase in Wenzel’s narrative schema is concerned with the presentation of the solution to the audience. I would argue that the final phase of Night Train commences at the beginning of part three of the narrative, “The Seeing” (NT 133), with Mike’s realization that “Jennifer left clues” (NT 134) and that the supposed victim has orchestrated the whole investigation. One might argue that closure is given to Colonel Tom and Trader. For instance, Mike refrains from telling Trader that Jennifer’s suicide note and the motive for suicide contained therein do not sound authentic. In order to provide closure to Colonel Tom and to give him something he can live with, she blatantly lies to him: “It all measures up” (NT 148), when, in fact, nothing seems to make sense (a similar argument can be found in Martínez-Alfaro 119). Moreover, Mike’s possible suicide provides closure for Mike if one were to read death as all-encompassing closure. The only one who lacks closure is the reader. “Failing to fulfill its promise as a detective story, the text turns into a pitch-black psychological study of womankind and human motivation” (Oertel 135). The detective intending to kill herself is not a stipulation the reader has bargained for under the narrator-narratee contract. One might argue that the reader gets closure as regards Jennifer’s death. No doubt remains that it has been suicide. Regarding motive, however, no satisfactory explanation is provided. The statement that “[s]he just had standards. High ones. Which we didn’t meet” (NT 147) is not an explanation the reader can happily live with. Oertel (135) argues that
there is much value in this kind of manipulation of genre and the spoiling of our expectations: not only does it make us aware of how we tend to read, what general expectations we draw from certain text-types, but also springs a surprise on us of a fresh, though rather peculiar, nature. And perhaps it also makes us aware of the artificial nature of other detective stories that often create cheap showmanship, in fact having nothing to do with real life. In real life, there isn’t always a showdown, a satisfactory closure, a “motive” that explains what people are like and what life is about.

4.1.2.5. \textit{Night Train} – A violation of the narrator-narratee contract by both parties?

It has been argued that the author has to heed three stipulations of the metaphorical contract with the recipient of the narrative. First of all, he has to present a conundrum to the reader at the beginning of the narrative as a ‘trigger’. \textit{Night Train} adheres to this rule by introducing Mike’s “worst case” (NT 1), the mysterious death of Jennifer Rockwell. In line with the contract, only a limited number of potential solutions is given. The reader wants to solve the mystery of Jennifer’s enigmatic death. A limited number of suspects is introduced – the most obvious being Jennifer’s boyfriend. However, all the potential suspects are eliminated as the possible culprit. The first stipulation of the narrator-narratee contract has clearly been properly fulfilled.

The second rule for the narrator to observe would be to postpone the final solution to the mystery as long as possible in order to maximize suspense. The narratee desperate to arrive at the ultimate solution is taunted by detours, red herrings, and story sidelines. Readers of \textit{Night Train} have to plough their way through various digressions, mysterious references to night trains passing by Mike’s apartment, and ghosts of dead people standing by Mike’s bedside. The reader seems to be bombarded with red herrings – and so is Mike. There are manifold clues in the narrative pointing to murder (e.g. the three bullets in the head, the distressed boyfriend, the absence of a motive for suicide). However, the narrative yields a second category of clues, namely the clues indicating suicide, which were planted by Jennifer herself: the lithium, the suicide note, the book about suicide, Arn Debs, or the staged major mistake at work. Moreover,
the reader is given glimpses of Mike’s past as a story sideline. Therefore, it can be asserted that the revelation of the ultimate solution, or non-solution, is postponed as long as possible. The narrator again fully complies with the terms of the contract.

However, the most important piece of information, namely the motive for suicide, is never provided. No closure is given to the reader. However, if there is no actual motive, the narrator can, consequently, not offer any explanation. In general, it can be said that Mike is a reliable narrator (Finney 122), "she tells all that can be told" (Martínez-Alfaro 119). Mike conscientiously fulfills her contractual obligations. While the whodunit is eventually solved, the whydunit is not.

Furthermore, the detective is about to commit suicide. To a first-time reader this comes as a complete surprise; a repeater will already look for clues in the narrative and will find plenty of indications. In addition to the frustration of the narratee resulting from the refusal of a final solution, he is deeply disturbed by Mike’s intention to end her life. The reader is encouraged to like Mike from the very beginning; he feels empathy for her and pities her. It does not sit well with him that a beloved character plans to kill herself. According to all prevailing schemata, a good character is meant to win in the end – be it the love of their sweetheart or the battle against evil. Mike does not win, she loses: she does not only fail in providing closure to the case but also gives in to her troubles and her addiction. The detective killing herself constitutes a clear violation of the narrator-narratee contract.

According to the metaphorical contract, the reader is expected to suspend all disbelief, forget all prior knowledge and narrative schemata. However, the reader will nonetheless draw on detective story conventions and narrative schemata. For instance, Mike keeps emphasizing that Jennifer’s death is her “worst case”. Even though suicide is determined as the cause of death early on in the narrative, the reader cannot rid himself of the idea that Jennifer might be a murder victim after all. Even the clues planted by Jennifer herself attempting to offer an explanation for her voluntary death will be considered as possible
clues for murder. The narrative, of course, also caters to this tendency of the reader, for example, by choosing three bullets in the head as the cause of death - a highly unlikely suicide, yet apparently in the realm of the possible according to the narrative. Part of the suspense is clearly derived from the fact that the reader is still on the lookout for a murderer, even though Jennifer’s death is ruled an unmistakable case of suicide. The profound distrust of the reader probably stems from the deeply ingrained conventional mystery schema. A murder investigation of a suicide is a highly unlikely occurrence in the cosmos of detective fiction. Clearly the least likely suspect will turn out to be the culprit. Consequently, one might argue that the narratee breaches the metaphorical contract as well by resorting to these deep-seated narrative schemata.

4.1.2.6. Suspense and style in Night Train

The following pages deal with the generation of suspense and tension in Amis’ narrative via syntactic, lexico-semantic and text-pragmatic devices. I would argue that some of these stylistic features are able to generate both suspense proper and tension. The type of suspense triggered by the narrative may strongly depend on whether the narratee consumes a text for the first, second, or even third time.

4.1.2.6.1. Syntax, suspense and Amis’ style of writing

Regarding his style of writing, Amis stated in an interview that

[n]o one wants to read a difficult literary novel or deal with a prose style which reminds them how thick they are. There’s a push towards egalitarianism, making writing more chummy and interactive, instead of a higher voice, and that’s what I go to literature for. (Muir)²¹

Night Train is written in this “chummy and interactive” style. The reader gains the impression that the narrator is talking to him in person. Diedrick (160) labels it a “dramatic monologue”. It feels like a one-sided communication – almost as if the reader has the possibility of butting in and asking questions. Towards the

²¹ Also quoted in Norman, Killing 44.
end of the narrative, for example, Mike seems to directly address the reader: “Hurry hurry. Because you see: This is where we came in. It’s five p.m. on April second. In an hour I meet with Paulie No” (NT 139). The personal pronoun ‘we’ seems to encompass Mike and the narratee. She tells her quasi-audience to hurry as if they were to tag along to the meeting. The reader cannot help but be in suspense if he himself is to some extent part of the story. This assumption would, of course, be based on the premise that the reader is willing to suspend all disbelief and to imagine that the fictional world were real.

Furthermore, the idea of a “chummy and interactive” narrative seems to entail rather short sentences, which are frequently “chopped and elliptical” (Diedrick 163). No elaborate syntax is used (Oertel 133). Phrases are constantly repeated – sometimes containing a slight variation of the original phrase (e.g. Diedrick 163, Norman, Killing 53). Amis’ construction of relatively short paragraphs might be another means of creating suspense. The brief paragraphs seemingly force the reader to pause for a nanosecond before he is able to resume reading. As a result, his reading experience might be characterized as being severed or clipped. Amis’ paragraphing might induce the reader to pause and ponder the previously received information. Due to this seemingly imposed additional time for reflection, there might be a slight increase in suspense.

Martínez-Alfaro (126) suggests that “[t]he style in which the novel is written relies on repletion as a vehicle for bringing home the idea of the double, central to the story” (i.e. the idea of Mike and Jennifer being mirror images). Moreover, one might claim that the frequent repetition and reiteration might be indicative of Mike’s mental condition. She is driven to the brink of a nervous breakdown by the case. The need to constantly repeat whole sentences or phrases may point towards a need for reassurance that all is not lost yet and that she is still able to function.

An example of repletion and repetition to be found in the narrative would be: “It’s all true. It’s the case. It’s the case. Paulie No, as we say, is a state cutter. He cuts for the state. He dissects people’s bodies and tells you how come they
died” (*NT 4*). Another example would be: “Three shots, Trader. Three shots. And let me tell you, that *wipes out* suicide. That *wipes out* suicide” (*NT 53*). The quotations illustrate that apart from verbatim repetition Mike often resorts to paraphrasing. It might be argued that repetition is counterproductive to the creation of suspense. However, I would posit that the opposite is true in *Night Train*. Via repetition particular emphasis is laid on the phrases or sentences in question. As a result, the reader’s attention is directed towards them. The narratee’s curiosity is aroused and suspense will set in.

Moreover, the fairly frequent use of italics serves as another device for laying special emphasis on particular lexical items. If one presumes that the narrative constitutes a monologue delivered by the narrator, the words in italics would be the ones Mike stresses while ‘talking’ to the reader; they are of particular importance to her. Particular importance for Mike would, in turn, translate into heightened reader awareness.

In general, Mike’s narrative is rife with interrogative clauses and ellipsis – two syntactic features which lend themselves to the creation of suspense and tension. The openness of questions demanding an answer and the truncated sentences generate tension on the small scale of a single sentence, while simultaneously heightening the suspense created by the overall narrative. Furthermore, questions and ellipsis would be typical features of colloquial language and of actual speech. This strengthens the impression that Mike is seemingly engaged in a one-sided conversation with the reader.

The following quotation comprises a variety of devices inducing suspense and tension: “The jury is still out on women police. On whether they can take it. Or for how long” (*NT 11*). The unusual construction of ‘women police’ instead of ‘policewomen’ makes the reader pause. Fill (*Prinzip* 37) has argued that deviation from syntactic rules, for instance an unusual word order not adhering to the subject-predicate-object rule, gives rise to syntactic suspense. The same has to be true for an ‘inverted’ noun phrase. Tension is created. Curiosity and interest will be evoked if the narratee notices a syntactic deviation. He will wonder why the narrator felt the need to alter the given syntactic rules. Curiosity
will, in turn, lead to an increase in suspense. Furthermore, elliptical sentences, as has already been argued earlier, cater to tension and suspense as they imply vagueness, indeterminacy and uncertainty. Ellipsis challenges the reader to mentally complete the truncated sentences with the missing syntactic elements. Last but not least, the quotation contains the referentless pronoun ‘it’, which promotes the creation of suspense due its indeterminacy. The reader is kept guessing what the actual referent is until it appears several lines later in the text and provides relaxation (cf. suspense and text-pragmatics).

An example of the frequent use of questions paired with the narrator’s omnipresent need for repetition would be: “He heard her. She heard him. They talked the same language. Isn’t that what we’re all supposed to want? […] Isn’t that what we’re all supposed to want?” (NT 78). The quotation clearly shows that questions have the tendency of requiring an immediate answer. If the answer is not provided in the narrative, the narratee feels compelled to mentally give an answer due to the inner tension created. The varying sentence types, i.e. interrogative clauses and statements, further contribute to this non-content-based form of suspense. Moreover, one might argue that the repetition of the interrogative sentence aptly illustrates Mike’s emotional turmoil regarding her relationship with Tobe.

4.1.2.6.2. Suspense and lexico-semantic elements in Night Train

4.1.2.6.2.1. Night Train’s lexicon of suspense

A detective story is bound to contain myriads of words pertaining to the subject area of crime and criminal investigation – a lexicon destined to generate suspense (cf. suspense and lexico-semantics). Striking examples to be found in the text would be the words “[h]omicidal” (NT 53), “bodies” (NT 23), or phrases stemming from American police jargon such as “notification of death” (NT 6), or “[b]lowback” (NT 1). Oertel (133) detects “a striking clash of linguistic registers”. On the one hand, Mike speaks, for instance, of “parlance” (NT 1) and “elastic concept” (NT 1) belonging to a high linguistic register. On the other hand, she
resorts to informal language and slang such as “can’t really get a fix on “worst”” (*NT 1*) (Oertel 133). This contrast would lend itself to the creation of tension.

The following quotation taken from the beginning of *Night Train* is replete with ‘words of suspense’ destined to shock the reader:

> So I’ve seen them all: Jumpers, stumpers, dumpers, dunkers, bleeders, floaters, poppers, bursters. I have seen the bodies of bludgeoned one-year-olds. I have seen the bodies of gang-raped nonagenarians. I have seen bodies left dead so long that your only shot at a t.o.d. is to weigh the maggots. But of all the bodies I have ever seen, none has stayed with me, in my gut, like the body of Jennifer Rockwell. (*NT 4*)

A sensitive reader might be horrified by this deeply disturbing account. This rhyming, “playfully alliterative” (Norman, *Killing* 48), “darkly comic list of corpses nervously laughs off the unthinkable” (Norman, *Nothing* 2) as the only way to stay sane. It has been argued that “[t]he brutalities of her job are sanitized and robbed of their horror by euphemisms and jokes” (Norman, *Nothing* 2). In general, it might be said that an author, while trying to entice the reader into buying and reading his books, has to walk a fine line. On the one hand, he attempts to arouse interest and thrill by incorporating gory details into the narrative. On the other hand, his narrative must not be too gory, otherwise he will frighten off potential readers by the disgusting details. By resorting to euphemisms and “grotesque, visceral comedy” (Norman, *Killing* 48) the horror evoked is toned down. Moreover, comedy may also be used as a vehicle for generating additional suspense (cf. Fill, *Prinzip* 115).

Furthermore, a conspicuous and suspense-inducing lexical choice would be the word ‘predator’. During Trader’s interrogation Mike states, “I feel the predator in me” (*NT 53*). *The OED* defines “predator” as “a ruthlessly exploitative or rapacious individual”, or as “an animal that kills and eats prey”. Associations of wild animals, of bloodshed and death are evoked, which will undoubtedly lead to an increase in suspense. However, a troubling notion would be that it is the detective who is linked to the predator, not the alleged murderer.

The following short, yet highly suspenseful, quotation contains various noun phrases having the potential to shock the reader and to cater to seekers of narrative thrill: “As usual, and of set purpose, I am turning the interrogation
room into a gas chamber. For-hire executioners, bludgeoners of prostitutes – they seldom object to this (though you’d be surprised). A professor of philosophy, I reckoned, might have lower tolerance” (NT 48). First of all, the narratee is compelled to wonder who could be more dangerous than “[f]or-hire executioners” or “bludgeoners” and their brutality. “A professor of philosophy”, whom one stereotypically pictures as mild and docile, using his intellect rather than his fists, stands in stark contrast to these villains. The question arises how he will fare in these drastic circumstances. Tension owing to the marked contrast and intense curiosity will unmistakably be aroused. Furthermore, the comparison of the interrogation room to “a gas chamber” is highly disturbing. Notions of Hitler and the Nazis and their crimes against humanity are conjured up. When Mike likens her interrogation room to such a place of utmost misery and cruelty, suspense will necessarily arise.

However, incompatible with the idea of a conventional detective story seems to be the concept of ghosts: “The ghost of a dead person must divide into many ghosts – to begin with. It is labor-intensive – to begin with. Because there are many bedrooms to visit, many sleepers to stand over. Some sleepers – maybe just two or three – the dead will never leave” (NT 14). The word “ghost” as such entails a high level of suspense. Readers of ghost stories expect goose bumps; they expect to get scared and to shudder at uncanny occurrences which cannot be explained by means of conventional reason and intellect. The last clause even evokes the notion of zombies as the walking dead. However, in a murder mystery ghosts and zombies seem to be extraordinarily out of place. Nevertheless, the reader’s curiosity will be grabbed. The amalgamation of a detective story with a ghost story might even double the suspense felt due to a possible pooling of suspense potentials of the respective genres.

Moreover, the narrative is peppered with Latin phrases. As has been argued earlier, foreign words or phrases lend themselves as potential vehicles for heightening the level of tension. The first of a series of Latin phrases – written in capital letters appropriate for an inscription on the wall of an autopsy room – is immediately translated into English: “Let talking cease. Let laughter flee. This is the place where death delights to help the living” (NT 22). The passage helps to
create a bleak, dark and gloomy atmosphere and as such helps to contribute to suspense. However, whether the actual Latin phrases add to the suspense or tension experienced by the narratee or whether they are counterproductive, remains a subject for discussion. A reader not well-versed in Latin will probably just skip the Latin lines. Consequently, there will probably be no alteration to his state of suspense. Readers possessing a rudimentary knowledge of Latin, on the other hand, might be tempted to try their hand at a little translation work of their own. By not merely passively consuming the narrative but by actively working to establish meaning, interest in the narrative might increase. One might unquestionably be tempted to check if one’s translation is in line with the narrative and if it corresponds to the translation given. Fill (Prinzip 158) argues that this variant of suspense will be created due to the unexpected occurrence of a foreign word or phrase. The reader is bound to be surprised when he stumbles over the Latin phrases mentioned above as they appear in the narrative without prior warning.

In the context of the autopsy and the autopsy report further short Latin phrases are interwoven with the English text. “This is the body, he is saying, echoing the sacrament: *Hoc es corpus*" (NT 24) or “*Haec est corpus*. This is the body” (NT 59). Tension is not merely created owing to the unexpected infusion of the Latin language into English but also by the allusion to Christian rites and sermons (cf. Puschmann-Nalenz 207). A solemn atmosphere is created which adds to the level of suspense enjoyed by the reader.

Finally, unusual collocations awakening the narratee’s curiosity would be another lexico-semantic vehicle for suspense creation. An example would be Trader’s “look of hilarious humiliation” (NT 122) when asked why he was distressed the day Jennifer died. The adjective and the noun seem to stand in stark semantic contrast. The reader will instantly label the phrase odd. The use of alliteration draws additional attention to the phrase (cf. Noorgard, Montoro and Busse 49). The question arises whether the author has intentionally chosen alliteration in order to put particular emphasis on the noun phrase. Tension is unmistakably generated as the reader’s attention is bound to be riveted by the strange combination. He will wonder what possible explanation there could be.
for somebody to experience “hilarious humiliation”. However, the narrator refuses to resolve the mystery leading to the contrast at this point in the narrative: ““Another time.” And he stood up, saying, “Let’s do ‘distressed’ another time”” (NT 122). Information is strategically withheld enabling a further rise in suspense. Not only is the reader denied the explanation of why Trader should have been distressed on this unfortunate day, he is also denied a possible explanation for the semantic contrast of the collocation.

4.1.2.6.2.2. The metaphor of the night train

The title of the novel might evoke suspense even before the narratee opens the book for the first time. Amis’ title Night Train suggests darkness and sinister secrets. Moreover, the word ‘train’ might trigger associations of Agatha Christie’s Murder on the Orient Express. The reader might hypothesize that a train functions as the scene of a heinous crime occurring in the middle of the night, for instance. The title Night Train works as a clear incentive to buy and read the book.

Mike begins her quasi-diary with a reference to the night train: “It was 20:15. I remember the time because I had just been startled out of a nod by the night train […]. The night train, which shakes the floor I walk on. And keeps my rent way down” (NT 5). A first-time reader will assume that Mike is referring to a literal train closely passing by her apartment. He might experience suspense as he knows that particular importance is attached to the night train, otherwise the author would have chosen another title. The narratee will yearn to learn its full significance. A repeater, on the other hand, conscious of the fact that the night train is used as a metaphor for suicide will probably be able to feel suspense as well – but for different reasons. The open question has already been answered during his first reading; the informational void has been filled. A repeater might experience suspense because he is actively looking for tell-tale signs and clues to Mike’s deteriorating mental condition. He already knows that Mike’s life is ultimately at stake. A recidivist reader might search for warning signs missed during his first reading. He might, for instance, infer that the ground shaking
beneath Mike’s feet because of the passing night train is symptomatic of Mike’s world, which begins to disintegrate owing to her “worst case”. I would argue that suspense on the lexico-semantic level will only be felt by the repeater in the aforementioned example. A first-time reader, while suspecting a certain significance owing to its prominent position in the title of the novel, will probably not be able to discern the meaning of the night train as a metaphor for suicide.

As has been argued earlier, the distance between vehicle and tenor of a metaphor are crucial as regards the amount of suspense generated. In the present case, the night train functions as the vehicle of the metaphor, whereas the tenor would be suicide. The distance between both tenor and vehicle of Night Train’s omnipresent metaphor should be sufficient to spark off a fairly high amount of both suspense and tension. In addition, the metaphor appears to be rather unconventional, which would equally contribute to its suspense-creating potential.

It might be suggested that the narrator plays with the reader (cf. Kakutani’s reference to a “game of cat and mouse”) by providing another possible explanation for the title of the novel leading away from the meaning of the metaphor, namely that of the night train being a mere reference to a song. One might even be tempted to speak of yet another red herring, this time pertaining to the “case” of Mike’s suicide. While Mike reads the autopsy report verifying Jennifer’s death as suicide, a tape containing “[e]ight different versions of “Night Train”” (NT 58) is playing in the background. A repeater will instantly grasp the significance of the metaphor, which a first-time reader will not be able to do. The latter will probably be curious as regards the importance of the song. He is now able to choose between two potential explanations regarding the choice of title, i.e. the actual night train as a means of transport and an apparently vastly popular song – after all, there are at least eight different versions of it.

Furthermore, another troubling aspect would be that Trader is compared to the night train as well: “Is that Tobe now, starting up the stairs? Or is it the first rumor of the night train? The building always seems to hear it coming, the night

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22 Puschmann-Nalenz (205) also discusses the “triple meaning” of the night train (i.e. the actual train, the song and the metaphor for suicide).
train, and braces itself as soon as it hears in the distance its desperate cry” (*NT* 26). It might be inferred that Tobe is not completely innocent as regards Mike’s potential suicide at the end. The final phrase “its desperate cry” seems to be particularly ominous. Even after repeated re-readings of the novel the metaphor lends itself to the generation of suspense. Details to be overlooked during a first reading will appear in a different light. New meanings will be deciphered and new hypotheses will be formed. As a result, the narrative is still able to generate a comparatively high level of suspense (cf. paradox of suspense).

The opening sentence of the second part of the narrative, appropriately titled “[f]elo de se” (*NT* 67) (i.e. suicide), finally divulges the secret of the metaphor to the novice reader:

Suicide is the night train, speeding your way to darkness. You won’t get there so quick, not by natural means. You buy your ticket and climb on board. That ticket costs you everything you have. But it’s just one-way. This train takes you into the night, and leaves you there. It’s the night train. (*NT* 67)

Both “darkness” and “the night” might be read as metaphors for death. The payment for the one-way ticket is one’s life. No return ticket can be bought; suicide cannot be reversed. Earlier formed hypotheses will immediately be reassessed, rejected, adapted or new ones will be formulated in accordance with the newly gained insights.

Another particularly disturbing reference to the night train is presented to the reader after Mike’s shocking revelation concerning the abuse by her own father: “And here comes the night train. First, the sound of knives being sharpened. Then its cry, harsh but symphonic, like a chord of car horns” (*NT* 106). The reader – both novice and repeater – is bound to feel suspense. The reader is almost able to hear the sounds described. The passage might be read as an enumeration of possible methods of suicide: cutting one’s wrists by the newly sharpened knives or throwing oneself in front of a car. The reader has grown fond of Mike, he feels for her and pitys her. The empathy developed by the reader reinforces his experience of suspense setting in as a result of the bleak atmosphere created above.
However, a happy ending does not appear to be in store for Mike: “There – finished. All gone. Now me I’m heading off to Battery and its long string of dives. I want to call Trader Faulkner and say goodbye but the phone’s ringing again and the night train’s coming [...]” (NT 149). Mike obviously contemplates killing herself. Apart from inducing a high level of suspense, the urgency conveyed by Colonel Tom in the phone call preceding this shattering revelation seems indicative of Mike’s disastrous mental condition. He asks her to slow down and tells her that she is “talking too loud” (NT 148). Moreover, he inquires “[w]hat’s happening with [her]” (NT 148) and finally tells her that he is “coming over” (NT 148). Mike, on the other hand, ignores him; she just reports to him the concocted story of Jennifer’s suicide. Were it not for Colonel Tom’s side of the telephone conversation, the reader would not be able to discern that something was seriously wrong with Mike. Against all the odds, the narratee hopes that either Colonel Tom or Tobe manages to avert Mike’s “worst case” from repeating itself. I would posit that the narratee will be in a quasi-eternal state of suspense as he is left in the dark regarding Mike’s ultimate fate.

4.1.2.6.3. Suspense and text-pragmatic features in Night Train

As has been argued earlier, a narrative told by a first-person narrator tends to have a higher potential for suspense than a narrative told by an omniscient narrator owing to the former’s own restricted knowledge. Mike is not able to provide information she herself does not possess. According to these theoretical considerations, Night Train should trigger suspense.

Both Norman (Nothing 6) and Martínez-Alfaro (119) read the whole novel as an elaborate suicide note - Mike’s suicide. As a result, doubts arise regarding the truthfulness of Mike’s account. Jennifer’s suicide note is a mere concoction of lies and falsehoods destined to solace the living. No true motive is given, only a fabricated one - mental illness. The narratee might wonder if Mike’s narration, her devastation and despair owing to “the worst case [she] ha[s] ever handled” (NT 1) is an excuse for a relapse into alcoholism in order to provide solace to her loved ones or whether the blame can, in fact, be ultimately attributed to the
case. Kakutani entertains doubts regarding Mike’s reliability as a narrator as well owing to her alcohol abuse and her closeness to the suicide victim. He wonders whether Mike is “playing her own game of cat and mouse” with the narratee (Kakutani). The common consensus among critics, however, would be that Mike is a reliable narrator.

Furthermore, intertextual suspense can repeatedly be found in Night Train. The opening phrase “I am a police” (NT 1), for example, could be construed as an intertextual reference to David Simon’s Homicide. A Year on the Killing Streets, which Amis has allegedly used as research material for authentic American ‘cop-talk’. On the one hand, Simon’s book is said to be a bestseller, a “journalistic opus” (Norman, Killing 45). Therefore, readers should be able to recognize any allusions to it. On the other hand, one might argue that even though the book sold extremely well it might not have been read by very many readers of Night Train. Consequently, the intertextual allusion will go unnoticed and tension will not be able to arise. If a narratee, however, recognizes intertextuality in the very first sentence of a narrative, his curiosity will undoubtedly be aroused. As has been posited earlier, an intertextual allusion which is not easily recognizable will lead to a particularly high degree of suspense. The opening sentence would, then, seem to be an ideal place for such an intertextual reference. It entices the reader to, first of all, buy the book and then, of course, to read the whole novel.

Another intertextual allusion, which will probably be more easily recognized by a larger audience of readers, would be the name of Jennifer Rockwell’s doctor, Hi Tulkinghorn. The “original” Mr. Tulkinghorn appears in Charles Dickens’ Bleak House – an early example of English detective fiction (Diedrick 165). The aforementioned intertextual reference to the Christian Eucharist during the autopsy, “Hoc es corpus” (NT 24) (cf. Puschmann-Nalenz 207), would be the most apparent case of intertextuality in Night Train. Both intertextual references are likely to induce suspense on the text-pragmatic level.

Flashbacks and digressions would be further text-pragmatic devices for suspense creation. In general, flashbacks and digressions serve as vehicles for
prolonging suspense by interrupting the main story line and by retarding salient points of information. A typical example would be Trader’s tale about the mailman intending to kill himself as “a preamble to ‘distressed’” (NT 129) – a seemingly vital clue pointing towards Trader as the culprit. Trader’s story is funny, yet irrelevant. Its main purpose seems to be the retardation of the eagerly awaited explanation of Trader’s state of distress.

Mike’s account of one of her former cases, namely of a teenage mother killing her sister’s baby because her sister dared to use the last diaper (cf. NT 124-126), would qualify both as a flashback to Mike’s past and as a digression from the story proper. The case bears no obvious relevance to Mike’s current case. The main aim appears to be the postponement of the final solution. Nevertheless, the narratee might wonder whether there is a hidden meaning he has not yet fathomed and whether the account yields any hints as regards the motive behind Jennifer’s death. Atypical would be, however, that the episode is not related at a particularly suspenseful point in the narrative.

Moreover, Mike’s biography is interwoven with the main story line of solving the mystery of Jennifer’s death. On the one hand, one might argue that the various disclosures of details concerning Mike’s life are digressions from the main plot of Jennifer’s demise. The flow of the narration is regularly interrupted and suspense should theoretically increase owing to the further retardation of information pertaining to Mike’s “worst case”. On the other hand, if one reads the whole novel as an elaborate suicide note, these ‘digressions’ would be of utmost importance. They offer explanations as to why Mike would contemplate suicide in the end. One might argue that Mike’s autobiographical comments constitute a second plot line or even the hidden main storyline told almost exclusively via flashbacks.
4.2. Paul Auster’s City of Glass

4.2.1. City of Glass – An anti-detective novel

City of Glass is “a deconstruction of the hard-boiled narrative” (Holmes). The story features an amateur detective called Daniel Quinn.

Like most people, Quinn knew almost nothing about crime. He had never murdered anyone, had never stolen anything, and he did not know anyone who had. He had never been inside a police station, had never met a private detective, had never spoken to a criminal. Whatever he knew about these things, he had learned from books, films, and newspapers. (CG23)24

His sole qualification seems to be that he is a writer and “devoted reader of mystery novels” (CG 7). His ‘career’ as a detective is launched by pure chance25, by a wrong number. While impersonating the detective Paul Auster he tries to imitate his fictional sleuth Max Work, who is described as “aggressive, quick-tongued, at home in whatever spot he happened to find himself” (CG 9) – the prototypical hard-boiled detective. Quinn pretends to be as hard-boiled and tough as the protagonist of his mystery novels. Yet he represents the complete antithesis to the tough detective. Instead, one might label Quinn rather soft-boiled.26

Quinn is portrayed as the quintessential postmodern defeated sleuth. He does not succeed in solving the mystery. He shadows a man he is not entirely sure is the right Stillman Sr. Moreover, the narratee gets the impression that Quinn occasionally does not possess a will of his own. For instance, he dresses in a trance-like state before his, or rather the detective Paul Auster’s appointment with the Stillmans. “It was not until he had his hand on the doorknob that he began to suspect what he was doing. ‘I seem to be going out,’ he said to himself. ‘But if I am going out, where exactly am I going?’” (CG 12). It seems as if Quinn is not acting out of his own free will; he seems to act as a mere puppet on a string doing what his master (i.e. the author of the narrative) wants him to do.

23 CG is used as an abbreviation for City of Glass.
24 Partly also quoted in Holzapfel 30.
25 Springer (35-37) discusses the notions of chance and arbitrariness in postmodernism.
26 Chénetier (34) applies the term not only to Quinn but to the whole narrative.
Further evidence that Quinn’s case is destined to end in disaster emerges in the following passage: “[H]e could feel himself going blank, as if his brain had suddenly shut off. He had wanted to take in the details of what he was seeing, but the task was somehow beyond him at that moment. The apartment loomed up around him as a kind of blur” (CG 14). Quinn epitomizes the exact opposite of the classical detective. Sherlock Holmes or Hercules Poirot would notice every last detail about their surroundings. They would be able to absolutely rely on their intellect and ‘little grey cells’ to uncover the whole truth (cf. Holmes’ discussion of the difference between Marlowe and Quinn). Quinn, on the other hand, apparently does not stand the slightest chance in solving the enigmatic case of the Stillmans.

Quinn stumbles about in the metaphorical dark of the case. He talks to Stillman Sr. three times and does not learn anything of import to the case. The unexpected disappearance of Quinn’s suspect constitutes a dramatic turning point for Quinn; his behavior becomes hard to comprehend. For instance, he decides to keep Peter Stillman Jr.’s apartment under surveillance for several months and he does not become suspicious when neither Peter nor Virginia ever ventures out of their home. “We cannot say for certain what happened to Quinn during this period, for it is at this point in the story that he began to lose his grip” (CG 114). He is evicted from his apartment; the new tenant informs him that the former occupant “disappeared, hadn’t paid his rent in months” (CG 126). The logical conclusion for Quinn seems to be to live as a squatter in the by now empty apartment of the Stillmans.

The reader might be inclined to wonder whether Quinn has been admitted to a mental hospital – thereby becoming a mirror image of the elder Stillman who was locked up in a mental institution after his trial. “Each [room] was identical to every other: a wooden floor and four white walls. […] Within this room there was a second door which led to a windowless cubicle that contained a toilet and a sink” (CG 127). Mysterious trays full of food keep appearing in Quinn’s room, which, as Springer (105) argues, introduces “a fantastic quality” into the
narrative. Quinn, who is “obviously in trouble” (CG 132), seems to be bitterly defeated and ultimately driven to madness by the Stillman case.

An alternative interpretation would be that Quinn relives the experiment conducted with Stillman Jr. (cf. Springer (105) who proposes that Stillman Jr. serves as a “model for identification” for Quinn). The detective lives in a world of utter isolation and growing darkness. “He wondered if he had it in him to write without a pen, if he could learn to speak instead, filling the darkness with his voice” (CG 132). Quinn seems to have lost his ability of speech, which is strongly reminiscent of Peter’s former inability to communicate with other people.

At the end of the narrative, Quinn vanishes without a trace. The last pages of the novel might possibly allude to Quinn’s approaching death:

This period of growing darkness coincided with the dwindling of pages in the red notebook. Little by little, Quinn was coming to the end. […] He regretted having wasted so many pages at the beginning of the red notebook, and in fact felt sorry that he had bothered to write about the Stillman case at all. For the case was far behind him now, and he no longer bothered to think about it. […] He remembered the moment of his birth and how he had been pulled gently from his mother’s womb. He remembered the infinite kindness of the world and all the people he had ever loved. […] He wanted to go on writing about it, and it pained him to know that this would not be possible. Nevertheless, he tried to face the end of the red notebook with courage. (CG 131-132)

If one reads the red notebook as a metaphor for Quinn’s life (cf. suspense and lexico-semantic elements in City of Glass), one would be led to conjecture that Quinn’s life will end as soon as the notebook reaches the end of its ‘lifespan’. Furthermore, Quinn’s memories of his own birth seem indicative of the alleged phenomenon that a dying person sees his whole life pass by. “[A]n ominous resonance” (Nealon 130) can also be detected in the following passage: “The last sentence of the red notebook reads: ‘What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?’” (CG 132). Nealon (130) proposes that “Quinn in some sense ceases to exist when the notebook runs out, when the writing ends”. Moreover, at the beginning of the narrative, the reading of mysteries is likened to food27. Books seem to be essential for Quinn’s survival –

27 Cf. “It was a kind of hunger that took hold of him, a craving for a special food, and he would not stop until he had eaten his fill” (CG 8).
be it via the passive consumption of novels or via actively composing a text. If writing is an absolute necessity for Quinn to stay alive, it follows that as soon as he runs out of pages to write on he will perish. Furthermore, one might claim that the last lines of *City of Glass* evoke the notion of an obituary or a funeral speech: “[M]y thoughts remain with Quinn. He will be with me always. And wherever he may have disappeared to, I wish him luck” (*CG* 133).

Another clear deviation from the traditional detective story pattern would be the conspicuous absence of an actual crime (e.g. Natti or Holzapfel 29). The mystery aficionado waits in vain for a body to appear – if one disregards Stillman Sr.’s suicide and the highly suspicious circumstances of the death of Peter’s mother, which is only mentioned in passing. If no criminal transgression is committed, it follows that there will neither be a victim nor a villain (Springer 98). In addition, there will be no need to engage the services of a detective. In *City of Glass*, Quinn is compelled to decipher what might count as a case first before he can try his hand at solving it (Natti). Holzapfel (29) and Springer (98), based on Holzapfel’s writing, argue that the only criminal deed in the text would be Stillman’s experiment depriving his infant son of all human contact. Quinn is hired to protect Peter from his father, who is allegedly determined to kill him. This in retrospect rather questionable assumption is based on a letter, which Stillman Sr. sent out of the mental hospital and which threatened Peter with “a day of reckoning” (*CG* 28). One might claim that Quinn is supposed to be less of a detective and more of a bodyguard trying to protect Peter’s life. In the end, it becomes evident that Quinn does not have to outwit any villain. Natti posits that the only adversary the detective comes up against is Quinn himself.

Furthermore, New York, which can be seen as the common playground of hard-boiled detective fiction (Holzapfel 31), exhibits a labyrinth-like quality typical of postmodern detective stories (cf. Merivale and Sweeney 8): “New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, […] it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well” (*CG* 3-4). The motif of the maze mirrors the postmodern situation of utter hopelessness that both Quinn and Stillman encounter in the narrative (Holzapfel 28).

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28 Partly also quoted in Holzapfel 31.
31). “New York [...] is the most forlorn of places, the most abject. The brokenness is everywhere, the disarray is universal. [...] The broken people, the broken things, the broken thoughts. The whole city is a junk heap” (CG 78).29

The metropolis is portrayed in an almost apocalyptic way, thereby functioning as “a symbol for discontinuity and chaos” (Holzapfel 31). If disarray and chaos reign in the city, it can hardly be surprising that people get lost and disappear without a trace in the vastness of this intricate maze.

As regards clues and evidence, one might argue that instead of helping to solve the case they “point to a void or into other directions leading Quinn away from both solution and case” (Holzapfel 30). A striking example of the utter meaninglessness of clues in City of Glass would be Stillman Sr.’s walking route spelling ‘the tower of Babel’. Quinn infers from this seemingly vital clue that Stillman intends to murder his son and considers him to be “far more dangerous than previously imagined” (CG 71). However, Stillman Sr. never ventures near his son and eventually commits suicide. The clue leads to yet another dead end.

Other prominent postmodern features to be found in Auster’s narrative would be “the missing person, [...] the double, and the lost, stolen, or exchanged identity” (Merivale and Sweeney 8). All the main characters disappear without a trace (cf. Bertens 201). Only the anonymous narrator and the fictional character Paul Auster are left at the end of the story. As regards the notion of doubles30, the second Stillman Sr. Quinn encounters at the train station immediately springs to mind. Sorapure (79) suggests that Stillman Sr.’s doppelgänger “haunts the subsequent proceedings in the form of a continually menacing alternative to Quinn’s entire enterprise”. The narratee is bound to wonder what would have happened if Quinn had followed the other Stillman. Another example of doubles would be the two Peter Stillmans, father and son. Quinn might also be read as a double of both Stillmans at the end of Auster’s book. Early on in the narrative, Quinn, for instance, eerily echoes the young Stillman’s words: “All I can say is this: listen to me. My name is Paul Auster. This is not my real name” (CG 40).

29 Also quoted in Holzapfel 31.
30 An extensive discussion of doppelgänger in Auster’s narrative can be found in Springer (97-108), for instance.
Last but not least, the fictional Paul Auster acts as a double of both the author of the text and the fictional detective called Auster.

Closely related to the issue of doubles would be the notion of identity, which provides an especially prominent theme in *City of Glass*. Quinn assumes various identities; the reader might even get the impression that Quinn displays slightly schizophrenic tendencies (cf. “Work had become a presence in Quinn’s life, his interior brother, his comrade in solitude” (CG 6)). Prior to the case, he wrote the Work detective series under a pseudonym. The narrative speaks of a “triad of selves that Quinn had become” (CG 6), the triad of Quinn, Work and William Wilson. Holmes claims that Quinn possesses “a fluid identity”. One might argue that the longer it takes Quinn to solve the case, the more his identity becomes destabilized and the closer he seems to get to the brink of insanity.

Finally, as regards closure, Paul Auster stated in an interview that “mystery novels always give answers; [his] work is about asking questions” (McCaffery, Gregory and Auster 22). True to his words, Auster’s narrative leaves the reader with numerous unanswered questions. No closure is given. The case remains unsolved. Instead, the end gives rise to a fresh batch of haunting questions.

### 4.2.2. Suspense in *City of Glass*

As discussed earlier, one has to bear in mind that the experience of suspense is a highly subjective phenomenon. In his review of *City of Glass*, T. Olson, for instance, states that “the book is a pleasure to read, full of suspense and action”. Other readers might possibly hold a slightly different view. The following subchapters are dedicated to the discussion of the various ingredients of suspense to be found in Auster’s narrative, which undoubtedly contribute to T. Olson’s impression of a highly suspenseful narrative.

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31 Holzapfel (31-37) provides an in-depth analysis of identity in *City of Glass*.
32 Also quoted in Holmes.
4.2.2.1. Some general observations

“It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the
dead of the night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was
not” (CG 3). The first sentence of the novel rivets the reader’s attention and
creates a high level of suspense owing to a number of suspense-inducing
features. The use of referentless pronouns (‘it’, ‘he’) and the ominous noun
phrase ‘the voice’ create an informational void the narratee longs to fill.
Moreover, a phone call in the middle of the night always seems to be the
harbinger of bad news. The narratee will already assume the worst.

Much later, when he was able to think about the things that happened to
him, he would conclude that nothing was real except chance. But that
was much later. In the beginning, there was simply the event and its
consequences. Whether it might have turned out differently, or whether it
was all predetermined with the first word that came from the stranger’s
mouth, is not the question. The question is the story itself, and whether or
not it means something is not for the story to tell. (CG 3)

The first paragraph continues to leave the reader in the dark as regards the
identity of the protagonist. Numerous other questions arise as well. What might
the enigmatic event be to which the narrator refers? Its consequences must
have been devastating. What might have been this mysterious first word which
altered everything? A variety of hints are given to evoke the reader’s curiosity
and to induce him to continue reading. Moreover, the narratee is bound to
wonder what the last sentence could possibly mean. He assumes that the
narrative will yield the answer to this apparent conundrum. Bernstein (135)
speaks of a “caveat” inherent in the concluding sentence of the first paragraph.
He claims that “Auster frames the trilogy with comments that cast doubt on the
project of detection” (Bernstein 135).

In the ensuing paragraph the reader finally learns the name of the protagonist.
The tension generated by the referentless pronoun ‘he’ is relieved by the final
provision of the referent. However, the way Quinn is introduced by the narrator
caters to the creation of suspense as well:

As for Quinn, there is little that need detain us. Who he was, where he
came from, and what he did are of no great importance. We know, for
example, that he was thirty-five years old. We know that he had once
been married, had once been a father, and that both his wife and son
were now dead. We also know that he wrote books. To be precise, we know that he wrote mystery novels. (CG 3)

The seemingly omniscient narrator appears to be impatient to arrive at the story proper and does not want to linger over any protracted introduction of the main character. This eagerness of the narrator is transferred to the narratee who is all the more desperate to learn about the mysterious event, which was triggered by an ominous phone call and by something as trivial as a wrong number. The first two sentences of the passage quoted above induce the narratee to anticipate that the narrative will not contain a wealth of information regarding Quinn and his background. However, an extensive introduction follows on the ensuing pages of the novel. The reader is kept waiting for the desired information pertaining to the sinister and enigmatic event, which further fuels suspense.

Another vehicle for suspense creation to be found here would be the seemingly direct address of the reader. By repeatedly resorting to the first-person plural pronoun ‘we’ and its accusative case ‘us’, the narrator gives the semblance of engaging the narratee in a dialogue (Springer 108). One might claim that the reader becomes his accomplice (Klepper 256), which would, of course, lead to deeper involvement of the reader in the narrative realm and, in turn, to a considerable increase in suspense. Therefore, the reader will already be in a state of relatively high suspense prior to the account of the thrill-generating phone calls.

As has been established earlier, the main prerequisites of the generation of suspense would be an open question of sufficient relevance to the reader and feelings of empathy for the protagonist (cf. the nature of suspense). In City of Glass, the open question addressing a matter of life and death could be formulated as follows: Will Quinn be able to save Peter’s life? Will he be able to prevent the father from murdering his son? Furthermore, the open question posed by the narrative only allows for two binary opposed answers: either Quinn will succeed in saving his client’s life or he will fail and Peter will die. As a result, the question lends itself to the creation of a high amount of suspense.

When Quinn learns about the alleged culprit’s suicide, the open question posed at the beginning of the narrative loses its significance. Instead, other pressing
questions arise. Sorapure (75) has identified a number of “decisive questions” which are left to the reader’s imagination and which concern whether or not an actual crime has taken place. The questions regard the fate of Peter Stillman, both father and son, and the fate of Quinn himself. No binary opposed answers are available. For instance, if one considers Peter Stillman Jr.’s fate a variety of hypotheses come to mind. He could have voluntarily left New York fearing for his life unaware of his father’s death. Or he could have moved for a wide variety of other reasons – be it a change of scene or a nicer apartment, for example. Alternatively, he could have been the victim of a crime. His father might have succeeded in taking revenge after all. Yet another feasible explanation for his disappearance might be that the Stillman’s were part of a conspiracy against Quinn and managed to carry out an elaborate hoax. His fate is completely left to the imagination of the reader. Similarly, one might suggest a number of speculative hypotheses regarding Quinn’s disappearance and Stillman Sr.’s mysterious death. Smith (35), for example, suggests that “Stillman Snr. may have killed Virginia and Peter Stillman, or they may have killed him. Or the whole scenario might have been the Stillmans’ fabrication. The plot teases narrative desire, but fails to satisfy it”.

As regards empathy, Auster’s narrative almost manipulates the reader into developing feelings of empathy for the protagonist. He has lived in utter isolation after the loss of his family and is essentially described “as a broken person” (Holzapfel 54). A feeling of deep sadness permeates the narrative whenever his dead son is mentioned.

It had been more than five years now. He did not think about his son very much anymore, and only recently he had removed the photograph of his wife from the wall. Every once in a while, he would suddenly feel what it had been like to hold the three-year-old boy in his arms - but that was not exactly thinking, nor was it even remembering. It was a physical sensation, an imprint of the past that had been left in his body, and he had no control over it. (CG 5)

While the narratee’s initial impression might be that Quinn acts in a cold and heartless way by trying to eradicate all memories of his loved ones, it soon becomes apparent that he merely became inured to the grief of losing both his wife and son. The reader cannot help but feel sympathy for his loss. Towards the end of the narrative the reader learns that Quinn had decorated his
apartment with drawings made by his son, which were thrown out when Quinn was evicted. The fact that he kept his son’s drawings in clear view cannot be reconciled with the notion that Quinn should not think of his son very often. The narrator’s reliability might be called into serious question here. Moreover, Quinn’s utter despair becomes evident when the narrator states that “[Quinn] no longer wished to be dead. At the same time, it cannot be said that he was glad to be alive” (CG 5).

The following passage would be especially heart-breaking and might even move the narratee to tears:

The subject of children was too painful for him, especially children who had suffered, had been mistreated, had died before they could grow up. If Stillman was the man with the dagger, come back to avenge himself on the boy whose life he had destroyed, Quinn wanted to be there to stop him. He knew he could not bring his own son back to life, but at least he could prevent another from dying. […] He thought of the little coffin that held his son’s body and how he had seen it on the day of the funeral being lowered into the ground. That was isolation, he said to himself. That was silence. It did not help, perhaps, that his son’s name had also been Peter. (CG 35)

The reader never learns what happened to Quinn’s son. Suspense and thrill are generated by this heartrending account. Having successfully managed to emotionally involve the narratee, the narrator seemingly teases the reader knowing that the latter is looking for answers. The narrator plays with the emotions of the reader by creating haunting images (e.g. the coffin being lowered into the ground). The reader suspects that the circumstances of the toddler’s death must have been particularly awful. Apparently Quinn could only sleep with the light turned on and was haunted by nightmares for a period of time (cf. CG 5). The narratee is never told what nightmares Quinn had to endure. The small child’s death remains a mystery to the reader. In addition, one might wonder, as T. Olson does, what the import of the identical first names might be.

However, the feelings of empathy experienced by the narratee dwindle in the course of the narrative. It proves to be rather difficult to feel empathy for somebody whose identity is fluid and interchangeable. Moreover, “information is scarce” (CG 114). Owing to an overall lack of information regarding Quinn’s
thoughts, feelings and motivations in the second half of the book, the narratee might find it extremely difficult to feel empathy or to take over Quinn’s perspective according to the perspective-taking model of suspense creation. Quinn’s behavior becomes increasingly bizarre. For instance, he lives on the street in front of the apartment of the Stillmans for weeks without once setting eyes on them. As the reader is unable to comprehend Quinn’s erratic behavior, his feelings of empathy are bound to peter out. However, on the last pages of the book feelings of sympathy and pity are rekindled when the reader is led to suspect that Quinn is about to die. The amount of suspense felt by the narratee will strongly correlate with the depth of emotional involvement. As a consequence, suspense should be highest at the beginning and at the end of Auster’s narrative.

4.2.2.2. The title and its potential for suspense

In general, the title of a novel can be used as an effective means of attracting the interest of potential buyers. The title’s allusion to New York City is obvious as City of Glass is the first narrative of Auster’s The New York Trilogy. It might be said that the city of New York holds a strong fascination for readers worldwide. Therefore, the title would kindle interest in the narrative and might act as an incentive to buy the novel. Chénetier (35) jokingly argues that readers are hardly likely to read “The Iowa City Trilogy”. The New York Trilogy, on the other hand, has an attraction from which the reader cannot withdraw. The American metropolis evokes the stereotypical images of bright lights, of ‘the city that never sleeps’, of glamour and fashion, but also of crime, homelessness and poverty. Both the glamorous “sparkling destination in the travel agency books” (Caleffi) and the decrepit, dangerous side of New York with its ‘mean streets’, would serve as excellent ingredients of suspense.

In addition, curiosity will be evoked concerning the question why the metropolis should consist of glass. It has been argued that the narrative portrays the city as “a transparent terrain abundant with unlimited possibilities” (Martin 104). The transparency of the glass would entail high visibility. There would be little
opportunity to hide one’s misdeeds and criminal transgressions in a city made of glass. Behind the millions of window panes in New York numerous eyewitnesses might lurk. The reader might even be reminded of the famous Hitchcock movie Rear Window.

Towards the end of the story it becomes apparent that the glass functions as a mirror when Quinn hardly recognizes himself in the glass after having lived on the street for months. City of Glass is meant to evoke images of the New York skyline and its countless skyscrapers (cf. Little 149). In their glass, the characters “are reflected and duplicated” (Martin 104). These endless reflections illustrate the postmodern notion that “identity is fractured, unstable, [...] easily discarded” (Martin 104) and “fragile” like glass (Little 139). Natti describes Auster’s novel as “a tale of mistaken and taken identities, where there is no real truth, no objective answers and every fact in the story is distorted, only visible on the surface, as if looking at a reflection in a pane of glass”.

Furthermore, the image of a mirror would be consistent with the intertextual reference to Lewis Carroll’s Through the Looking Glass earlier in the narrative. By his foray into private detection, Quinn enters a strange and eccentric world inhabited by odd characters, who make it their habit to vanish into thin air. Quinn encounters his very own postmodern variant of Wonderland. And so does the reader. By immersing himself in the narrative, he steps through the looking glass into a gloomy world of fluid identities and omnipresent doppelgänger.

4.2.2.3. Was-Spannung, Wie-Spannung and Warum-Spannung in City of Glass

In theory, the reader should encounter Was-Spannung as the predominant form of suspense in City of Glass. The open questions posited by the text would be whether Stillman Sr. will succeed in murdering his son or whether Quinn will manage to save his client’s life. The reader supposedly does not have the slightest idea of how the story will end, which would be a defining factor of Was-
Spannung. Wie-Spannung, on the other hand, presupposes that the reader is aware of the narrative’s ultimate outcome. Therefore, Wie-Spannung should theoretically be entirely negligible.

However, the narratee is reluctant to let go of the formulaic patterns of traditional detective stories and thrillers. As a result, he is firmly convinced that there will be a body or at least an attack on the younger Stillman’s life. Wie-Spannung arises regarding the father’s intended modus operandi, the time of the attack and the reactions of the remaining characters. The reader will strongly assume that Quinn will prevent his client from coming to any serious harm. Good is supposed to conquer evil after all. The narratee will probably believe that he knows the bare bones of the ending, i.e. that there will be an attack on Peter Stillman and that Quinn will save the day. However, the narrative does not adhere to any standard formulae of detective stories or thrillers. The narratee’s Wie-Spannung will not be resolved by the narrative.

Last but not least, Warum-Spannung can be felt as well – yet only on a very minor scale. For example, the narratee is bound to wonder why Stillman Sr. should have committed suicide all of a sudden. There seems to be no apparent motive. No investigation is carried out; Quinn simply acknowledges the fact that Stillman Sr. committed suicide and asks no further questions. However, mystery aficionados will instantly suspect foul play. Stillman is said to have “died in mid-air, before he even hit the water” (CG 123). No explanation is given as to why he should have died in mid-air. Even stranger seems to be the fact that Quinn as the amateur detective shows no inclination to look into the matter. A traditional detective would surely have sought to find out every last detail about this unexpected death and its mysterious circumstances.

A further example of Warum-Spannung might be Quinn’s decision to stay in the abandoned apartment of the Stillmans after having been evicted from his own home. The reader wonders why Quinn feels the urge to live there of all the possible places in New York City. However, the narrator does not pick up on this and leaves Quinn’s inner motivations uncommented. As the narrator is not omniscient, he might not be aware of the amateur detective’s motivations and
his inner psychological workings. Consequently, he might not able to further comment on this issue. The reader, on the other hand, is faced with yet another burning question which remains unanswered by the narrative.

4.2.2.4. Thrill and human impulses in *City of Glass*

*Crimen*-, *fructus*- and *sexus*-motifs can be detected in *City of Glass* as well. Owing to its classification as a postmodern detective story, it is hardly surprising that *crimen* provides the dominant motif in the narrative. First of all, the threat to Peter Stillman’s life can be subsumed under the topos of *crimen*. The reader is enthralled when the mysterious voice on the phone states that he or she – one cannot tell the caller’s gender initially – is in mortal danger (cf. *CG* 11).

Stillman’s experiment with his infant son, which constitutes a crime committed against his offspring, pertains to both *fructus* and *crimen*. The reader is bound to be shocked by the father’s cruelty towards his child. The combination of *fructus* and *crimen* continues to be firmly attached to their relationship. After all, the father is said to hatch a vicious plan of murdering his son. Thereby, the narrator ensures that his narratee will be able to experience a high level of thrill.

Moreover, *fructus* can be pinpointed in the description of the father-son relationship between the fictional Auster and his son Daniel. Their relationship provides a stark contrast to the Stillmans’; it seems to be an idealized version of a father-son relationship. Their perceived happiness seems to be hard to bear for Quinn, who “felt as though Auster were taunting him with the things he had lost” (*CG* 101) – *fructus*, of course, also comes into play as regards the death of Quinn’s son. Feelings of pity are again evoked in the reader. Strikingly, Quinn, the fictitious Auster’s son and his real-life counterpart are namesakes sharing the first name Daniel (cf. Martin 131), which again gives rise to numerous unanswered questions concerning its import.

Last but not least, the third human impulse, *sexus*, is incorporated into the narrative as well. Thrill would, for instance, be generated by the description of
Virginia Stillman, who is strongly reminiscent of the women depicted in Raymond Chandler’s hard-boiled detective fiction (Holmes). The reader is transferred into the fictional world of a Marlowe novel: “The woman was thirty, perhaps thirty-five; average height at best; hips a touch wide, or else voluptuous, depending on your point of view; dark hair, dark eyes, and a look in those eyes that was at once self-contained and vaguely seductive. She wore a black dress and very red lipstick” (CG 13). Virginia Stillman serves as an effective means of ‘spicing up’ the story. Bearing in mind that Chandler’s femmes fatales are often far from innocent victims, the reader might be inclined to immediately cast her in the role of the deceiving woman with an agenda of her own.

4.2.2.5. Narrative schema and suspense in City of Glass

The following chapter is concerned with the narrative schema used in Auster’s postmodern detective story. I would argue that owing to the fact that Quinn is a detective without a real case the mystery schema does not entirely fit. Neither does the suspense proper schema. Instead, one might detect a combination of both schemata. I would propose that the beginning of City of Glass can be classified according to the suspense proper schema, while the remaining narrative seems to adhere to Wenzel’s mystery schema.

The introductory phase of the suspense proper schema has to contain an initiating event, which promises lurking danger and thrill. In City of Glass, the mysterious phone calls in the middle of the night asking for the detective Paul Auster serve as powerful suspense triggers. The reader is immediately captivated and enthralled by the urgency conveyed in the phone calls. An additional feature of the initial phase would be the introduction of both the amateur detective and his clients. The “machine-like” (CG 15) and ghost-like Stillman, “a casualty of his father’s experiment” (Smith 43), arouses the reader’s curiosity. First of all, Peter behaves like a “marionette” (CG 15); his speech mannerisms remind the reader of a machine as well (Holzapfel 40). Moreover, the image of a ghost is conveyed via the description of Stillman as white and
seemingly transparent: “Everything about Peter Stillman was white. […] Against the pallor of his skin, the flaxen thinness of his hair, the effect was almost transparent […]]. As their eyes met, Quinn suddenly felt that Stillman had become invisible” (CG 15). Smith (36) argues that “the ghostly corpse-like figure of Peter Stillman” illustrates the incorporation of non-realism in Auster’s narrative. The integration of ghosts or similar phenomena would surely be conducive to a heightened state of suspense (cf. the discussion of the notion of ghosts in Night Train). I would posit that phase one ends with Mrs. Stillman’s account of the experiment conducted by the elder Stillman. She asks Quinn to protect her husband from being murdered by the hand of his own father.

The second phase of the suspense proper schema intends to spark feelings of sympathy and empathy for the characters. However, there is no clear caesura to be found between the first and second phase in City of Glass. Pity and sympathy are evoked prior to the initiating event of the ominous phone call. The reader learns about Quinn’s loss of his son and his life as a recluse in a city inhabited by millions of people. Furthermore, Stillman Sr.’s cruel experiment with his son is bound to generate feelings of sympathy and pity for the poor child. The allusions made to the funeral of Quinn’s son entail yet another overlapping of phases, namely of the second phase and the ensuing reflection phase.

After the first two phases borrowed from the suspense proper schema, I would propose that City of Glass resumes with the second phase of the mystery schema, the reflection phase. Admittedly, there is no crime in the past to be solved by the sleuth. Instead, the crime is supposed to be averted by Quinn. Nevertheless, one might assign the reflection on the past crime of the Stillman experiment to this phase. Quinn’s appointment with the Stillmans is followed by an account of similar experiments having been conducted in the past and of “cases of accidental isolation” (CG 34) of small children. The detective does not deliberate the ‘main’ crime he is supposed to avert from happening but the already atoned for crime of the Stillman experiment. The mention of yet another crime, namely the murder of Kaspar Hauser – presumably a victim of accidental isolation as well – raises questions as far as Peter Stillman’s fate is concerned.
It is stated in the text that “[n]ot long after these disclosures, Kaspar was murdered by an unknown man with a dagger in a public park” (CG 35). The reader might wonder if Peter’s fate is foreshadowed by the reference to this cold case.

One might posit that the third phase, the analytic phase, commences with the appearance of the Stillman Sr. twins at Grand Central Station. In general, the analytic phase introduces different possible solutions, various theories and red herrings. The two Stillmans might be read as two possible solutions to the narrative. “Quinn froze. There was nothing he could do now that would not be a mistake. Whatever choice he made – and he had to make a choice – would be arbitrary, a submission to chance. Uncertainty would haunt him to the end” (CG 56). The narratee cannot help but wonder whether Quinn makes the right choice and follows the right man.

During Quinn’s surveillance of the alleged villain he discovers that the paths Stillman takes during his extended walks through the city generate letters of the alphabet which might read ‘tower of Babel’ when put into the right sequence. As he fails to record all of Stillman’s paths Quinn’s “epiphany” seems rather unreliable. Nevertheless, his discovery puts Quinn in a state of acute agitation, which translates into a steep increase in suspense for the reader. Quinn reads it as a clear indication that “Stillman [Sr.] was indeed plotting something against Peter” (CG 71). The graphic illustrations contained in the novel “add an element of mystery to the text” (Springer 101). The narratee will be inclined to try to decipher their meaning. However, apart from the third letter ‘E’, one might claim that Quinn’s interpretation of the drawings of the two other letters is rather far-fetched. The reader would probably not have been able to identify them as letters of the alphabet. Quinn himself concedes that “it could well have been meaningless” (CG 70). Nevertheless, he strongly believes that he has unearthed crucial evidence against Stillman. Typical of the analytic phase this seemingly vital clue turns out to be yet another red herring having no implication for an actually inexistent case.
Stillman does not show the slightest inclination of harming Peter. He is described as a harmless elderly gentleman speaking “[i]n a surprisingly gentle tenor voice” (CG 73), walking with a stoop and “with effort” (CG 55), “[t]he expression on his face […] placid” (CG 55). This hardly seems to be the description of a cold-blooded murderer determined to kill his only son. Consequently, if Stillman is no murderer all apparently valuable clues the narrative yields will be of no import. The narrative resumes by relating Quinn’s conversations with Stillman Sr. They discuss Stillman’s work, the notion of language and the inadequacy of words. Their conversations do not seem to pertain to the actual ‘case’. However, during their last meeting Quinn assumes the identity of Stillman Jr. His father reacts in a strikingly weird way. He does not identify Quinn as an impostor. Instead, Stillman tells him that he has “often wondered” (CG 84) what became of his son and that he was told that Peter had died. He tells Quinn that “[c]hildren are a great blessing” (CG 84). Someone determined to murder his son would surely think differently. The narratee might be inclined to rule out Stillman as the culprit at this point in the narrative and might cast his suspicions on Virginia Stillman instead.

After their third conversation Stillman disappears. This arouses the detective’s and the reader’s suspicions again. The reader starts wondering whether the harmless old man is not a psychopath after all. Quinn decides to search for the ‘real’ detective called Auster. He intends to enlist Auster’s help in trying to save Peter Stillman from a violent death. However, he fails to locate the detective and meets the fictional Paul Auster, a fellow writer, instead. Critics have wondered whether the fictitious Auster should be read as a mere minor character in the narrative or as “a manipulative master plotter” (Sorapure 85) who pulls all the strings like a puppet master, which would, in turn, raise questions concerning Quinn’s earlier behavior reminiscent of a marionette. Quinn, in the true manner of a detective, suggests several possible solutions to the mystery of why somebody should have called him asking for Paul Auster to help solve a case (e.g. crossed telephone wires or a practical joke). One might suggest that Quinn tries to analyze the ‘case’ of the mysterious phone call in lieu of a ‘real’ case.
At first glance, Auster’s and Quinn’s discussion about Don Quixote does not seem to have anything to do with Quinn’s problem. Therefore, the suspense felt by the narratee might slightly dwindle. However, on closer inspection, one might wonder if the allusion to Don Quixote does not yield a vital clue to the Stillman case after all. The whole case could just be “an elaborate hoax” (CG 100). The fictional Paul Auster posits that “Don Quixote was conducting an experiment. He wanted to test the gullibility of his fellow men” (CG 100). The suspicion of the narratee is evoked. He will reexamine all the information received earlier and will try to bring it in line with this new thesis. This process would be characteristic of the analytic phase, in which new suspicions and theories are brought forward and analyzed. However, in this postmodern variant of a detective story this potential theory of a solution to the whole drama of Quinn’s case comes in the guise of an intertextual reference to Cervantes’ Don Quixote. “Don Quixote […] was not really mad. He only pretended to be. In fact, he orchestrated the whole thing himself. […] Again and again he wonders how accurately his chronicler will record his adventures” (CG 99). The chronicler would correspond to the unnamed narrator of City of Glass. Quinn would then inevitably be Don Quixote. The notion of madness brings to mind the possible associations of a psychiatric ward at the end of the narrative. If Quixote only pretended to be mad, the reader might wonder whether the same is true for Quinn. Consequently, one might infer that Quinn is not to be trusted. Instead of bringing clarity to the case, this theory results in the narratee’s utter confusion, which might, in turn, be counterproductive to the generation of suspense.

The fourth phase of the mystery schema, the blocking phase, begins with Quinn’s failure to contact Mrs. Stillman via phone. Obstacles to be overcome by the detective would be a characteristic feature of this phase. In City of Glass, Quinn himself seems to create most of the obstacles he encounters. For instance, he does not read the newspaper and, thereby, fails to learn of Stillman Sr.’s suicide. Another example would be his surveillance of the Stillman apartment for several months without becoming suspicious that none of the Stillmans ever leave the building.
I would argue that the final phase of the story begins when Quinn calls Auster and learns of Stillman Sr.’s demise. He is also told that “[t]he cheque bounced” (CG 123), which was made out by Virginia Stillman to the detective Paul Auster. The reader might be tempted to think that this serves as a clear indication that the whole case is an elaborate hoax. The question arises as to who could have initiated the practical joke played on Quinn, who is described as a complete loner at the beginning of the narrative. The narratee might wonder whether the anonymous narrator introduced on the last but one page is to blame or whether a mysterious third party outside of the narrative is the culprit. He might ask himself whether any of the other characters is the guilty party or whether Quinn orchestrated the whole thing himself. Suspense will necessarily arise as the reader longs to obtain answers to these burning questions.

However, nothing seems to add up. Whatever hypothesis the reader forms, evidence can be found in the text to immediately destroy it. If one interprets the “growing darkness” (CG 131) as approaching death, the question remains why his body should disappear. “At this point the story grows obscure. The information has run out, and the events that follow this last sentence will never be known. It would be foolish even to hazard a guess" (CG 132). One might get the impression that the whole narrative is rather obscure. Suspense is not resolved. The story’s non-solution is highly unsatisfactory for the reader. It might be foolish to try to come up with a neat ending – yet it seems to be the narratee’s desperate longing to construct an ending of his own making if the narrator refuses to present one.

4.2.2.6. *City of Glass* – Another violation of the narrator-narratee contract?

As regards the fulfillment of the narrator-narratee contract, I would argue that the narrator closely abides by two of the three ‘golden’ rules: he inserts a ‘trigger’ element at the beginning of the narrative and he postpones the conveyance of essential information for as long as possible. The mysterious phone call asking for Paul Auster and the caller’s enigmatic proclamation that
he will be the victim of a murder during his third call clearly serve as suspense triggers. They immediately rivet the reader’s attention and urge him to go on reading. Regarding the first phone call, I would posit that the introduction of Paul Auster as a fictional character in the narrative has a considerable potential for suspense. First of all, it makes the reader pause. He wonders why the detective should be the namesake of the author. The question is bound to arise whether the fictional Auster is an autobiographical rendering of his real-life counterpart. The narratee searches for an explanation for this seemingly unconventional choice33. His curiosity will be aroused. He will be tempted to go on reading expecting to ‘meet’ the fictional Auster in the course of the narrative.

The second trigger, the third phone call, leads to a steep increase in suspense. While in conventional detective stories the level of suspense reaches its peak shortly before the final revelation of the culprit at the end of the narrative, one might claim that in City of Glass the climax of suspense can be found right at the beginning of the narrative, namely when the potential murder victim calls the detective to enlist his help to avert the impending catastrophe. The reader is provided with next to no information. He is deeply plunged into an informational void. He only learns that the caller’s life is in grave danger – no further specifics are given. The narrator leaves the gender of the caller undetermined, he only refers to “the voice” (CG 3) – “the sound of a voice unlike any [Quinn] had ever heard […] , hardly more than a whisper and yet perfectly audible” (CG 6-7). An aura of mystery surrounds the caller. Moreover, another effective means of suspense creation would be the caller’s assertion that “[t]ime is running out” (CG 7) - an equivalent of the ticking time bomb. A sense of utmost urgency is conveyed which strongly contributes to the amount of suspense experienced by the reader. The narratee’s information deficit becomes even more obvious and next to unbearable when the caller admits that he is familiar with the identity of his ‘murderer’. The reader is bound to be overcome by curiosity. This crucial nugget of information is withheld, while the narrator seemingly rubs the reader’s nose in the fact that the information is right there under his nose, yet it is not disclosed. The narrator stalls for time via the caller’s refusal to reveal the potential murderer’s name on the phone. Instead, Quinn, or rather Auster, is

33 In fact, postmodern writers frequently include themselves as characters in their texts (Natti).
asked to meet his ‘client’ in person, which implies an implicit promise that he will impart the yearned for information during their meeting. Therefore, I would argue that the narrator amply fulfills his first contractual obligation.

As far as the second stipulation of the metaphorical contract is concerned, one might posit that the narrator masterfully prolongs the arrival at the final solution, or rather non-solution. Owing to the insertion of such a powerful trigger at the very beginning of the narrative, the reader is desperate to learn more and dives headlong into the fictional world of lurking danger and death. However, his arrival at the story’s ultimate outcome is hindered and postponed by manifold digressions, detours and red herrings. Examples of detours intended to prolong the experience of suspense would be Quinn’s visit to the Columbia library to read Stillman’s book on language34, or the lengthy digression on homelessness. Especially the latter example has no obvious import to the detective story plane of the narrative. The narrator even admits that “what [Quinn] wrote that day had nothing to do with the Stillman case” (CG 108). Literary critics have argued that the excursus on homelessness contains “several moving passages” (Smith 48). Nevertheless, I would suggest that it is counterproductive to the creation of suspense. While, in theory, the amount of suspense increases in correlation to the length of the retardation period, the reader, who is desperately longing for the murder to finally occur or, at least, for a serious attempt to put the fiendish plan into operation, might feel bored rather than thrilled by the narrator’s account. As a result, the narratee might quickly skim through this part of the narrative or skip a few pages altogether. Closer attention will be paid as soon as the narrative proper restarts. As a consequence, I would argue that the narrator has not entirely succeeded in “counteracting the reader’s natural inclination to dash forward” (Sternberg 162-163). Regarding the narrator-narratee contract, however, the narrator closely heeds the second stipulation as well.

Typical of a postmodern anti-detective story, the narrator does not fulfill his contractual obligation to provide a solution and closure to the narrative. The ending proves to be particularly unsatisfying. It might be proposed that the lingering dissatisfaction is due to the reader’s “experience that the novel eludes

34 The notion of language and its import in City of Glass is discussed in Smith (41-43) or Springer (30-32), for instance
him and leaves a confusing number of questions unanswered” (Springer 107). Springer (107) notes that owing to the seeming adherence to the conventions of detective stories at the beginning of the narrative, the reader takes it for granted that the detective will present a final solution to him at the end of the narrative.

Auster himself stated in an interview that detective story aficionados will probably be “bitterly disappointed” by the ending of City of Glass (McCaffery, Gregory and Auster 22). At the very end of the novel, the narrator states the following: “As for Auster, I am convinced that he behaved badly throughout. If our friendship has ended, he has only himself to blame” (CG 133). One cannot help but wonder to whom the anonymous narrator refers: to the ‘real’ Auster or to the fictional one? The most obvious solution would, of course, be that the narrator refers to the fictional Auster. However, owing to the metatextuality of the whole novel (Bremer 203) and its self-referentiality (Holmes) it might not be too far-fetched to propose that the narrator alludes to the real Auster, who behaved badly as regards the third stipulation of the narratorial contract. He refrains from providing closure to his narrative. The narrator seems to echo the feelings of the frustrated reader whose ‘friendship’ to Auster has ended as well. Auster cheated him out of a solution and out of a satisfying ending to the narrative, which would hardly serve as an ideal basis for a friendship.

Last but not least, the narratee has to fulfill his side of the contract as well. He is supposed to suspend all disbelief and to deactivate any prior knowledge concerning the narrative, narrative schemata and genre conventions. However, the narrator renders this deactivation process particularly challenging for the reader. Natti argues that “Auster wants the reader to keep the author in mind at all times, bridging the gap between fiction and reality. Auster’s inclusion of himself in the novel reminds us that this story is a book, not something that could happen in real life”. Therefore, it is not surprising that the narratee does not entirely succeed in suspending all disbelief when typical of anti-detective fiction the narratee is “denie[d] […] heartfelt involvement, reassurance, and escape from reality by reminding him continuously that fiction is only fiction” (Tani 148 quoted in Springer 132). As a consequence, I would propose that both parties have violated the narratorial contract.
4.2.2.7. Suspense and style in *City of Glass*

4.2.2.7.1. Suspense and syntactic devices in *City of Glass*

The novel’s most memorable suspense episode, the phone call asking Quinn to save the caller’s life (cf. *CG* 11), is also interesting from a syntactic point of view. The suspense generated via the content of the phone call, the lurking danger and the deliberate vagueness as regards actual facts (e.g. the identity of the anonymous caller or the identity of the perpetrator) is further heightened by the tension induced by a variety of syntactical features. The conversation consists of relatively short sentences – some of them elliptical. The sentence structure used leads to the production of a staccato rhythm during the sequences of the enigmatic caller’s speech, which, in retrospect, would, of course, be indicative of Peter Stillman’s speech impediment caused by his father’s cruel experiment. In addition, structural suspense is generated by the interplay of questions and answers and constant repetition.

Furthermore, the narratee frequently encounters ellipsis creating structural suspense in *City of Glass*. A prime example is provided in Virginia Stillman’s account of her husband’s past and her father-in-law’s experiment: “Nine years. An entire childhood spent in darkness, isolated from the world, with no human contact except an occasional beating” (*CG* 27). The elliptical sentence structure serves as a means of laying particular emphasis on this passage. Ellipsis is bound to stand out in a narrative. As a result, the attention of the reader is riveted towards this passage. One might conjecture that the empathy felt for the poor child might by reinforced by the use of this syntactic device.

Another example of ellipsis can be found in the description of Virginia Stillman before she presents the case to Quinn: “Pensive. As if searching for an attitude of unshakeable honesty” (*CG* 25). The sentences might have been deliberately left incomplete to, once again, put special emphasis on this passage. The narratee might be induced to wonder about the wife’s need to adjust her demeanor to one of absolute honesty. Suspicion is cast on her, which would positively affect the amount of suspense felt by the story’s recipient.
The following passage aptly illustrates the creation of tension via ellipsis and the alternating use of questions and statements:

Her [i.e. Virginia Stillman’s] marriage? Perhaps. The complete incongruity of it. Could it be that she’s in it for the money? Or somehow working in collaboration with Stillman? That would change everything. But, at the same time, it makes no sense. For why would she have hired me? To have a witness to her apparent good intentions? Perhaps. But that seems too complicated. And yet: why do I feel she is not to be trusted? (CG 40)

The burning and pertinent questions Quinn tackles here are bound to mirror the questions which are likely to arise for the reader as well. On the other hand, one might posit that the questions might function as an invitation to the narratee to formulate his own hypotheses regarding the case. If the narrator succeeds in actively involving the reader in the narrative, the latter is likely to care about the outcome, which would, in turn, be conducive to suspense.

4.2.2.7.2. Suspense and lexico-semantic elements in *City of Glass*

First of all, as is to be expected in a detective story, countless lexical items stemming from the field of crime and death are to be found in *City of Glass* (e.g. “death” (CG 11), “murder” (CG 11), “kill” (CG 11), “evidence” (CG 27), “trial” (CG 26), or “tail job” (CG 29)), which cater to the overall impression of a highly suspenseful narrative. However, the notion of death does not exclusively allude to the demise of a murder victim. For instance, the words “coffin” (CG 35) or “funeral” (CG 35) refer to the death of Quinn’s infant son. Furthermore, Quinn likens the Columbia library to a “crypt of oblivion” (CG 41) – a rather peculiar comparison, if taken out of context, as one would expect a library to be a mine of information and the very antithesis to oblivion. Quinn, on the other hand, regards the absolute silence to be found in the library to be the common denominator. Silence as a possible metaphor for death repeatedly appears in the story: be it the silence on the phone at the very beginning of the story or the “utterly quiet” (CG 113) street in front of the Stillman apartment towards the end. This gives rise to the question in how far the various instances of silence foreshadow Quinn’s possible death or Peter Stillman Jr.’s possible demise.
Other examples of ominous noun phrases used in an unusual context would be “hidden staircases” (CG 50) and “dark alcoves” (CG 50). The image of a dark and mysterious medieval castle is evoked, while the narrator describes Grand Central Station in New York. It almost appears as if Quinn has been catapulted into the midst of a Gothic novel for the duration of a few heartbeats. Other seeming loans from Gothic horror stories would be the lexical items “horrify” (CG 71), “fiendish” (CG 71), or “monstrous” (CG 27). The lexicon used clearly caters to the narratee’s longing for thrill and suspense.

As regards collocations and their suspense creating potential, the phrase “in the dead of night” (CG 3) at the very beginning of the narrative comes to mind. The prepositional phrase does not qualify as an unusual collocational phrase and as such should not lend itself to the generation of suspense (cf. suspense and lexico-semantics). I would argue, however, that the opposite is the case here. The collocation sounds frightfully ominous and entices the reader to picture utter darkness and stillness. He knows that a phone call in the middle of the night can only mean extremely bad news. Consequently, this fairly common collocation should serve as an excellent device of suspense creation. The same should be true for the collocations “desperate tone” (CG 10) and “great danger” (CG 11), which both provide a considerable amount of suspense despite their common occurrence.

Another lexico-sematic means of creating suspense and tension would be metaphors. Quinn’s red notebook might be given as an example of a possible metaphor. The color red, which provides a stark contrast to the whiteness of Peter Stillman, might evoke associations of blood. On the one hand, blood might be read as a symbol of life. On the other hand, it might stand for murder and death. In addition, Quinn is depicted as a mere marionette with no will of his own when he buys the notebook: “For reasons that were never made clear to him, he suddenly felt an irresistible urge for a particular red notebook. […] [S]omething about it seemed to call out to him – as if its unique destiny in the world was to hold the words that came from his pen” (CG 38). An air of mystery surrounds Quinn’s apparent trademark. One might even claim that magic seems to be at work here. Suspense is bound to arise and the reader cannot
help but wonder what the significance of the red notebook\(^{35}\) might be. The narratee might be inclined to read the red notebook as a metaphor for Quinn’s life (cf. \textit{CG} 131-132 and its discussion in chapter 4.2.1. of this thesis). Another interesting detail would be that Stillman Sr., who is a fellow writer having published his book on language, also possesses a red notebook. One might argue that when there were no pages left in his notebook, Stillman had to die as well. As regards the metaphor’s potential for suspense, the red notebook should be able to generate a relatively high amount of tension and suspense as there seems to be sufficient distance between vehicle (i.e. the notebook) and tenor (i.e. Quinn’s life). In addition, the metaphor appears to be fairly unconventional, which would entail the generation of a considerable amount of lexico-semantic suspense.

\textbf{4.2.2.7.3. Suspense and text-pragmatics in \textit{City of Glass}}

\textbf{4.2.2.7.3.1. The narrator as a suspense-creating vehicle in \textit{City of Glass}}

Narrative point of view is of particular interest in \textit{City of Glass}. Initially, the reader is led to believe that the narrator is omniscient. He knows, for instance, that “[t]hat, of course, was a mistake. But of all the mistakes Quinn made from beginning to end, it was no worse than any other” (\textit{CG} 64). He seems to know every last detail about Quinn’s life and his innermost feelings. The narrator keeps up this guise of omniscience for most of the narrative.

Towards the end of the novel, however, the narrator can no longer sustain the pretense of omniscience. He is forced to admit to gaps in his knowledge concerning the sequence of events (Springer 108):

\begin{quote}
The account of this period is less full than the author would have liked. But information is scarce, and he has preferred to pass over in silence what could not be definitely confirmed. Since this story is based entirely on facts, the author feels it his duty not to overstep the bounds of the verifiable, to resist at all costs the perils of invention. Even the red notebook, which until now has provided a detailed account of Quinn’s experiences, is suspect. (\textit{CG} 114)
\end{quote}

\(^{35}\)“The Red Notebook” is also the title of one of Auster’s essays (Barone 3).
The fact that the narrator strongly insists on the truthfulness of his account raises strong suspicions about his reliability (Natti). All at once, he seems to have lost his apparent trustworthiness. Springer (108) claims that “[t]his narrator is unreliable in every sense”. By referring to himself as “the author”, the narrator might strive to establish a semblance of detachment and neutrality to counteract this impression of unreliability.

It has been argued earlier that omniscient narration is likely to offer less suspense than a narrative told from a restricted point of view. I would claim that an unexpected change from omniscient narration to a restricted point of view might be particularly conducive to the generation of suspense as it startles readers out of the seeming security of the fictional world portrayed by an omniscient narrator. The reader’s mind snaps to attention as soon as the restricted perspective is introduced into the story. One might posit that a reader is kept on his toes by an unreliable narrator. The narratee is compelled to constantly wonder whether the narrator is intentionally leading him on and is hiding vital pieces of information from him. By actively questioning the information conveyed by the narrative, the reader will probably develop a vested interest in the final outcome of the story and might, therefore, experience heightened suspense.

Without prior warning, the narrator appears as a fictional character at the very end of the narrative. Springer (108) argues that his sudden appearance is highly bewildering for the reader. Questions are bound to arise regarding his identity. I returned home from my trip to Africa in February […]. I called my friend Auster that evening, and he urged me to come over to see him as soon as I could. […] At his apartment, Auster explained to me what little he knew about Quinn, and then he went on to describe the strange case he had accidentally become involved in. He had become obsessed by it, he said, and he wanted my advice about what he should do. Having heard him out, I began to feel angry that he had treated Quinn with such indifference. I scolded him for not having taken a greater part in events, for not having done something to help a man who was so obviously in trouble. Auster seemed to take my words to heart. […] He said that I was the only person he could trust. […] As for Quinn, it is impossible for me to say where he is now. I have followed the red notebook as closely as I could, and any inaccuracies in the story should be blamed on me. There were moments when the text was difficult to decipher, but I have done my best with it and have refrained from any interpretations. The red
notebook, of course, is only half the story, as any sensitive reader will understand. (CG 132-133)

While having referred to himself as “the author” before and, thereby, attempting to establish an objective stance, the account appears to turn highly personal all of a sudden by the use of the first-person pronoun. The narrator still refrains from providing his name and merely introduces himself as a friend of the fictional Auster. By mentioning that he only returned from an apparently extensive journey, he establishes that he is entirely innocent as regards Quinn’s strange case and his final disappearance. No blame can be attributed to him. Furthermore, he portrays himself as a deeply sympathetic and empathetic character. He criticizes Auster for not having been of more help to Quinn when he obviously needed it. Simultaneously, he stresses his own trustworthiness. After all, Auster sought his help and guidance and he listened to the narrator’s advice. The emphatic emphasis that he is to be trusted is surely intended to induce the credulous reader to believe that the narrator has provided a reliable account of past events. However, the passage will probably have the opposite effect on a more suspicious reader.

In an interview Paul Auster stated that “a novel written in the first person is going to sound more intimate than one written in the third person” (McCaffery, Gregory and Auster 16). The sudden contrast between the third-person narrative and the surprising introduction of a first-person narrator renders this sudden intimacy even more tangible. One might argue that this unexpected intimacy gives rise to an increase in suspense. The narratee longs to know who the mysterious narrator is and why he surfaced as a character only at the very end of the narrative.

Auster himself states that “in City of Glass you have a book written in the third person throughout, and then, right at the end, the narrator appears and announces himself in the first person - which colors the book in retrospect somehow, turning the whole story into a kind of oblique first-person narrative” (McCaffery, Gregory and Auster 17). Working from the premise that the seemingly trustworthy narrator is, in fact, highly unreliable, the reader is bound to doubt the veracity and accuracy of the information provided. He will wonder how much of the narrative is pure speculation and invention despite the
narrator’s repeated protestations to the contrary. These pressing questions raised by the final introduction of the narrator as a fictional character and the resulting foregrounding of the process of narration might lead to a prolonging of suspense due to the reader’s urge to analyze the degree of veracity of the narrator’s account of events even after he has finished reading. Suspense might not cease the moment the reader shuts the book; he might remain in suspense a little longer than usual by trying to find answers to the questions posed by the narrative.

4.2.2.7.3.2. Intertextual suspense in City of Glass

Auster’s first part of the trilogy incorporates a substantial number of intertextual references. First of all, a number of prominent allusions are made to Edgar Allen Poe who is said to be the forefather of detective fiction (cf. Davis 28). Quinn writes his detective novels under the pseudonym William Wilson. The name is borrowed from one of Poe’s narratives, in which the main character William Wilson kills his doppelgänger (Klepper 255). This intertextual reference raises certain expectations in a reader who is familiar with Poe’s text. He will infer from Quinn’s nom de plume that City of Glass will be similar to Poe’s story and that a double of the protagonist is likely to appear (Bremer 203). One might say that the intertextual allusion seemingly foreshadows future events. However, intertextual suspense will only arise if the reader recognizes the allusion to Poe’s narrative. Moreover, literary critics have identified references to Poe’s The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (CG 70) (Holzapfel36 50 and Klepper 261) and to his short story “The Man of the Crowd” (Sorapure 81 and Klepper 260). Poe enthusiasts will surely have no problem in identifying these intertextual references, while other readers might remain oblivious of the tension created.

The direct reference to Poe and to his detective Dupin (cf. CG 40), who is said to be the first detective in literary history, would surely enable a larger part of

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36 Holzapfel (50) identifies four references to Edgar Allen Poe in City of Glass, namely William Wilson, Dupin, Arthur Gordon Pym, and the name Quinn as a reference to one of Poe’s biographers.
Auster’s readership to experience the tension created by intertextuality. Even if a narratee is not familiar with Dupin, he is bound to have heard of Poe. Quinn’s habit of taking extended walks through New York in all weather conditions (cf. CG 3) might be a more subtle reference to Dupin, who is famous for his perambulations through Paris. As the latter allusion is not as easily discernible as the direct reference to Poe and Dupin it is bound to generate a higher level of intertextual suspense.

Furthermore, from the aforementioned references to Dupin, the prototypical superhuman detective who is able to solve the most intricate mysteries, the reader will infer that Quinn possesses similar intellectual abilities and will undoubtedly be able to solve the present mystery. One might claim that Auster plays with the expectations of the reader and disappoints them strategically. The postmodern defeated detective Quinn turns out to be the exact opposite of Dupin. He blunders about in the metaphorical dark of the case; his method of jotting down information in his red notebook leads nowhere. He is unable to solve any of the mysteries: neither the suicide of Stillman Sr. nor the disappearance of Peter and Virginia Stillman.

Another interesting intertextual allusion is made to Marco Polo at the beginning of the narrative:

Quinn picked up the Marco Polo and started reading the first page again. ‘We will set down things seen as seen, things heard as heard, so that our book may be an accurate record, free from any sort of fabrication. And all who read this book or hear it may do so with full confidence, because it contains nothing but the truth.’ (CG 6)

This proclamation bears striking similarities to the repeated assertions of the narrator that City of Glass is free from any invention and fabrication. Springer (102-103) suggests that the anonymous narrator “does not explicitly claim that his story is true”. Via the integration of a quotation from Marco Polo’s Travels the narrator openly admits that his story is highly unreliable due to the fact that “Marco Polo was considered an impostor and his story an invention for several centuries” (Springer 103). The unsuspecting reader who is unaware of Marco Polo’s ‘reputation’ may believe that City of Glass will indeed be an accurate record of events. The amount of intertextual suspense generated, however,
would in this instance be rather small as intertextuality can be easily identified owing to the explicit reference to Marco Polo.

Examples of other literary references to be found in the narrative would be to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (CG 43) and *Paradise Regained* (CG 47), the Book of Genesis (CG 43), Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* (CG 81), Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (CG 97), or Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (CG 121). These straightforward references do not require the reader to put any effort into identifying the origin of the textual allusions. Therefore, their potential for the generation of intertextual suspense is limited. However, the narratee might be inclined to attempt to find any common ground between the works mentioned and Auster’s postmodern narrative, which might, in turn, lead to a higher involvement of the reader. As a result, suspense might slightly increase.

A higher potential for intertextual suspense might be detected in the following passage: “He arrived in a neverland of fragments, a place of worldless things and thingless worlds” (CG 72). ‘Neverland’ might be read as a reference to J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*. Beforehand, the narrator has briefly mentioned that Quinn has dreamt about the town he lived in as a child. Therefore, one might conjecture that ‘neverland’ might be an allusion to Barrie’s immensely popular book for children. As the intertextual reference is rather hidden in the text and as there is sufficient distance between the respective genres of the two narratives, i.e. a postmodern detective story and children’s literature, a comparatively high amount of intertextual suspense should set in.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed suspense in two postmodern detective stories, namely in Amis’ *Night Train* and Auster’s *City of Glass*. The question remains whether there are any similarities regarding the creation of suspense.

First of all, the opening sentences of both novels immediately rivet the reader’s attention – be it via structural incompleteness or the use of referentless
pronouns. The narratee’s curiosity is aroused and he will attempt to fill in the informational void created by continuing reading. Both narrators masterfully retain important information to achieve maximum suspense, especially at the beginning of their respective narratives.

Moreover, both detective stories pose numerous open questions of sufficient importance to the reader. In *Night Train*, the most burning questions are initially concerned with the identity of the victim of the crime and the identity of the culprit. However, the question of *whodunit* changes to the question of *whydunit* in the course of the narrative. The narratee is enthralled by the narrative until the last page of the book. *City of Glass* pursues a similar strategy as concerns the open questions posited. The suspenseful question of whether Quinn will be able to avert the murder of Stillman Jr. loses its profound significance in the course of the narrative. Other aspects (e.g. the notion of authorship or identity) gain importance, while the actual story line seemingly fades into the background (Smith 35). Bernstein (135) even compares Auster’s narrative to “literary criticism”. Therefore, it can hardly be surprising that the amount of suspense experienced by the reader decreases the more complex the book’s “network of narratives” (Smith 34) becomes. These different narrative strands “interweave and work allegorically in several directions at once” (Smith 34). The narratee, who expected to enjoy a story of detection and crime and is only marginally interested in literary criticism, will surely be out of his depth. Consequently, he might claim that *City of Glass* starts out as an immensely suspenseful story which steadily loses its appeal the more the story progresses and the more the semblance of a conventional detective story fades.

It has been argued that *Night Train* “flout[s] the anticipation of audience expectations and mov[es] the focus of the story away from the solution of the mystery, towards addressing unanswerable questions about identity, reality, and knowledge” (Martínez-Alfaro 117) as well. Yet Amis’ narrative loses none of its potential for suspense. This might be due to the fact that *Night Train* never loses sight of its main plot line. Mystery aficionados might feel more at home in Amis’ text as the well-known ingredients of traditional detective fiction still feature prominently in the novel. A crime is committed and Mike endeavors to
solve it. The narratee is not abandoned in a labyrinth of story lines with no exit sign in sight as is the case in *City of Glass* (cf. Holzapfel 25).

As regards empathy, again both *Night Train* and *City of Glass* manage to evoke feelings of deep sympathy and empathy for the protagonists. Mike’s disastrous childhood and her alcohol addiction trigger feelings of pity and compassion. An even more powerful emotion prompt can be found in *City of Glass*, when allusions are made to the funeral of Quinn’s infant son. These mental images are imprinted on the reader’s mind and he is not likely to forget them. Mike’s intention to commit suicide proves to be especially haunting as well as the reader has grown fond of Mike during her narrative. However, in *City of Glass* the feelings of empathy and sympathy slowly peter out in the course of the book as Quinn’s behavior becomes increasingly hard to comprehend. Only at the very end of Quinn’s story the narratee develops fresh feelings of pity and compassion for him. Nevertheless, I would assert that both texts amply fulfill the prerequisite of generating feelings of empathy to create suspense.

Furthermore, the different forms of suspense, *Was-Spannung*, *Wie-Spannung* and *Warum-Spannung*, can be detected in various degrees in both stories. The same is true for the incorporation of *crimen*, *fructus* and *sexus*. As regards the narrative schema used, both novels adhere in varying degrees to the mystery schema proposed by Wenzel. *Night Train* seems to still follow the conventional schema comparatively closely. *City of Glass*, on the other hand, is harder to subsume under traditional schemata. It has been argued that the beginning might be classified according to the suspense proper schema, while the remaining narrative seems to follow the mystery schema.

Regarding the fulfillment of the narrator-narratee contract, both narrators closely abide by two contractual stipulations, namely by the insertion of a suspense ‘trigger’ at the beginning of the narrative and the postponement of the conveyance of vital information for as long as possible. Typical of a postmodern detective story, Mike and the anonymous narrator both refuse to provide closure to their narrative, which constitutes a clear violation of the third rule of the metaphorical contract. The narratee, on the other hand, does not entirely fulfill
his contractual obligation either. He is supposed to suspend all disbelief and to deactivate any prior knowledge, genre conventions and schemata. However, the conventional mystery schema seems to be so deeply ingrained in the reader’s mind that he cannot help but apply it to Night Train and City of Glass. One might claim that the anonymous narrator in Auster’s narrative works with unfair means by including the author as a fictional character in the novel. As a consequence, the narratee is virtually unable to suspend all disbelief when the novel’s artificiality is so blatantly pointed out.

As far as style, syntax and suspense are concerned, Amis “chummy” style of writing immediately comes to mind. Repetition and ellipsis are omnipresent in Night Train. They create a high amount of tension which contributes to the overall impression of a highly suspenseful narrative. The same features can be found in City of Glass as well – yet not as frequently as in Amis’ version of a detective story.

Furthermore, lexico-semantic means of generating suspense seem to be of equal importance in both narratives. Both contain myriads of lexical items which lend themselves to the generation of suspense. Moreover, Auster’s and Amis’ novels use metaphors as a vehicle for suspense creation. While the metaphor of the night train functions as a powerful means of creating tension and suspense in Amis’ narrative, the possible metaphor of Quinn’s red notebook remains comparatively hidden in the text. A casual reader might not ponder over its possible significance. Therefore, its potential for creating suspense might not be fully exploited. The meaning of the night train, on the other hand, is readily explained in the novel and, as a consequence, the narratee is unable to miss its significance.

Last but not least, text-pragmatic devices of suspense creation seem to be of particular importance in City of Glass. Intertextual allusions can be found in Night Train as well. Yet Auster’s narrative seems to be almost flooded by intertextuality. Another marked difference would be that Mike is a reliable narrator – atypical in postmodernism, while Auster’s anonymous narrator is a prime example of an unreliable narrator trying to disguise himself as utterly
reliable. I have argued that the unreliable narrator is likely to create a particularly high amount of suspense owing to the narratee's innate need to question and reassess the information provided by an obviously unreliable source.

To sum it up, both postmodern detective stories contain a high amount of suspense. Admittedly, in the case of City of Glass, the complexity and multi-layered construction of the text might lead to a decrease in suspense. However, one should bear in mind that suspense is a highly subjective phenomenon. While some readers encounter thrill and suspense in a narrative, others might look for it in vain. Moreover, I do not think that it would be safe to draw any conclusions from the analysis of merely two postmodern detective stories for the whole genre. Certain tendencies would surely be representative (e.g. the violation of the narrator-narratee contract by the narrator), while other similarities might be pure coincidences.
Bibliography


<http://www.crimeculture.com/contents/articles-summer05/DanHolmes.html>


Abstract

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