

Madness in the new york trilogy



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Author Philip K. Dick once said, " It is sometimes an appropriate response to reality to go insane." The theme of the source of madness is explored in all three stories that form Paul Auster's novel The New York Trilogy. The three relatively short detective stories all explore similar themes and similar ideas, one of them being why people would go mad in our society. In the first story, the reader sees Queen the detective become mad as he cannot crack the Stillman's case, which in the end was no mystery to solve. In the second story, the reader sees Private Investigator Blue go mad when he is paid to simply watch a man write all day, nothing else. In the third story, the narrator goes crazy by trying to find his own identity through his childhood missing friend. At the end of the novel, the reader can recognize Paul Auster is making the point in his three narratives that because men have no real purpose, they will go mad.

City of Glass deals with the theme of the existence of purpose leading to insanity by presenting writer Quinn with a detective case. He is hired to follow Peter Stillman Sr, who has been in jail for locking up his child several years. However, since the beginning of the case were are presented with the meaninglessness of the case. This first appears when Quinn is going to start his pursuit of Stillman at the trainstation, and suddenly he finds himself in trouble as two identical men with Stillman's face materialize from the trains. Quinn recognizes that whoever he chose to follow " would be arbitrary, a submission to chance," and that it would " haunt him to the end,"(pg. 68). This displays how even since the beginning of Quinn's pursuit, there is no real purpose to it. Everything could have been different if he followed the other Stillman, defeating the purpose of Quinn's search for the truth. It does

not exist in this case. After following various “ leads” that lead Quinn nowhere but to imagine things like maps of paths and himself becoming Stillman’s son, Quinn loses track of Stillman one night. He realizes at that time that “ He had nothing, he knew nothing [and that], he only knew that he knew nothing,”(pg 125). After this, the book turns very dark, as Quinn goes live in an alley in front of Tillman Jr’s apartment. He goes mad, teaching himself to live on the least food possible and sleeping on 15 minute intervals. This shows that when Quinn realizes that he cannot solve his case, and there is no meaning to what he has been trying to do all this time, he simply goes mad. It proves the point that knowing nothing breaks the human spirit.

Ghosts explores this same idea in a somewhat similar way. This time it follows a real private investigator named Blue, who is hired by White to watch Black from across the window and write reports on what he does every week. In the begging, Blue begins to wonder about all the interesting things the case coul entail, however he soon notices that all that the most action he would get is to watch Black write all day. In an absurd conversation where Black takes on Blue’s role and explains to Blue what he himself does all day, he explains that his job is just to watch a man that “ sits in his room all day and writes,” he explains how this is enough to “ drive you crazy,” (pg. 214) This shows how in his research to find out the truth about the case, he only finds absurdity, which in turn, makes him go crazy. This becomes a metaphor for life through the story. When Blue really becomes crazy in this story is when he sneaks into Black’s house and finds that what he has been reading and writing are Blue’s own reports. This hits Blue hard, as he

discovers how the last year of his life he has been investigating nothing. The narrator explains that it “ is not certain that Blue ever really recovers from the events of this night,” (pg. 224). After finding out that everything he has investigating is a non existent fraud, Blue goes crazy. In the end, the narrator does not know what happens to him, as he simply puts on his hat and leaves the apartment where everything happened.

The Locked Room differs from the other novels, as it is farther away from the detective genre. In his search for truth, the narrator is not solving a case, rather looking for Fanshawe, which symbolizes himself. After Fanshawe disappears, the narrator who is his childhood takes over his life, marrying his wife, and publishing his book. The narrator becomes Fanshawe. This is why when he gets a letter from the real Fanshawe the narrator becomes obsessed with finding him. As a parallel to the other stories, he also loses his life (wife and child) to embark on his search. He becomes so desperate to find his long lost friend that at a bar he pretends on man who “ didn't know weather to treat [him] as a jovial drunk or a dangerous psychopath,” (pg. 249) of being Fanshawe. This demonstrates that by looking for Fanshawe, the narrator tries to find himself, and when he cannot he loses his marbles. When the narrator finally finds Fanshawe, he gets a notebook of his notes. On the journey back home, he tries to read the journal he tried to “ get a sense of what Fanshawe had written,” but he explains that he “ understood very little” (pg. 370) of what was written. As in the two other stories, the characters never seem to get the answers that they have lost everything looking for. The narrator in The Locked Room ultimately does not find himself when looking for Fanshawe. His purpose, as the others, was meaningless.

The trilogy explores several themes inside the stories, such as the use of language and words, the duality of things, or the hassles of being a writer. However, the most prominent thing that the reader notices after reading this trilogy, is the idea that if a man searches too much, he will go mad. This searching typically refers to meaning or purpose or identity of oneself.

Whether it is you are looking for answers in a case, purpose in your career, or your identity, if you look too hard to any of these you will find nothing.

What Auster says about this nothingness is that it leads to madness. Paul Auster does not criticize this madness, in the first book he even questions what crazy Peter Stillman sees when he looks at a tree. This questions if the insane look at the world in a different way, not necessarily good or bad. However, he does assert - in a very dark manner - that when looking for the inexistent purpose of humanity, individuals will only find insanity.