Representations of Space and Time in the Labyrinth: A Comparative Analysis of *City of Glass* and *Biritus madīna tahta al-ard* [Biritus a City Underground]

By

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Representations of Space and Time in the Labyrinth: A Comparative Analysis of *City of Glass* and *Biritus madīna taḥta al-ard [Biritus a City Underground]*

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines representations of city-labyrinths as they are portrayed in *City of Glass* by Paul Auster and *Biritus madīna taḥta al-ard [Biritus a City Underground]* by Rabī’ Jābir. Although an ancient structure, the labyrinth is an intricate space which often functions as an ‘other’ reality in the world today; it comes to represent and contain the marginal individuals and collectives in society. Slums, ghettos, refugee camps, and subway stations are made up of mazy, labyrinthine networks. These intricate spaces are difficult to map, for the users of these space often defy the space’s intended function. As a space, the labyrinth meets the six principles of heterotopias outlined by Michel Foucault in his lecture entitled “Of Other Spaces.” Thus, the labyrinth can be described as a heterotopic space. Such spaces are often characterized by difference and deviation. A prison, which Foucault identifies as a heterotopia, is a labyrinth to the guard who is unfamiliar with the internal codes and rules known to the prisoners. The labyrinth has a distinct spatial and temporal order that is perceived as a disorder by the lost walker. In *City of Glass*, the protagonist uncovers a new order that manifests itself in the form of an invented language. As he attempts to interpret this language, he realizes the impossibility of escaping this labyrinth. The interpretations yield limitless possibilities that are never confirmed. In *Biritus*, the new order manifests itself through a fictitious subterranean city-labyrinth existing beneath modern-day Beirut. Unable to comprehend the order of this labyrinth, the protagonist realizes that he must escape the labyrinth or remain wedged in the past. Furthermore, the labyrinth challenges the protagonists’ notions of time. The temporal order of the labyrinth is characterized by a backwards movement in time; the protagonists can only move forward in the labyrinth by moving backwards first. The walker discovers that the physical city-labyrinth is only a tangible manifestation of the labyrinth within; the journey through the labyrinth is, thus, transformed into an internal one.

Keywords: Labyrinth, Maze, Heterotopia, City, Disorder, Temporal, Spatial
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Introduction

“There is no need to build a labyrinth when the entire universe is one.”
— Jorge Luis Borges

The Origin of Labyrinths

As an architectural structure, the labyrinth is a space with intricate passages in which the walker becomes lost. The *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary defines the “labyrinth” as “a place that has many confusing paths or passages; something that is extremely complicated or difficult to understand” (“Labyrinth”). Figuratively and metaphorically, the term “labyrinth” is used to characterize a difficult or enigmatic situation. As Plato describes in the dialogue between Socrates and his friend Crito in *Euthydemus*:

Then it seemed like falling into a labyrinth; we thought we were at the finish, but our way bent round and we found ourselves as it were back at the beginning, and just as far from that which we were seeking at first. (404)

In language, the riddle represents a verbal labyrinth, for riddles are “compact and ambiguous statements couched more often than not in structures parallel and symmetrical…The fruitless meanings comprise the dead ends and false alleys of the verbal labyrinth” (West 79). The mental process of uncovering the answer to the riddle resembles the challenging journey through the labyrinth; the lost walker attempts to find an exit in the physical labyrinth just as one tries to resolve a riddle, which is itself an intangible labyrinth.

The etymology of the word “labyrinth” remains ambiguous to the present day. In 1892, German archaeologist Maximilian Mayer claimed that *labyrinthos* is the house of
the double-headed ax (labrys) on Knossos, Crete. Although widely accepted, this interpretation has been challenged because the evidence of the existence of a cult of a double-headed ax is lacking. In addition, the word labyrs was only the Lydian (and not the Greek or Cretan) word for ax. The suffix “-inthos” was used by the Greeks in reference to names of places they had come across upon migration (as in Korinthos) (Kern 42).

In his book Through the Labyrinth: Designs and Meanings Over 5,000 Years, Hermann Kern argues that the original manifestation of the concept of the labyrinth is the dance pattern, for he claims that the dance pattern is the most primordial and direct form of expression (25). The graphic and literary forms came at a later stage and were attempts to record the movements of the dance. For example, a pitcher from Tragliattella (ca. 620 BCE) depicts warriors emerging from a labyrinth in a dance pattern. The word “Truia” on the labyrinth translates to “arena” or “dance surface” (Kern 25).

The lusus Troiae (the Game of Troy), a weapons dance which followed labyrinthine paths, was originally enacted on two occasions: during funeral rites and at the founding of a city. The purpose of the dance was to establish a protective wall, symbolically separating one space from another. The living are protected from the dead, and the interior space of the city is protected from the external world beyond its walls (Kern 80). When perceived as such, the labyrinth also functions as a form of protection against outsiders. Virgil describes Anchises’s funeral games in the fifth book of the Aeneid. Aeneas calls upon his son Ascanius who has created a dance pattern to be performed by his fellows on horseback to honor Anchises:
Next they start on other charges and other retreats in corresponsive spaces, and interlink circle with circle, and wage the armed phantom of battle. And now they bare their backs in flight, now turn their lances to the charge, now plight peace and ride on side by side. As once of old, they say, the labyrinth in high Crete had a tangled path between blind walls, and a thousand ways of doubling treachery, where tokens to follow failed in the maze unmastered and irrecoverable: even in such a track do the children of Troy entangle their footsteps and weave the game of flight and battle. (110)

The Game of Troy and the structure of a labyrinth are similar in that they are both “complex in pattern, difficult to follow, and interwoven” (Doob 28). Hence to those inside the labyrinth (the dancers performing the complex dance), the paths are decipherable. However, to the outsider, the dance is characterized by winding and perplexing paths.

Labyrinths in varied forms have also been depicted on Christian church floors since late antiquity. Their function remains disputed as the evidence to explain their existence is inconclusive. One theory states that they served as symbolic paths of repentance (Kern 146). Another interpretation suggests that the feeble and sick who were unable to visit Jerusalem performed pilgrimages on their feet or knees in church labyrinths (Doob 119). This function of church labyrinths, however, likely emerged in the eighteenth century.
Labyrinths and Mazes

The terms “labyrinth” and “maze” are used interchangeably today; however, certain scholars distinguish between the two structures. William Henry Matthews argues that the terms “labyrinth” and “maze” can be used interchangeably (2). Other scholars differentiate between the physical and architectural structures of the labyrinth and the maze (Kern 23; Doob 50). They argue that the structure of the labyrinth has only one path which leads to the center. The center is a dead end; thus, the walker must walk back the same path he entered in order to exit the labyrinth. In contrast to the labyrinth, the structure of a maze requires the walker to choose paths, creating more possibilities for the walker. This distinction between mazes and labyrinths is important when one traces the architectural and historical evolution of such spaces. It also remains significant when one considers the implications of the single-path labyrinth and the multicursural maze.

To become physically lost within the paths of the labyrinth or the maze does not only bring about an external sense of disorientation but an internal one as well. It may appear that the journey through the single-path labyrinth poses no challenge to the walker; after all, the walker merely follows the single path which leads to the center and walks back out of the labyrinth through the same path. What must not be overlooked, however, is the internal, psychological journey. The uncertainty of where the path will lead and of when the journey will end leaves the walker feeling detached and disoriented. In the labyrinth, there is no assurance, as even what lies in the center is unknown to the walker; the center (if there is one) is ambiguous, and the walker discovers its meaning only upon reaching it. The walker has little control over the surrounding space, for even though one knows where the labyrinth begins, one is never certain of where it will end. Likewise,
the maze too leaves the wanderer feeling helpless within its spaces; the walker continuously questions whether the choices made are the right ones. Thus, the labyrinth does not only pose an external, physical challenge (to find one’s way out of the tortuous paths) but becomes an internal journey. The center, then, is a turning point for the walker. As Kern describes:

Once at the center, our subject is all alone, encountering him-or herself a divine principle, a Minotaur, or anything else for which the ‘center’ might stand...Therefore, turning around at the center does not just mean giving up one’s previous existence; it also marks new beginnings. A walker leaving the labyrinth is not the same person who entered it, but has been born again into a new phase or level of existence; the center is where death and rebirth occur. (30)

While the labyrinth presents the walker with an internal challenge that can be overcome by a process of self-reflection, the maze forces the walker to focus on the external surroundings in order to make choices that will lead to an exit. The distinction between labyrinths and mazes is important when one considers its implications; one journey is an internal challenge, another is an external one. Today, however, the terms “labyrinth” and “maze” are used interchangeably, and the boundaries between the external and internal journeys through the labyrinth have been blurred. As such, the notion of the labyrinth is one that includes the idea of the maze and vice versa. Thus, in today’s world, the distinction between the maze and the labyrinth dissolves.¹

¹ For the purposes of this thesis, the terms “labyrinth” and “maze” will be used interchangeably.
The Labyrinth of Daedalus

The Egyptian labyrinth near Hawara is one of the earliest labyrinths. This structure was a temple erected by the Twelfth Dynasty’s greatest pharaoh, Amenemhet III (19th c. B.C.) (Kern 57; MacGillivray 329-330). Admired by the Greeks, it served as a model for the Cretan labyrinth. Today, only a few columns remain of this grand structure. What is known about it primarily comes from ancient accounts. In the second book of his Histories, the Greek historian Herodotus describes:

Certainly, there can be no doubting that the Labyrinth would have cost more in terms of sweat and gold than all the walls and public monuments built by the Greeks put together…Take the corridors which lead from vestibule to vestibule, for instance, or the passages which twist with such intricacy between the various courtyards: these, as we wound our way from a courtyard to some chambers, and then from the chambers to a colonnade, and on from the colonnade into some vestibules, and then from the vestibules back out into a courtyard, provided a source of limitless wonderment to me. (172)

Another well-known early architectural labyrinth is the Minoan Palace at Knossos, which is also known as the Palace of the Double Ax. Some believe that the labyrinth built for King Minos was a replica of the Egyptian labyrinth. This palace is often associated with the Cretan myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. Daedalus built the labyrinth for King Minos of Crete to detain the half-man, half-bull Minotaur who was born to Pasiphaë, queen of Crete. The Minotaur was born out of Pasiphaë’s love affair with the Cretan bull that was given to Minos in answer to his prayers to become king. When Minos refused to sacrifice the bull as a show of his appreciation, Aphrodite cursed
Pasiphaë with an infatuation for the beautiful white bull. The Minotaur (man and beast) was born out of this love affair. To control, contain, and conceal the Minotaur, Daedalus was instructed by Minos to build the labyrinth. In the eighth book of his _Metamorphoses_, Ovid states, “Minos intended/ To remove this shame from his chambers and enclose it/ In a dark, winding labyrinth. Daedalus,/ A renowned master architect, did the work,/ Confounding the usual lines of sight/With a maze of conflicting passageways” (210).

Daedalus’s labyrinth is a structure which represents man’s ability to impose order on a reality governed by chaos. Unable to recognize the Minotaur as part of his reality, Minos attempts to construct a secluded space for the Minotaur. The construction of the labyrinth is, thus, an attempt to restore order to Minos’s world. For this to occur, the Minotaur must be concealed from Minos’s reality. However, in producing a space in which the Minotaur can exist, Minos also produces another reality which, paradoxically, becomes difficult to control and navigate. Even the labyrinth’s architect himself is barely able to escape this intricate structure. In some accounts, he does not escape at all.

So complicated was the labyrinth that no individual was ever able to escape its paths. Every year, Minos commanded that seven men and women be sent from Athens to be fed to the Minotaur to avenge the death of his son, Androgeus, who was killed in the Panathenaic Games in Athens. Theseus, son of Aegeus, decides to slay the Minotaur; he is sent to Crete as one of the seven young men. Theseus eventually slays the Minotaur and escapes the labyrinth with the help of Minos’s daughter, Princess Ariadne, who falls in love with him. Thus, Theseus is successful on his journey as a result of Ariadne’s
clue. She gives Theseus the Mitos (the skein of thread) to help him navigate his way back out of the labyrinth. The clew becomes a significant metaphor as it is:

- the life-line spun and rolled into a ball by the Fates at birth and unravelled throughout one's life, making it a guide through life's perplexities. The key is to find one's clew and to learn how to follow it; otherwise one is lost in the maze.

(MacGillivray 229)

Theseus’s encounter with the Minotaur represents the center of labyrinth, for he discovers his true path and purpose at that moment.

Yet, not everyone is as fortunate as Theseus. He is saved by Ariadne’s clew; however, what happens when one does not find the Mitos? When in possession of the clew, one does not fear the consequences of each choice. Without it, navigating the labyrinth “may require either the most astute intellect, actively noting each turn and remembering each passage, or it may require complete unthinking acquiescence, a Zen-like blending of the self into the maze until it is fully internalized within the wanderer” (Hawthorne 78). The discovery at the center (if there is one) may bring about self-awareness or it may uncover evils of the world which are best left there. In either case, the walker returns from the journey a changed individual.

The labyrinth may appear to be a chaotic, aimless space, but it only appears so to the outsider who is unable to decipher its paths. To the insider who has found a way to ‘map’ this space, the labyrinth has a clear structure and form:

- Its architecture may be so complex that it defies analysis and thus appears aimless, but to the insider, the architect or whoever knows the plan, a labyrinth is
never formless. To the outsider or the person trapped in it, it may seem as
formless as a garbage dump, the canals of Venice, or the crisscrossing of forest
paths; escape from it may seem impossible or, if finally possible, very difficult,
achieved only by a few initiates. (Hawthorne 78)

A bird’s-eye view of the labyrinth allows one to observe the visible order of this
structure. From above, it is fixed and static; from within, it is a dynamic space that is
continuously altered by the walkers’ choices.

**Representations of Labyrinths in *City of Glass* and *Biritus madīna taḥta al-arḍ***

The significance of the labyrinth in the Cretan myth is very much illustrative of
the function of the modern labyrinth in literature today. At its most basic level, the
labyrinth functions to disorient and delude the walker. In today’s world, the modern city-
labyrinth operates in this manner with its web-like paths, complex networks, and
intricate relationships. The protagonist today may embody some or all the qualities of
the characters of the Cretan myth. Like Minos, he can be a creator of this space, like the
Minoatur, he can become a prisoner of it, or like Theseus, he can overcome the
challenge and leave the labyrinth as a changed individual. Minos commands the
construction of the labyrinth in order to contain the Minotaur. The labyrinth, thus,
becomes a tool to control reality—an attempt to impose order on a disordered world.
Minos, however, fails to see that in giving the Minotaur a space, he also gives him the
potential to create an alternative time-space which, paradoxically, becomes
uncontrollable. In giving him a time-space, he is affirming his existence (and not erasing
it as he had initially planned to do). Like the Minotaur who roams the labyrinth in search
of an exit, the protagonist treads the paths of the city-labyrinth in search of meaning. For the modern Minotaur, the labyrinth may function as a refuge. Enveloped within its walls, the protagonist constructs and exists in a labyrinth of his own creation. It can act as a refuge from the harshness of this world; one may choose to dwell in the labyrinth because it remains safer than the external world in spite of its perceived chaos. The protagonist can also be a modern Theseus, roaming the labyrinth with the purpose of slaying the Minotaur. Unlike Theseus, however, the modern protagonist often discovers that there is no Minotaur to confront or worse, that the Minotaur lurks within. The protagonist today, lacking Theseus’s valor and purpose, finds himself in the labyrinth by chance and not by choice. Immersed in the labyrinth, the protagonist is unable to perceive the space in its entirety, and he has no choice but to wander. It appears that the labyrinth, although an ancient structure, continues to symbolize the condition of modern man today; “The labyrinth is a clever metaphor for life. Whoever goes into that maze must find their way through the complexity of twists and turns to defeat the monster lurking there” (Mac Gillivray 329). What the protagonists discover is that the monsters prowl within, transforming the journey through the labyrinth into an internal one; the physical journey is merely a tangible representation of the internal labyrinth inside each one of us. To escape this labyrinth, one must find a way to slay the Minotaur within.

This thesis examines representations of city-labyrinths as they are portrayed in *City of Glass* by Paul Auster and *Biritus madīna taḥta al-ard* by Rabī’ Jābir. The labyrinth is an intricate space which often functions as an ‘other’ reality in the world today; consequently, it comes to represent and house the marginal individuals and collectives in society. As a space, it meets the six principles of heterotopias outlined by
Michel Foucault in his lecture entitled “Of Other Spaces,” thus it can be described as a heterotopic space. Such spaces are often characterized by difference, deviation, and marginality. A prison, which Foucault identifies as a heterotopia, can also be a labyrinth to the guard who is unfamiliar with the internal codes and rules known to the prisoners. Furthermore, labyrinths follow a temporal and spatial order which is different from the external space they are a part of. This order is perceived as a disorder by the lost walker. Through imposing a certain order, this space also imposes a distinct time pattern, challenging the walker’s own notions of time.
Chapter One

Understanding Space and Heterotopias: Manifestations of Real-life Labyrinths

For the purposes of understanding labyrinths as spaces, it becomes significant to understand and define the term “space” as well as to explore the implications of the concept of “space”. To conceive of space as a product of historical, social, and spatial forces implies that all spaces are in a continuous state of ‘becoming’. Spaces are utilized, occupied, (mis)used, abused, owned, sold, forgotten, created, and destroyed. Every society produces its own space; the space of the ancient world cannot merely be understood as a group of people and things that once existed in a given space nor can they be understood only through the texts of Plato and Aristotle (Lefebvre 31). As the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre maintains, “(Social) space is not a thing among things, nor a product among other products; rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity—their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder” (Lefebvre 73). This conception of space goes beyond the physical understanding of space, and it encompasses space in its social, cultural, and historical dimensions. Space, thus, comes to be seen as a dynamic entity.

In the past, space had often been considered a fixed entity whereas history implied progress and fecundity. The fascination of the 19th century was history, “with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world” (Foucault 22). This period saw the overprivileging of history
(time) over spatial thought. In their introduction to *Thinking Space*, Mike Crang and Nigel J. Thrift assert that “part of the reason for the turn to space in many disciplines has been a drive to move away from the tyrannies of historicism and developmentalism,[yet] the fact remains that space without time is as improbable as time without space” (1). Thus, they add that Michel Foucault’s “celebrated announcement that the era of space was succeeding that of time needs to be taken with a pinch of salt” (1). Consequently, the priority given to historical forces had quieted the power of spatial thought (Soja 15).

Prior to the 1960s, human geography was primarily concerned with describing the differences between various geographical locations throughout the world. This ‘regional geography’ addressed questions such as: “Why was the South of the United States different from the North?” and “How many regions could be identified in England?” (Creswell 16). It began with a description of the physical and geographical features of a space and ended with an analysis of the ‘culture’ being studied; thus, a description of how regions differed resulted in the creation of boundaries (Creswell 16). Space and place were understood as locations, and they appealed to:

the *nomothetic* or generalizing impulse of science…Since the *particular* had no place in the hierarchy of values developed in the post-enlightenment world, studies of place were often relegated to ‘mere description’ while space was given the role of developing scientific law-like generalizations. In order to make this work, people had to be removed from the scene. This empty space could then be used to develop a kind of spatial mathematics—a geometry. (Creswell 16)
The 1980s saw a shift in spatial theory as it relates to power, gender, class, race, and the social and cultural world (Creswell 29). For example, Kay Anderson studied the development of Chinatown in Vancouver, Canada. She argues that “these places cannot simply be read as symbols of essential Chineseness but rather that such places are ideologically constructed as places of difference” and are “the result of negotiation with those with power to define place” (qtd. in Creswell 28).

The notion that space is continuously (re)produced through the interaction of the physical, social, historical, political, and cultural forces is difficult to grasp as a result of what Lefebvre identifies as the double illusion of space: the illusion of transparency and the realistic illusion (28). The illusion of transparency deceives one into believing that space is innocent. Space “appears as luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free rein” (Lefebvre 29). The realistic illusion leads one to believe that space is simply ‘out there’; it is merely the physical entity in which our lives are carried out (Lefebvre 29). The implications of these illusions are twofold. Firstly, space is no longer only seen as a passive backdrop but as fluid and dynamic entity which is ‘produced’ by people, society, and history. Secondly, space becomes a force, for it is not only a consequence of social actions but (oftentimes) also an initiator of them.

Lefebvre’s conception of space is based on a triad of interconnected spatial dimensions: spatial practice (the perceived space), representational spaces (the lived space), and representations of space (the conceived space). Spatial practice:

embodies…a close association…between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work,
‘private’ life and leisure)... A spatial practice must have certain cohesiveness but this does not imply that this is coherent. (Lefebvre 38)

A space comprises a set of places that are interconnected through physical urban networks (roads, railways, airports, harbors, pedestrians’ paths, the internet, and the media) which are utilized by inhabitants as they move from one place to another by using common networks. Thus, the spatial practice is constructed through the walker’s choices; a walker chooses paths over others depending on his priorities. For instance, one can take a longer yet more pleasant route home as opposed to a shorter but noisy path. It is worth noting that Lefevre’s concept of spatial practice does not take into consideration modern developments in communication routes such as the internet and the media, which brought the speed and possibility of communication between distinct places to a level that is unprecedented in human history.

Representational space (the lived space) is the space “as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’” (Lefebvre 39) It is thus “the dominated—and hence passively experienced—space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects” (Lefebvre 39). This space is complex, symbolic, and abstract; it is relevant to culture, history, and ideology. Unlike spatial practice, representational space is not necessarily characterized by cohesion or consistency. It is the space as it is lived and experienced thus is laden with symbols that have personal as well as collective meaning. Representational space is connected to spatial practice, for it is about how individuals ‘use’ space. Yet, it is also about how people give meaning to places within that space. For instance, a public park may have sentimental value to the
residents in the neighborhood. Perhaps it holds memories which tie generations together. It is in this space that meaning is produced and that history is (re)created and interpreted.

Representations of space (the conceived spaces) are the spaces “of scientists, planners, urbanists…all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived” (Lefebvre 38). Using their understanding of spatial practice and representational space, they seek to construct and modify the space through plans, maps, models, and designs for building roads, parks, hospitals, educational institutions, museums, theaters, and vehicles for transportation. For instance, a suburban neighborhood is constructed to accommodate a quiet, secure family-oriented lifestyle. It will likely include a common outdoor public space in which children can safely roam. Thus, the area was constructed by planners and architects to suit such needs; this corresponds to the representations of space.

All spaces are produced by the interrelations between the elements of Lefebvre’s triad: spatial practice, representational space, and representations of space. Each of the three facets of space identified by Lefebvre allows us to conceive of space as an active and dynamic force. What is significant about Lefebvre’s triad is the notion that spatial practices and representational spaces often defy the representations of space. Because they have the ability to contradict “conceived” spaces and alter “perceived” spaces, representational spaces (“lived” spaces) have the potential to become spaces of resistance. Students climbing over the school wall in order to leave the school premises do not see the wall as an isolating barrier but as a possibility to achieve a means to an end (escaping the humdrum of the school hours); the wall ceases to function as it was once conceived. A walker of the city produces this representational space, for he:
transforms each spatial signifier into something else. And if on the one he actualizes only a few of the possibilities fixed by the constructed order (he goes only here and not there), on the other he increases the number of possibilities (for example, by creating shortcuts and detours) and prohibitions (for example, he forbids himself to take paths generally considered accessible or even obligatory). (Ceratu 98)

Thus, the maps designed by the planners of a space become unnecessary; “[a]lthough maps purport to accurately represent places, they actually produce ideological spaces, and in so doing ignore human experiences of spaces” (Middleton and Woods 282). Maps, then, have much to do with conceived spaces, for they explain how a space ought to be ‘used’. Human experiences, on the other hand, are about spatial practices and representational spaces which are related to how inhabitants actually ‘use’ their space. A walker can choose to disregard the map and construct his own trajectories. Individuals construct their own maps and produce their own (dis)order. They become active agents in the manner by which they construct and produce their space.

Lefebvre’s facets of space are also important when considering the complex space of the labyrinth. As a representation of space (conceived space), the labyrinth was designed by Daedalus under Minos’s command to ensure that the Minotaur remains forever lost in its paths. It was constructed to delude the Minotaur and any other walker who roams inside. However, the spatial practice and representational space of the intricate structure of the labyrinth comes alive with the Minotaur and the lost walkers’ activity. The space takes a new meaning as the lost walkers attempting to flee the labyrinth have to overcome two challenges: deciphering the physical paths of the
labyrinths and escaping the deadly Minotaur. Although labyrinths as conceived spaces are intended to disorient the walker, the walker actively makes choices about which paths to take; at the forking path of a labyrinth, he must choose one path over the other. Upon reaching a dead end, he must walk back to make an entirely different choice. He may create physical markers (for example, a mark on the wall) to help him navigate his path or use existing ones. Because they are about the walker’s choices and are concerned with the walker’s usage of space, they are connected to spatial practices and representational spaces.

1.1 Manifestations of Labyrinths

While the city represents a space which can be mapped, there remain unknown, concealed ‘unmappable' spaces within the city. Often labyrinthine-like and secluded, these spaces follow their own order. Such spaces are not isolated from the city; rather, they come about as a reflection and by-product of it. The most noticeable city-labyrinths in city spaces exist beneath the ground. David Pike describes the social and cultural development of the underground with respect to its geographical development. These developments can be understood in certain contexts (in this case, the contexts of London and Paris). The sewers, then, are one way in which the labyrinth manifests itself in the city. On the one hand, the sewer carries the waste produced by the inhabitants away from the city; hence, it is a form of control in the modern city. On the other hand, the sewer is an “irrational space, the most organic, primitive, and uncontrollable part of the modern city” (*Subterranean Cities* 191). Pike states that the sewers do not only accumulate the waste of human excrement but also the “cast-off and outmoded remains of things, places, techniques, and ideas for which the physical and conceptual space no
longer exists in the world above” (*Subterranean Cities* 191). Hence, the sewers, with their underground labyrinthine paths, become a metaphor for the marginalized; it is there that they are allowed to create an alternative reality which remains connected to the world above.

Another underground labyrinth is that of the underground railway. Pike describes the Paris Métro:

> Its tunnels, stations, and trains are dominated by the mechanisms of the state: the planned, abstract conceptual framework of trains and tunnels, conductors, ticket sellers, and maintenance crews as well as the security system of transit police and surveillance equipment. Overlapping and interacting with this conceived space are the rhythms of the commuting that constitute everyday life in the modern city and the unforeseen, underground rhythms of that city, from clochards, panhandlers, and subway musicians to pickpockets and muggers to systemic breakdowns and malfunctions to the overlapping personal and social histories imbricated throughout the system. (*Metropolis on the Styx* 13)

Those who use this space are not merely restricted to following the path of the map (the conceived space). For instance, the subway musicians are juxtaposed with the commuters who merely want to arrive at a destination. This labyrinth becomes a dynamic living space which follows its own internal rules. At night, this space becomes the space of the homeless and the vagabonds; it comes alive once again with *their* movements. Although the city-labyrinth may appear to be fragmented and disordered from the outside, “[n]either cities nor places in them are unordered, unplanned; the
question is only whose order, whose planning, for what purpose, in whose interest” (Marcuse 224). This space has learnt to regulate itself and impose its own order on the city. What must not be overlooked is the role of the social, cultural, and political forces which produce (or prevent) the actualization of any given space. To speak of the contemporary underground railway of Dubai conjures in the mind an image wholly different from the underground railway of Paris. Contrary to Parisian underground railway, the marginalized (for example, the musicians seeking to make a living) are not allowed nor given the permission to temporalize in the underground railway of Dubai where authority controls and sets clear boundaries which cannot be crossed.

Above the ground, labyrinths manifest themselves in diverse forms, some transient and short-lived while others permanent and everlasting. From seemingly chaotic street festivals and fairs to seemingly ordered prisons and refugee camps, the labyrinth has become the structure which best illustrates the condition of spaces in many of today’s cities. Labyrinths are also produced from the movements of the pedestrians and walkers of the city whose “swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities” (Certeau 97). This labyrinth is one that is in constant flux; it is continuously (re)produced by the movements of the walkers in the city. When seen from above, this labyrinth dissolves; “An Icarus flying above these waters, he [the viewer from above] can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below” (Certeau 92). The city from above is the theoretical “panorama-city”; it corresponds to the representations of space, for it is the space of the “space planner urbanist, city planner or cartographer” (Certeau 93). In the labyrinth below, the walkers continuously alter the representational space. Their trajectories can be identified on a
map, but their movements “refer, like words, to the absence of what has passed by” (Certeau 97). Each step creates endless possibilities, and each choice brings something new. Even upon reaching a dead end, the walkers’ choices are limitless, for they have to walk back the same path to make alternative choices. Although this labyrinth has no physical walls, its walls are created and transformed every day by the movements of walkers; “They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city…[their] bodies follow the thick and thins of urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it” (Certeau 93). When the walkers disappear, this labyrinth, too, fades. Because this space does not have boundaries, it becomes difficult to ‘control’. It creates a twofold threat; the fear of becoming lost and going astray and the fear that moving crowds can turn mob-like. Related to this is the notion that ‘sameness’ creates a labyrinth. One characteristic of labyrinths is the mirroring effect that is produced as a result of the walker’s inability to recall whether he has crossed a certain path before or not. When everything appears the same, reference points disappear and the walker becomes disoriented. This is illustrated through the experience of being a tourist without a map.

More significant than external labyrinths is the labyrinth within; this is a labyrinth with invisible walls. It is perhaps the condition of all human beings—the despair and frustration which arises as a consequence of a fruitless search for meaning in senseless world. We roam inside labyrinths of memory and history. At times, we intentionally construct our labyrinths, for the world outside becomes excruciatingly intolerable. In this case, the labyrinth functions as a refuge. Very often, internal labyrinths manifest themselves through psychological illnesses such as multiple personality disorder or schizophrenia.
A key figure who has written about the concept-space of the labyrinth is Argentinean short-story writer and essayist Jorge Luis Borges. In his “Notes on Borges’ Labyrinth,” Frank Dauster writes of Borges’ short stories. Upon analyzing the function of labyrinths in Borges’ stories, he concludes that they reveal insights:

of a chaotic universe, formless and without natural laws, within which man wanders in search of his destiny. In this search, man imposes intellectual constructions designed to aid him in the search by ordering reality. But upon penetrating to the center of his own creation, man realizes the falsity of this construction, penetrates the meaning of existence, and is left with no recourse but to die, resigned to the implacable fact of the universe: its total pointlessness.

(148)

The experience of being in labyrinth changes the walker, for the walker is “born again into a new phase or level of existence” (Kern 30); this new phase of existence may be one of rebirth (the walker returns to the external world as a changed individual with new perspectives) or of destruction (the walker is never entirely able to cope with the external world). The labyrinth forces the walker to not only search the external paths for an exit, but also to look within for answers. As a result, being in the labyrinth becomes an internal as well as an external journey.

1.2 Labyrinths as Heterotopias

Sigurd Lax states that the medical term heterotopia is used to “indicate a spatial displacement of normal tissue” which does not affect the overall functioning of the organism (qtd. in Sohn 41). Literally meaning other (heteros) place (topos), Foucault
borrowed this medical term in the preface of his book *The Order of Things*, where he describes heterotopias as:

> disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to ‘hold together’. (xviii)

He later uses the term in his lecture “Of Other Spaces” to denote places which are different from the everyday quotidian spaces. His usage, thus, shifts to describe heterotopias in spatial terms. It is a vast concept which encompasses places such as boarding schools, cemeteries, libraries, theaters, and festivals.

Foucault’s description of heterotopias manifests itself in two forms: heterotopias as textual spaces and heterotopias as physical spaces (Topinka 58). The two forms which heterotopias take are an attack/resistance of a dominant social order (Topinka 58). As spaces, heterotopias can sometimes function as ‘other’ spaces reserved for the marginalized figures and groups in society. As “textual” spaces, heterotopias entail an “attack on the principles according to which texts are written: grammar, syntax, and more generally, order” (Topinka 58).

Foucault’s concept of heterotopias becomes important when one considers the implications of heterotopic sites. Labyrinths, like heterotopias, are spaces which allow alternative realities to exist, thus they become sites of creation. For instance, the labyrinth (and heterotopia) of the short-lived festival produces alternative realities which
would not be allowed to unfurl in everyday spaces; the everyday space is temporarily replaced with an-other world. Because labyrinths often evolve on the margins, they come to resemble heterotopias, places that are “outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (Foucault 24). Certain heterotopic spaces that exist on the margins share features with labyrinths. To exist in a labyrinth (whether by choice or by force) is to exist (temporarily or eternally, partially or entirely) outside the dominant order. Labyrinths are spaces which tend to be ignored and disregarded due to their default nature; they are enclosed spaces with a limited number of entrances and exits, they pose the threat of disorientation, and they follow a distinct order which often clashes with the outside world.

Thus, heterotopias, which may function as spaces of deviation and difference, must undoubtedly extend to labyrinths. That is not to say that all heterotopias are labyrinths, but in one sense, all labyrinths are heterotopias, for they satisfy the principles of heterotopias outlined by Foucault. One main characteristic that distinguishes the labyrinth from other spaces is the extensive complexity of its paths which ensures that a walker becomes lost and disoriented.

Foucault’s conception of spatial heterotopias is primarily based on six principles he outlines in “Of Other Spaces,” a lecture which was never intended for publication. He describes heterotopias as “real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites…” (24). In contrast to utopias which are spaces in their utmost perfected (yet never attainable) form, heterotopias are the “real sites” that exist within every culture. To illustrate this distinction, Foucault uses the example of a mirror. The mirror is both a utopia and a
heterotopia; the reflection represents a virtual “placeless place”. However, it also functions as a heterotopia, for in looking at the mirror, one realizes that the space he/she occupies is “absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds” (Foucault 24). The reflection, then, represents an alternative view of oneself (Topinka 61). It may reveal features one was previously unaware of; one cannot ‘un-see’ his reflection. Thus, as Foucault claims in The Order of Things, heterotopias threaten the ground on which one stands by challenging the norms of the dominant order. Similarly, the journey through the labyrinth leaves the walker a changed individual; it may cause him to discover and face internal conflicts and struggles, eternally changing the walker and challenging his notions of selfhood.

The first principle is that heterotopias exist in every culture. Although they are universal, they are diverse and may vary in the manner in which they temporalize in the world. Foucault categorizes heterotopias into two types: heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation. Heterotopias of crisis exist in pre-modern societies and refer to places reserved for people who are temporarily in a state of crisis in relation to their society (adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women). For example, the nineteenth century boarding school or military service for young adolescent men functions as heterotopias. In this space, the young adolescents in a state of ‘crisis’ encountered “the first manifestations of sexual virility” which “were in fact supposed to take place ‘elsewhere’ than at home” (Foucault 24). In modern society, these heterotopias of crisis are being replaced by heterotopias of deviation—spaces reserved for individuals whose behavior deviates from the norm (prisons, rest homes, psychiatric institutions) (Foucault 25). Today, one important aspect to reconsider concerning
heterotopias of deviation is that the “social norms from which deviance emerges (that
deviance mirrors) have become more flexible, and deviance a more transient concept”
(Cenzatti 77). As a result of diversity, deviance has become a characteristic of the city;
the term “deviance” is no longer only reserved for outlaws and the mentally ill.
Consequently, a new layer of space (and meaning) has been added to heterotopias:
heterotopias of difference (Cenzatti 79). Heterotopias of deviation continue to exist in
today’s cities and remain spaces that are reserved for individuals who do not fit within
the mold of the norm. One example of such a space existing in the metropolis is that of
the prison. Inside the prison, there are internal rules known only by the prisoners
themselves. The ‘deviant’ groups “re-code these other spaces with their own informal
and often invisible meanings, rules and times” (Cenzatti 79). Yet, unlike heterotopias of
deviation which are expected and required to remain isolated from the everyday actions
of the city, heterotopias of difference:

   fluctuate between contradiction and acceptance, their physical expression equally
fluctuates between invisibility and recognition. No longer the monumental
constructions of heterotopias of deviance, the ‘other spaces’ of difference are
part of everyday life, in part invisible (such as a coffee shop or a bar where a
particular social group meets), in part in full sight (for example, when a park in
Milan or a bridge between skyscrapers in Honk Kong is occupied by Filipino
maids on their free day), and often in the in-between penumbra (such as the
parking lots in Los Angeles where day labourers wait to be hired). (Cenzatti79)

   Similarly, in his introduction to The Practice of Everyday Life, Michel de
Certeau states that “[m]arginality is today no longer limited to minority groups, but is
rather massive and pervasive…[It] is becoming universal” (xvii). Such a conception of heterotopias is more fitting to today’s modern city where deviance is no longer reserved for those on the outskirts but has rather become a condition of the city. The shape of the labyrinth, too, can be said to represent the condition of any city; the city-labyrinth is a complex networks of interrelated physical as well intangible relationships. Although the city can be deciphered through the map, the walker can choose to ignore the map. By defying the map, the walker adds a new layer of (dis)order to the city, further complicating this labyrinthine space.

The second principle of heterotopias states that the nature of heterotopias changes across time. For example, until the eighteenth century in western culture, cemeteries were placed next to churches; however, in the early nineteenth century, cemeteries were no longer in the center but on the outskirts of cities. “The dead…bring illnesses to the living, and it is the presence and proximity of the dead right beside the houses, next to the church, almost in the middle of the street, it is this proximity that propagates death itself” (Foucault 25). This shift in location indicates a shift in function; cemeteries were no longer the heart of cities but rather “the other city, where each family possesses its dark resting place” (Foucault 25). This is true for labyrinths which may function in one way over a certain time period and in another in a different time period. The labyrinth of Burj Ḣamūd which exists on the suburbs of North-East Beirut began as a refugee camp established by Armenians who had escaped the Armenian Genocide in 1915; survivors were allowed to build shacks in the then marshy region. Today, the space has ascertained its permanence in the city; residential buildings,
schools, restaurants, businesses, banks, markets, and bustling crowds have replaced the shacks.

The third principle states that heterotopias can juxtapose in a given space numerous sites that are in themselves incompatible. The space of the theater (the rectangular room) is juxtaposed with the spaces (scenes) created on stage, for the theater “brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, whole series of places that are foreign to one another” (Foucault 25). Similarly, the labyrinth brings together realities that would not usually coexist. For instance, in the labyrinth underground metro, beggars, musicians, and artists who use this space to survive are juxtaposed with travelers and employees who use this space as a passage to a destination. As a result of the juxtaposition of various ‘real’ spaces within a single site, heterotopias bring various individuals, social groups, and social relations in contact with another. It, then, also becomes a “space of conflict and confrontation where Lefebvre’s three facets of space visibly come together and where Foucault’s ‘juxtaposition of incompatible spaces’ occurs” (Cenzatti 83).

The fourth principle asserts that heterotopias have an internal clock which functions differently from “conventional” time. Foucault claims that time is perceived in two extremes in heterotopias: time as eternal and time as temporary and fleeting. Heterotopias in which time is perceived as fleeting are “the fairgrounds, these marvelous empty sites on the outskirts of cities that teem once or twice a year with stands, displays, heteroclite objects, wrestlers, snakewomen, fortune-tellers, and so forth” (Foucault 26). In contrast, museums and libraries are heterotopias “in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit” (Foucault 26). Similarly, the labyrinth, too, follows its
own internal framework of time. For example, the labyrinth of street festivals in Beirut transforms the walkers’ perception of space and time. At a first glance, the street festival is a labyrinth of walking crowds. The walker is temporarily disoriented as the space ceases to function as it ordinarily does. Streets are closed off to cars, stands, temporary stages, and displays are set up causing this space to temporarily follow a time pattern that is different from that of conventional time, one which is centered upon seeking pleasure and entertainment.

The fifth principle is that heterotopias are porous, accessible spaces in spite of their isolation. Certain heterotopic sites require permission upon entry. For instance, to pray inside a mosque, one must perform ablutions. Likewise, in order to enter the theater, one must purchase a ticket. Other openings to heterotopias are deceptive in that they appear simple, but on entering, one is instantly secluded. In a motel, a man and his mistress are able to have sexual relations in an isolated time-space. The system of access, entry and exit act in response to the “presence-absence of lived space” and “the ‘mechanisms of opening and closing’, of access and exclusion, entrance and exit, are…temporal systems, responding to the absence-presence of lived space” (Cenzatti 81). Like the heterotopia, the labyrinth is also accessible to those outside; the limited number of entrances and exits permit the walker to enter and leave (with greater difficulty) the labyrinth.

The final principle follows from the fifth and asserts that heterotopias have a function in relation to the external space they are a part of. Thus, heterotopias create alternative time-spaces which would not have been allowed to temporalize in the spaces outside the heterotopia. Likewise, the labyrinth as a real and imagined space comes to
house the untold stories of the marginal which also are often not permitted to
temporalize beyond the tortuous path of the labyrinth.

Foucault’s notion of heterotopias has been critiqued for its vagueness;
furthermore, it is concept which can apply to all spaces thus it becomes meaningless.
Benjamin Genocchio argues such a conception of heterotopias is insignificant because
all sites can be opposed against an Other; “Scouring the absolute limits of imagination,
the question then becomes what cannot be designated a heterotopia?” (39). He does not
entirely dismiss this concept, but rather states that:

The heterotopia is thus more an idea about space than any actual place. It is an
idea that insists that the ordering of spatial systems is subjective and arbitrary in
that we know nothing of the initial totality that it must presuppose. (43)

Kevin Hetherington, however, claims that heteropias “are more than just ideas
about space. Certainly they are not sites that exist in themselves, they are relational;
heterotopic –but it is also how that relationship is established that is significant” (48).
When recognized as relational spaces, it becomes important to explore the reasons for
their construction and existence, as the relationship between individuals and their
surrounding space is mutual. Moreover, what is lacking in Foucault’s theory is whether
the “space-time constellations that he describes do have the same meaning for all actors
involved” (Heynen 320). Does the prostitute who works in the heterotopic space of the
brothel have the same ‘liberating’ experience as the bourgeois male visitor? (Heynen
320). Similarly the space of the labyrinth may have different implications which depend
on its function and significance; one person’s labyrinth may be another person’s refuge.
Although we are able to alter the external space in a multitude of ways, often, the nature of the physical space also influences the type of social relations that can occur within a given space, for “the characteristics of the physical space give shape and even impose limits on what kind of representation can be produced there” (Cenzatti 80). For instance, an alleyway is more suited for illicit actions (drug dealing, prostitution) than for street festivals (Cenzatti 81). At times, space imposes its order, and we become helpless before it. Such is the space of the labyrinth. As a conceived space, the labyrinth is a physical and architectural structure designed to delude, mislead, and confuse the walker with its winding paths and dead ends. Yet, as a representational space, the labyrinth also creates possibilities; in spite of being lost, the walker must choose certain paths over others in his attempt to escape.

The labyrinth is well-suited to evolve in the city where relationships among inhabitants and their space in all its aspects (historical, cultural, social, political, technological, and economic) have become very much complex and convoluted in nature. The evolution of labyrinths, then, is a natural by-product of this complexity, and it becomes the shape which allows this intricacy to be expressed (physically and metaphorically) in a space of a sort. In the Badlands of Modernity, Hetherington builds on Foucault’s theory and states that “heterotopias are the sites of limit experiences, notably those associated with the freedoms of madness, sexual desire and death in which humans experience the limits of their existence and are controlled by its sublime terror” (46). Such limit experiences are also encountered in the space of the labyrinth. As stated in the Introduction, the journey through the labyrinth often forces the walker to confront hidden Minotuars that mask such limit experiences.
Deemed invisible city spaces, labyrinths (spatially and metaphorically) reveal insights and characteristics about human nature, their spaces, and their psyches. These experiences are given the potential to temporalize through literary works. As Peter Middleton and Tim Woods contest in *Literatures of Memory*, “[t]he city is both the site of authority and social control, and the place where the evasion of authority can become most self-aware, which is why so much of the best recent fiction gravitates towards representatives of urban space and cities” (281). In the hidden, forgotten, and overlooked spaces of city are such spaces expressed through fiction and language, as they fight for their place in history.

1.3 Labyrinths in *City of Glass* and *Biritus madīna taḥta al-ard*

In the novel *City of Glass* by Paul Auster, the structure of the labyrinth manifests itself through the city of New York which is itself an endless labyrinth. Very much aware of his presence in the labyrinth of New York, the protagonist Daniel Quinn enjoys the freedom that comes with aimlessly and wandering through the tortuous paths of the city. The moment that he tries to search for meaning and certainty, he is doomed to become a prisoner of a labyrinth of his own construction. The labyrinth in *Biritus madīna taḥta al-ard* by Rabī’ Jābir exists as an underground urban space; the fictitious city of Beirut below is a mazy, stone structure in which the inhabitants themselves become easily lost. Buṭrus remains unable to make sense of this subterranean labyrinth. Thus, he learns that the labyrinth has a distinct order which he perceives as a disorder, for he remains unable to comprehend it.

What is significant about the labyrinths in the novels is that they manifest themselves in two forms; labyrinths as physical spaces and labyrinths as intangible,
internal constructions in the characters’ minds. For Quinn, this internal labyrinth is represented through his construction of an atemporal language, one that cannot be sustained outside the labyrinth. Buṭrus, on the other hand, discovers that this underground city of the past forces him into an internal labyrinth of memory. The journey through the labyrinth is transformed into an internal one, leaving the walker a changed individual.
Chapter Two

Representations of Labyrinths in *City of Glass* and *Biritus madīna taḥta al-ard*

In the preface to *The Order of Things*, Foucault claims that heterotopias function to disrupt order. He cites a passage from Borges’ short story “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins” to illustrate this. The character Wilkins sets out to devise a language that would organize and cover all human ideas. His classification categorizes animals as follows:

(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camel hairbrush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies. (xvi)

According to Foucault, the ludicrousness of the classification does not result from the juxtaposition of the items listed but from the “fact that the common ground on which such meetings are possible has itself been destroyed” (xvii). The common space which *ought* to hold the objects in Wilkins’s classification together is shattered. This destruction, however, produces a new space, one that is governed by its own internal rules and that remains unknowable to those outside this space. As such, this order which is understood only by Wilkins, remains inaccessible to the reader. By juxtaposing the unrelated elements, Borges’ taxonomy, a labyrinth itself, produces a new order. The incomprehensible relationship between the juxtaposed elements presents the reader with a textual and conceptual quandary. Like Foucault who described his “shattered” laughter
upon reading Borges’ passage, the reader is taken into a labyrinth which is created by
the mere placement of elements in a series (a, b, c, d) indicating that a relationship *ought*
to exist between them (Foucault xvi). It is in this manner that the labyrinth functions; the
walker lost within its paths uncovers a new order which may clash with the world
outside. Thus, labyrinths, like heterotopias, produce a new, distinct order of their own.

To demonstrate how heterotopias create spaces with an alternative order, Robert
J. Topinka makes a reference to another short story written by Borges, “Funes el
Memorioso” which translates to “Funes the Memorious”. As a young man, Funes suffers
a horse accident which leaves him paralyzed. Funes discovers, however, that the
accident opens in his mind an agonizingly infallible memory; “In fact, Funes
remembered not only every leaf of every tree of every wood, but also every one of the
times he had perceived or imagined it” (Borges 65). His memory prevents him from
utilizing his old ways of knowing and thinking. To cope with his newly discovered
memory, Funes creates a new way of ordering knowledge even if this is only in the
imagined space of language (Topinka 69).

His memory becomes a heterotopic space (and a labyrinth), for he “attempts to
reorder language to fit the intensely full spaces of his memory” (Topinka 69). Funes
describes his memory as a “garbage heap”; it prevents him from returning to his old
ways of thinking and ordering knowledge. He invents a system of numbering whereby
each number corresponds to a word: “In place of seven thousand thirteen, he would say
(for example) *Máximo Pérez*; in place of seven thousand fourteen, he would say *The
Railroad*” (Borges 64). He can no longer conceive of generalizations. Each moment (and
memory) becomes so particular that his perception is based on immediate senses; “To
think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions. In the teeming world of
Funes, there were only details, almost immediate in their presence” (Borges 66). He is unable to comprehend that “the generic symbol dog embraces so many unlike individuals of diverse form; it bothered him that the dog at three fourteen (seen from the side) should have the same name as the dog at three fifteen (seen from the front)” (Borges 65). Consequently, he is forced to create a new system of ordering his knowledge, one that is not based on generalizations (Topinka 69).

However, he soon realizes the futility of his reordering projects and gives up on finding an alternative method to restructure his memories and knowledge. In the end, he finds solace only when he attempts to escape to a space which holds no memories:

Off toward the east, in an area that had not yet been cut up into city blocks, there were new houses, unfamiliar to Ireneo. He pictured them to himself as black, compact, made of homogenous shadow; he would turn his head in that direction to sleep. (Borges 66)

Like Funes’s memory, labyrinths can create alternative spaces which often allow for the production of new ways of (re)ordering knowledge causing us to question the ground on which our order stands. However, unlike Funes who perhaps finds some comfort in imagining spaces not yet tinted by his memory, we are often unable to do the same. We become stuck in an ‘in-between’ space, unable to go back to our old ways, unable to move forward within our new frame of thought. Borges’s short stories are fitting for the discussion of labyrinths, as they illustrate a labyrinth of the mind which is often the most difficult to escape.

The time-space of the labyrinth permits realities (which would otherwise not be allowed to unfurl) to produce their own spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces that are often characterized by marginality, deviation and
difference. What is significant about such spaces is their ability to produce “alternative modes of ordering; they have their own codes, rules, and symbols and they generate their own relations of power” (Hetherington 24).

Paul Auster’s *City of Glass* illustrates how the characters produce an order which can only be sustained in the space of the labyrinth. This new order manifests itself in the form of a new language; it produces a labyrinth for this invented language cannot be understood by those outside this space and order. Rabī’ Jābir’s *Biritus madīna tahta al-ard* unveils a city with a distinct order that is perceived as a disorder by the protagonist, Boutrous, who is taken layers beneath the earth into a physical city-labyrinth.

### 2.1 A New (Dis)Order in *City of Glass* and *Biritus madīna tahta al-ard*

*The New York Trilogy* by Paul Auster is composed of three stories: *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1985), and *The Locked Room* (1986). While the three novellas are set in New York City, *City of Glass* depicts the physical labyrinth of New York and its impact on the characters most explicitly. In *City of Glass*, the protagonist Daniel Quinn becomes entrapped in a labyrinth of language, for he is unable to decipher the newly uncovered order which manifests itself in the form of an invented language. Eventually, he himself becomes a part of the labyrinth as he invents a particular language which remains inaccessible to the lost reader (walker) unable to decipher its meaning. The characters’ labyrinths are produced through their construction of a ‘new’ language; thus, the outsider who is incapable of comprehending this language is taken into a textual labyrinth.

One evening, mystery novel writer Quinn gets several phone calls inquiring of a private eye Paul Auster (who also happens to be the author of the novella itself). After
many attempts to tell the persistent caller that he is not Auster, Quinn finally assumes
Auster’s identity and agrees to meet the anonymous caller. The caller turns out to be a
psychologically and emotionally disturbed Peter Stillman Jr. who hires Auster (Quinn)
to track his father, Peter Stillman Sr. Stillman Sr. who was put in prison for isolating his
son for nine years as part of his social experiment to find the prelapsarian language. His
obsession with finding the language of God is evident through a book he had written in
his early career in which he reinterprets the story of the Tower of Babel. Stillman Jr.
hires Auster because his father is to be released from prison and is a potential threat to
his son. Upon taking the case, Quinn finds himself in a labyrinth of language; there, he
not only uncovers but also produces a new (linguistic) order. The labyrinth of language
functions very much like a physical labyrinth; to the lost walker who cannot understand
this system, it is a riddle to be deciphered. Thus, to Quinn, the inaccessible languages of
Stillman Jr. and Stillman Sr. become labyrinths, for he can never decipher their
utterances and uncover the meaning of their words.

As Stillman Jr. tells Quinn the story of his childhood, his language, fragmented
and perplexing, takes Quinn into a labyrinth: “Dark, dark. They say for nine years. Not
even a window. Poor Peter Stillman. And the boom, boom, boom. The caca piles. The
pipi lakes. The swoons. Excuse me. Numb and naked. Excuse me. Anymore” (Auster
16). His madness has to be expressed through its own language and space, thus Stillman
Jr. attempts to order his world using alternative methods which remain inaccessible to
those outside the labyrinth. He asserts that he is a poet who makes up words, yet he is
the only person who understands the meaning of these untranslatable invented words
(Auster 19). Stillman Jr. produces a new linguistic order which remains inaccessible to
the outsider. In this textual labyrinth, the role of the lost walker (reader) is to attempt to
construct interpretations that never yield certainties. This is evocative of being placed at
the forking paths of a labyrinth, where each choice has endless outcomes and
consequences, and the walker continuously ponders whether the choice made is the
‘right’ one.

Similarly, when Quinn surreptitiously trails Stillman Sr.’s paths, he observes that
Stillman roams the streets collecting worthless objects (Auster 59). He begins to
question Stillman’s curious wanderings, “ransacking the chaos of Stillman’s movements
for some glimmer of cogency” (Auster 68-69). He searches for meaning in what appears
to be a meaningless pursuit and becomes certain that each path spells a letter. After
drawing Stillman’s paths, Quinn realizes that they had spelled the letters “OWERO
BAB” reminding him of “TOWER OF BABEL”, the topic of Stillman’s book (Auster
70). Quinn attempts to construct meaning by ‘reading’ Stillman’s paths just as one
continuously searches for an exit in a physical labyrinth. Hence, the act of walking
becomes synonymous with the act of writing, for walking is “to the urban system what
the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered” (Certeau 97). Perhaps this is
why Quinn convinces himself of the certainty of meaning behind Stillman’s movements.
Stillman’s trajectories become his “space of enunciation” and his ‘uttered’ words
(Certeau 98). Because Quinn is unable to decipher Stillman’s paths, he becomes
entrapped in a labyrinth of language, unable to find an exit or a definitive meaning to
Stillman’s words.

Deducing that Stillman Sr. is not a threat to his son, Quinn decides to address
him in order to uncover his true intentions. He converses with Stillman Sr. on three
occasions, each time introducing himself as different person. The first time Quinn
speaks to Stillman Sr., he introduces himself as Daniel Quinn (an alias as he is under the assumed identity of Auster). Stillman Sr. reveals that he is in the process of inventing a new language (Auster 76). He explains:

A language that will say what we have to say. For our words no longer correspond to the world…Consider a word that refers to a thing—‘umbrella’…When I say the word ‘umbrella’, you see the object in your mind…Not only is an umbrella a thing, it is a thing that performs a function—in other words, expresses the will of man…What happens when a thing no longer performs its function? Is it still the thing, or has it become something else?
(Auster 77)

According to Stillman, a broken umbrella cannot be labeled an ‘umbrella’ because it ceases to fulfill its function. He tells Quinn of his endeavor to create a new language; he roams the streets picking up meaningless objects, giving new names to the objects he collects. Stillman Sr. creates “new words that will corresponds to the things” (Auster 78). On his second meeting with Stillman Sr., Quinn introduces himself to Stillman as Henry Dark. The reader discovers that Henry Dark (whose initials stand for Humpty Dumpty) is the invented character in Stillaman’s book (and Stillman Sr.’s alter ego). As Stillman Sr. explains, Humpty Dumpty (who is paradoxically an egg which has not yet been born) is a philosopher of language; he is an egg that speaks and in speaking, affirms its existence (Auster 81). Stillman goes on to quote an excerpt from chapter six of Lewis Caroll’s Through the Looking Glass:

‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.’ ‘The question is’, said
Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master—that’s all.’ (qtd. in Auster 81)

Stillman Sr., thus, attempts to find a general and comprehensive language that can create a newly recovered order of the world, the case prior to the disaster of the Tower of Babel. Like John Wilkins in Borges’ *Chinese Encyclopedia* who set out to devise a language which would include all human terminology and thought, Stillman Sr. unsuccessfully endeavors to “master time by mastering language” (Söderlind 11). This alternative ordering of language is opposed to conventional language, for conventional language “is completely linked to, and indeed formed by, history, hence always belated and insufficient, but nevertheless a functional necessary convention” (Söderlind 11). The languages that the two Stillmans produce are part of a synchronic system which end once the relations that have produced them end. Therefore, their language is characterized by atemporality. Stillman Sr. claims, “Unless we can begin to embody the notion of change in the words we use, we will continue to be lost” (Auster 77-78). He undertakes the task of reaching a state of linguistic permanence forgetting that time cannot be ‘controlled’ and surely not through language, for when words become ‘whole’, they lose their function and become unnecessary.

Because their words are inaccessible and untranslatable, therefore ‘unmappable’, they come to resemble the space of the labyrinth. A language that cannot be ‘accessed’ is a labyrinth to the one attempting to decipher its meaning. Quinn “wondered if Peter [Stillman Jr.] saw the same things he did, or whether the world was a different place for him. And if a tree was not a tree, he wondered what it really was” (Auster 36). Like Quinn, we too are left to wonder what a tree truly means to Stillman Jr. or what a broken
umbrella means to his father. These meanings are inaccessible to those outside this linguistic order. Consequently, we are left to decipher what these words signify; there are endless possibilities. Similarly, in the labyrinth, the walker is forced to choose paths without knowing where they will lead, yet hoping that they will lead to an exit; we become Minotaurs stuck in a labyrinth, unable to understand its order and find our way out.

Quinn himself also produces his own labyrinth as he unsuccessfully endeavors to control his language by controlling his written words. Upon taking the Stillman case, he purchases a red notebook in which he keeps his notes, believing that it “would be helpful to have a separate place to record his thoughts, his observations, and his questions. In that way, perhaps, things might not get out of control” (38). To Quinn’s dismay, however, things do get out of control. Like Minos who creates the labyrinth to control reality and contain the Minotaur, Quinn attempts to control his own reality through containing his words. He produces a space (the red notebook) where words are written to stay on the page—not to be scattered, interpreted, and misinterpreted. When Stillman Sr. meets Quinn for the first time, he mockingly tells Quinn, “I see many possibilities for this word, this Quinn, this…quintessence…of quiddity. Quick, for example. And quill. And quack. And quirk…I like your name enormously, Mr. Quinn. It flies off in so many little directions at once” (Auster 74). Like the space of the labyrinth, the space of language is a space of possibilities. Quinn’s name which “flies off in so many little directions” is reminiscent of the journey through the labyrinth where the lost walker must make decisions upon reaching a forking path; each decision brings forth new possibilities. Yet neither Minos nor Quinn is successful in his attempt to manipulate reality, for such spaces are bound to spin out of control. He abandons conventional
language only to become a prisoner of the space of the red notebook. Realizing that he has neared the end of the notebook, Quinn tried:

> to weigh his words with great care, struggling to express himself as economically and clearly as possible. 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. (Auster 131)

The act of writing becomes synonymous with ‘being’; words become an essential component of his existence. As the space for his words run out, his being comes to an end. He tries “to face the end of the red notebook with courage” (Auster 132). The final sentence in the notebooks reads, “What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?” (Auster 132). This takes the reader into yet another labyrinth, for one is left to wonder of Quinn’s fate. Does his labyrinth evolve into yet another space or is it simply destroyed? In this textual labyrinth, possibilities are multiplied but never confirmed. We are not as fortunate as Thesus or the Minotaur who are certain of their fate. We are left to wonder and to wander in our own labyrinths.

In *Biritus*, Buṭrus uncovers an underground labyrinth beneath present-day Beirut. Like Quinn, Buṭrus’s journey through the underground labyrinth takes him to a time-space governed by a distinct order. The novel *Biritus madīna taḥta al-ard* by Rabī’ Jābir investigates the relationship between an aboveground city and an imagined underground labyrinth existing beneath it. The discovery of an underground labyrinth unearths a new time-space with an order that cannot be sustained in the world above, for the forces that maintain its continuity are not present. In this space, the order produced by the state of stagnation in the city below is best illustrated by Buṭrus’s discovery that the
underground city itself is doomed to death; perhaps it is making way for a new layer of history with a set of entirely different social relations and forces revealing that the past cannot be assimilated through the lens of the present. Unable to entirely grasp the order of the city below, Buṭrus realizes that his sole choice is to escape the labyrinth or perish along with it.

Published over one decade after the end of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-90), the novel begins in a reconstructed modern cosmopolitan Beirut. Jābir’s Biritus begins in a flourishing Beirut where the narrator (the character Jābir himself) is having dinner with friends in one of Beirut’s rooftop restaurants. The men are approached by a pale, sickly-looking man (Jābir 10). Jābir finally recognizes the man who turns out to be a security guard named Buṭrus. Buṭrus chooses to tell his tale of his experiences in the underground world to Jābir (who like the ‘real’ Jābir is a writer by profession). He deems Jābir the ideal person to tell his story to, for he admires his ability to maintain realistic elements in his fictional narratives (Jābir 15). A shift in narration from Jābir to Buṭrus sees that Buṭrus becomes the narrator, telling Jābir of his journey through the underground labyrinth.

He is forced into the labyrinth below when on duty one night, he falls (chasing a childlike figure) through a hole into an undiscovered underground city. Buṭrus later discovers that this childlike figure is, in fact, Yasmīna, a grown woman he falls in love with in the underground city (Jābir 25). His physical injuries prevent him from immediately returning to the upper world, and he unwillingly remains below until he regains his strength many months later.
Although the aboveground Beirut and the subterranean Beirut exist in parallel to one another, the underground Beirut is an ‘other’ place when compared to its aboveground counterpart. As Pike illustrates in *Metropolis on the Styx*:

> While aboveground space may be defined positively by the aspiration toward homogeneity, the underground is defined negatively by its failure to be or to remain homogeneous according to the same model. Whenever any space ceases to be adequate to the constraints of its conceived role in a particular discourse, it reverts to the world below as represented by that discourse in the same way that a once desirable neighborhood becomes a slum or an exhausted mine engenders a ghost town. (14)

In the eerie labyrinthine city below, untold stories linger in hidden spaces beneath the ground. Thus, as described in Chapter One, the underground spaces (which are often labyrinthine in nature) often become reserved for the marginal entities in society that the world outside the labyrinth cannot sustain. For instance, vagabonds may find refuge in the subterranean mazy spaces of subway stations.

Geographically, the subterranean city and the aboveground city are connected on a vertical access, but temporally, they are conjoined through a horizontal one, namely time. This geographical vertical axis physically separates the two spaces such that the space of the underground becomes an ‘otherworld’ in relation to the world above. The underground is often the space wherein “the trash heap of the world above, the place to which everyone, everything, and every place posing a problem or no longer useful is relegated “(Pike *Metropolis on the Styx* 2). The labyrinth of *Berytus* unveils Boutrous’s
deepest fears and memories which gradually return as he treads the paths of the labyrinth below.

In spite of being an ‘other’ world, the underground space is porous thus is not entirely isolated from the world above. The events in the upper world impact the city existing meters beneath. In *Biritus*, the inhabitants below can choose to depart to the upper world. For instance, Yasmīna leaves the labyrinth when she pleases (Jābir 23). The astronomer Salmān also tells Buṭrus that Yasmīna’s disappeared husband had not died as the others have told him but has left to the world above (Jābir 78). This accessibility is also exhibited in the manner the events above significantly impact the underground city. The Lebanese Civil War, which the inhabitants below called the ‘dark period’, had dire consequences on the underground city. Many inhabitants suffocated as a result of the smoke which infiltrated the city below (Jābir 94). Furthermore, the bombs and explosions often caused the ceilings to collapse on the inhabitants (Jābir 87). The remnants of the war remain in the city above as much as they do in the city beneath the ground.

During periods of war above, the underground Beirut once functioned as a refuge, for inhabitants of upper Beirut seeped into the city below in search of security and protection. As the historian Mas‘ūd tells Buṭrus, victims of famine in the early 1900s descended the city below in search of food and protection (Jābir 107). This function of the city below, however, evolves over time. As the social relations which had produced this space are eliminated, the underground city ceases to function as it once did. No longer a safe haven from the world above, this labyrinth evolves into a dark, threatening space. The narrator Buṭrus yearns for upper Beirut and eagerly awaits the
day he is well enough to escape. Although the city-labyrinth is a home for the inhabitants below, it comes to resemble a real-life hell for Buṭrus. The nature of a space, then, is “determined by an allegiance either to conceived or to lived space: one person’s subterranean hole is another one’s home; one person’s lucrative and productive factory is another one’s living hell” (Pike *Metropolis* 17-18). This ambivalence is very much linked to one’s perception of a space. If a space is perceived as transient, one accepts to be temporarily held within its walls (as a catacomb or sewer one visits). However, if this space is understood to be permanent, it takes the “symbolic status of a tomb or of a hell” (Pike *Metropolis* 17-18). Similarly, from the perspective of the inhabitants below, the stone labyrinth provides refuge and protection from the world above. The inhabitants fear the outside world and believe that they will be blinded by the light of the sun if they are exposed to the upper city (Jābir 122). If an inhabitant decides to leave to the aboveground city, they deem him dead (Jābir 78). In the eyes of Buṭrus, however, the city is a space to be escaped. Buṭrus realizes that the world below is best forgotten, for it is a world that is stuck in time. Yet, the task of forgetting becomes impossible as the journey through the labyrinth brings to the surface Boutrous’s memories of a horrendous past.

In this city-labyrinth beneath Beirut, Buṭrus uncovers a new order which he cannot assimilate. Because he is unable to understand the order below, he has no choice but to escape this stone labyrinth or remain eternally lost within its paths. Gradually, he begins to understand that the order in the city below clashes with the order above, thus he cannot comprehend it. For instance, the inhabitants below cannot conceive of large numbers. When Buṭrus inquires of the population of the city, his host Ishāq responds by
asking Buṭrus of the population above. Buṭrus replies that there are approximately one million inhabitants living above. After thinking upon the question, Isḥāq also maintains there are also one million inhabitants in the city below (Jābir 52). When Buṭrus later poses the same question to the astronomer Salmān, he explains that the inhabitants do not know of large numbers, stating that the city’s population does not exceed one thousand people. Or perhaps ten thousand; Salmān cannot remember (Jābir 90)! Because this system of organizing knowledge is not utilized in the world below, the inhabitants cannot conceive of it.

Similarly, Salmān later informs Buṭrus of the peculiar political system in the underground city. Although a president is elected annually, this process is a difficult one, for no one is eager to become a president. Salmān reveals that the life of a president is challenging, as the elected president is not permitted to leave the palace or to interact with others (expect for his wives who transmit information from the external world) (Jābir 89). He clarifies that, at present, they only elect presidents in order to maintain traditions. Salmān cannot even remember the name of the current president in spite of the fact that he was elected a few days earlier (Jābir 90). He also informs Buṭrus that they have ministers but their number is unknown. Salmān asserts that, at times, all the inhabitants below are ministers (Jābir 89)! This contradictory information leaves Buṭrus feeling confused and sullen. He is unable to comprehend this information, for it clashes with the order in the upper world. Not only does Buṭrus fail to comprehend the system below, but the inhabitants of underground Beirut are also unable to grasp the order of the city above. Salmān’s limited knowledge of the upper city prevents him from understanding Buṭrus. He asks Buṭrus to describe the trees that once covered the city.
Buṭrus explains that many of the trees had been removed to create space for residential areas. Unable to comprehend this, Salmān questions why the trees have to be eliminated when, according to him, there is enough light to sustain all the trees above.

The geography of the underground city imposes a certain (dis)order on the inhabitants, and they are helpless before it. As the astronomer Salmān reveals to Buṭrus, the city below was originally built to be a labyrinth with the presidential palace at its center (Jābir 86). Because the city below is an underground labyrinth, the inhabitants’ actions are restricted by the geography. The absence of maps poses a constant threat to the inhabitants below. The only character who has a map is the astronomer Salmān. To illustrate the importance of the map, Buṭrus recalls an incident involving his host’s daughter, Raḥīl. Prior to leaving her home to visit a nearby neighborhood, Raḥīl ties one end of a long rope around her arm and gives the other end to Buṭrus. She warns Buṭrus not to release the rope for fear that she will never find her way back (Jābir 92). The winding paths of the labyrinth do not only pose physical threats for the lost walker but also psychological ones; the inhabitants continuously live in fear of getting lost. Consequently, the walker of the labyrinth is left feeling disoriented and confused as he treads the path of the labyrinth. Furthermore, their geography also imposes a temporal order on the inhabitants below. In the underground spaces, time is no longer governed by the passage of day and night as the sunlight does not reach such depths (the temporal experience of the labyrinth will be addressed in Chapter Three).

Buṭrus observes that the inhabitants below favor expressing themselves through body language as opposed to words, and in certain situations, they do not use words at all (Jābir 104). They avoid making loud noises for fear that the ceilings would collapse,
thus they speak in whispers and murmurs and rely on body language. Like the atemporal language that Stillman the father and Stillman the son construct and use, the body language employed in the world below is also atemporal; it is fleeting thus cannot be sustained in the world outside the labyrinth.

The only way Buṭrus is able to make sense of the labyrinth below is through maintaining a certain degree of control over his spatial surroundings. To make sense of the disorder of the labyrinth, Buṭrus attempts to identify his geographical location using markers of the world above. Although Salmān tells him that they are beneath al-‘Umari Mosque, Buṭrus is skeptical of this and believes they are likely situated not directly beneath the mosque but in a nearby street. Salmān’s map of the world below reminds Buṭrus of the old, pre-war upper Beirut. To eliminate the sense of confusion and disorientation he feels in the underground city-labyrinth, Buṭrus tries to map his location using markers from the city above. Salmān remembers the landmarks of an older, pre-war Beirut, and he describes the old souks which Buṭrus is unfamiliar with and only remembers seeing as a child (Jābir 87). When Buṭrus sees the map of the underground city for the first time, he describes it as a labyrinth and is unable to decipher it as a result of its intricate lines and overlapping paths (Jābir 154). Is it possible, then, to draw a map of the labyrinth? The only way to do so is to use geographical markers he is familiar with. He recognizes that the map of underground Beirut resembles that of an older upper Beirut, the only difference being the number of gates and the manner in which they are distributed (Jābir 154). Thus, he attempts to make sense of this city-labyrinth by resituating himself in a space he is familiar with.
The order that is characterized by stagnation is illustrated through the presence of objects which have lost their function. The rarity of books in the city is indicative of an inability to progress. Salmān himself only has one book and the public library houses just over twenty books (Jābir 83). He is unable to read the old books which are in a poor condition; he fears that they will disintegrate if they are touched (Jābir 82). Similarly, the lantern in Isḥāq’s home does not work, and it is placed on the wall only for decorative purposes. It no longer has a connection with its intended function, reminding us of Stillman’s umbrella theory. In this labyrinth, words have, in fact, lost their function. The neighborhoods bear names of an ancient past which has no connection with their present. According to Salmān, Isḥāq’s ancestors had been Jewish, and his neighborhood had once been called ‘the neighborhood of the Jews’. This, however, had changed with time as Salmān claims that nothing remains of religion except names; the inhabitants below do not pray (Jābir 83). The artist Buṭrus meets as he visits various parts of the city tells of the salmon which once lived in the underground river before it had dried up. He shows Buṭrus his paintings of the salmon, some of which had been painted before the river had dried up and others had been painted after. Buṭrus exclaims that the paintings are identical but according to the artist, they are not. The artist tells him that he does not know how to paint anything else nor does he want to (Jābir 177). His inability to produce anything new reflects the city’s inability to progress. The nearing death of the city is further illustrated by the women’s sterility. The order of the city below is reminiscent of a dying, war-torn Beirut. Thus, his journey through the labyrinth is in fact a journey to a past Beirut which Buṭrus realizes has an order which cannot be entirely assimilated.
2.2 Mirroring as a Condition of Labyrinths

The labyrinth is never entirely isolated from the external world; oftentimes, it is a product of the world outside. As stated in Chapter One, the labyrinth can become a space which holds and contains the ‘waste’ of the external world; Minos attempts to eliminate the Minotaur from his reality by containing him in the labyrinth. The labyrinth, then, comes to represent the marginal individuals and/or collectives who cannot find a space to temporalize in society. As a result, the labyrinth becomes a space which mirrors hidden and unwanted aspects of the world outside.

The juxtaposition of several sites within a given space (a characteristic of heterotopias) is seen in the labyrinth as a mirroring effect that is produced by merely walking in the labyrinth. Inside the labyrinth, the walker is unable to tell one path from another, for the paths often appear similar. The walker believes he has stumbled on an exit only to realize that he is back on the same lost path. Just as one is often unable to tell one path from the other in the physical labyrinth, the mirroring of characters in City of Glass produces a similar effect in this textual labyrinth. The labyrinth is born out of the duplicate characters and spaces that appear to mirror one another. Certainty dissolves as nothing is but a reflection:

Mirroring is everywhere…and that Quinn goes through the looking glass when he enters the world of the Stillmans is explicit, as he takes the bus from West 96th street to get to Stillman's apartment on East 69th, which is where his story really begins. (Söderlind 3)

After Quinn’s final encounter with Stillman Sr., Stillman disappears. A confused Quinn searches for the ‘real’ Paul Auster hoping that he may have answers to his
dilemma. However, Quinn is surprised to learn that the only Paul Auster in the phone book is a writer, not a detective. When he finally visits Auster, Quinn identifies a reflection of his former life as a writer, father, and husband after meeting Auster’s wife and son. In Auster’s family, he sees a reflection of his forgotten past, “Quinn's Ideal I, the writer who is also a happy family man” (Söderlind 9).

The mirroring is not only seen as doubling one’s image but as tripling it, further highlighting the experience of the labyrinth. With binaries, one is conceived against an ‘other’ in an ‘either-or’ category. By destroying the conventional binaries of our thought, tripling unveils possibilities. The binaries themselves are not dismissed but are “subjected to a creative process of restructuring that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing strategies to open new alternatives” (Soja 5). Quinn’s fragmented identity is also composed of a triad: Daniel Quinn (whose initials mirror Don Quixote’s), William Wilson² (the alias under which he wrote his mystery novels), and Max Work (the detective protagonist of his mystery novels). The fragmentation is illustrated through his ability to see each character as a disparate identity; “Because he did not consider himself to be the author of what he wrote, he did not feel responsible for it and therefore was not compelled to defend it in his heart” (Auster 4). This tripling of his identity is further illustrated in the meaning of “private eye” which had a threefold meaning for Quinn: The letter ‘i’ for investigator, the ‘I’ “in the upper case” representing the subject, and the “physical eye of the writer, the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him” (Auster 8). Thus, Quinn comes to embody the three meanings as he moves from writer to detective to writer once more—from the “physical eye of the writer” to the lower case ‘i’ of the

² The name is based on Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “William Wilson” which is about a doppelganger.
The characters also appear in threes, each mirroring the other. Quinn, meets three Stilmans: Stillman Jr. (the son), Stillman Sr. (the father), and a third Stillman look-alike. As he waits for Stillman Sr. to arrive at the train station, he is met with a third Stillman; “Directly behind Stillman, heaving into view just inches behind his right shoulder, another man stopped, took a lighter out of his pocket, and lit a cigarette. His face was the exact twin of Stillman’s” (Auster 56). Similarly, there are also three Peters: Peter Stillman Jr. (the troubled son), Peter Stillman Sr. (the disturbed father), and Peter Quinn (Quinn’s dead son). Auster’s son is named Daniel which is also Quinn’s first name. Quinn’s initials also mirror Don Quixote’s (the authorship of Don Quixote is the topic of discussion between Quinn and Auster). Finally, the ‘real’ author of The New York Trilogy, Paul Auster has a double that makes an appearance (also as a writer) in the novella. His triple is private eye Paul Auster (the identity that Quinn assumes). Furthermore, Quinn gets three phone calls from Stillman Jr., and he speaks to Stillman Sr. three times (each time appearing as a different character). Tripling, more than doubling evokes the experience of the labyrinth; as possibilities expand so, too, do uncertainties.

The mirrors are finally shattered when Quinn comes face to face with Auster; this moment signals the beginning of the disintegration of Quinn’s identity. After Quinn explains the misunderstanding of the Stillman case and realizes Auster is unable to help him, Quinn and Auster become engaged in a literary analysis of the authorship of Don Quixote, “the book inside the book Cervantes wrote, the one he imagined writing”
(Auster 97). This discussion forces Quinn to the center of his labyrinth. Auster questions the authorship of *Don Quixote* and presents a theory arguing that the author of the novel is a combination of four different people: Sancho Panza (who dictated the story to Don Quixote’s friends), Don Quixote’s friends (who wrote the story in Spanish), Simon Carasco (who translated it to Arabic), and Cervantes (who found the manuscript and translated it back to Spanish) (Auster 99). According to Auster, this was done by Don Quixote’s friend to cure him of his madness; “The idea was to hold a mirror up to Don Quixote’s madness, to record each of his absurd and ludicrous delusions so that when he finally read the book himself, he would see the error of his ways” (Auster 99).

One cannot help but question if *City of Glass* is meant to function in the same manner for Quinn. Perhaps it mocks his attempt to find certainty in a city so fragmented and wholeness in a language so incomplete. Certainty, like reflections in a mirror, is but an illusion. The only way out of this labyrinth is to go within. Just as Don Quixote is meant to function as a mirror to cure him of his madness (according to Auster’s theory), *City of Glass* is the mirror which reveals to Quinn the ludicrousness of his task as a writer-turned-detective. Upon this realization, the mirrors are shattered. Quinn, a writer of mystery novels by profession, initially believes that “[i]n the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so—which amounts to the same thing” (Auster 8).

Accordingly, Quinn believes in the meaningfulness of Stillman Sr.’s curious wanderings. Initially, the reader is led to believe that Quinn is responsible for his own choices. After all, he willingly assumes Auster’s identity and makes the decision to trail Stillman Sr. for many days. Prior to the case, Quinn roamed the city-labyrinth of New York and wandered where he pleased: “New York was an inexhaustible space, a
labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how well he came to know its neighborhood and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well” (Auster 3-4). He has never had to question his own curious wanderings in the city of New York, and perhaps only does so when he trails Stillman. Thus, once he faces Auster, he is forced into the center of his own labyrinth. Auster asserts that Don Quixote was only pretending to be mad in order “to test the gullibility of his fellow men…to what extent would people tolerate blasphemies if they gave them amusement. The answer is obvious, isn’t it? To any extent…And that’s finally all anyone wants out of a book—to be amused” (Auster 100). Auster asserts that Don Quixote possibly devised the writing of his own narrative, for “throughout the book Don Quixote is preoccupied by the question of posterity. Again and again he wonders how accurately the chronicler will record his adventures” (Auster 99). The reader, once again, is left to wonder whether Quinn himself (who bears the same initials as Don Quixote) unknowingly takes part in a mystery novel created merely for the sake of amusement. Auster the author (not the character in the novel) is the creator of Daniel Quinn, and the Stillman case is nothing but a mere joke. Upon sharing his theory with Quinn, Auster “smiled with a certain ironic pleasure” and was “enjoying himself, but the precise nature of that pleasure obviously eluded Quinn. It seemed to be a kind of soundless laughter, a joke that stopped short of its punchline, a generalized mirth that had no object” (Auster 100). As Quinn faces Auster, the reader discovers that Quinn is a helpless character in a detective novel written only for the sake of amusement. He is not the creator of his labyrinth, but a prisoner of a labyrinth created for him. He attempts to return to his former life only to discover that another tenant had occupied his apartment. As his identity evolves from Quinn to Auster, from writer to detective to writer once more, his
mirrors are shattered and his fragmented reflection appears on the broken shards. Similar to the journey through the labyrinth, Quinn’s journey is a hopeless search for meaning. With each choice, he believes he is close to an exit only to realize that it is merely another perplexing path.

In *Biritus*, the mirroring is illustrated on a vertical axis, as the aboveground world and its underground counterpart appear to mirror one other. The parallel cities are both named ‘Beirut’; like the city above, the inhabitants below also refer to their city as Beirut, calling the city above ‘the outside world’ (Jābir 48). The underground city resembles a Beirut of the past, thus it is a spatial mirror to another temporal dimension that is very much reminiscent of a ghostly war-torn Beirut:

The underground city reflects the multiple past lives of the place, wars and natural disasters that dragged people underground. Beirut, a synecdochic domicile standing for death, has always been associated with violence and destruction stretching back to pre-historical and Roman times. (Aghacy 166)

Darkness fills the spaces below and the loudest noises come in mere murmurs and whispers. Even the inhabitants below physically resemble each other, with their wide eyes and pale, elongated faces further illustrating the effect of mirroring within the labyrinth. In his early days in the world below, Buṭrus is unable to tell one face from another. The memory of the death of Buṭrus’s father mirrors that of Raḥil’s mother. Her own mother choked to death (Jābir 152) just as Buṭrus’s father also ‘choked’ as a result of his severe asthma attacks (Jābir 222). Similarly, the image of his mother who had died of cancer resembles the inhabitants below; in her final stages, she too had a pale, ghostly appearance and wide eyes (Jābir 221). The mirroring is also present in the manner in which his father’s image returns to Buṭrus in the world below. He sees his father’s
countenance in three figures: the astronomer Salmān (45), his caretaker Ishaac (47), and the hunter ‘Abās (136). Everything that happens below is not only a reflection of past world above but also an entrance to the ghostly vaporous world of untold stories that linger in the city.

Furthermore, the labyrinth functions as a mirror to a labyrinth within. Buṭrus’s memories return to him as he walks the labyrinth below. Each memory from the world above finds a reflection in the subterranean world. Memories of ‘falling’ into the underground reappear from various stages of his life. Buṭrus recalls that as a child, he had once been stuck in a sewer tunnel; he had stared for hours at the rocks which took the shapes of animals and fantastical creatures (Jābir 27). This memory is not only actualized by his fall into Biritus but also by the otherworldly sights he sees there; he sees timeless human-like Roman statues in a valley known as the ‘Valley of Hell’ (94).

When he walks through an impoverished neighborhood in underground Beirut, he is reminded of the refugee camp he once volunteered to help in as young man (Jābir 194). His description of the refugee camp above is very much detailed that it appears to take precedence over the journey below. The physical journey itself is no longer important; rather, what takes precedence are the vivid memories which are reflections and mirrors to his past. As he tells Jābir of his descent, the memory of a former colleague, George Zakhour, who had fallen through an open manhole surfaces in his mind, resembling Buṭrus’s fall into the world below. The manhole was then closed by a passing walker and Zakhour remained inside for two days. Buṭrus comments that Zakhour was never the same after this incident, and this mirrors his state own state upon his escape from the labyrinth (Jābir 26). The legend of the ‘mud people’ mirrors the
militant fighters of a battered, war-torn Beirut. The inhabitants below live in fear of legends of the past as illustrated by their belief in the ‘mud people’. They believe that during the period of the plague, the inhabitants of one of the neighborhoods below devoured mud because they could not find anything else to eat; thus, a woman bore the first ‘mud baby’. Gradually, they grew in number and began attacking the inhabitants below until they were chased away from the city (Jābir 110). The dread of the ‘mud people’ living beyond the gates continues to haunt their present. Although Raḥīl herself is unable to conceive of large numbers, she claims that the ‘mud people’ certainly outnumber the population of the inhabitants below (Jābir 52). The ‘mud people’ mirror the militant fighters of the civil war in the city above. Buṭrus’s memories become infused with those of his brother’s, a militant fighter in the war. He tells Jābir of Nizār’s memories in the first-person, and he comes to claim the memories as his own. After a drinking rampage, Nizār and his companions slather their faces and bodies with mud and attack another militant faction, brutally killing the fighters (Jābir 214). Buṭrus’s description of the militant fighters mirrors the image of the mud people in the underground world. The mud-painted faces of Nizār and his companions are reminiscent of the ‘mud people’ who are feared by the inhabitants below.

Thus, the journey through the underground labyrinth is a mirror to Buṭrus’s memories, and it exposes a labyrinth within. The mirroring suggests that the world inside the labyrinth is very much connected to the world above; “What appear to be two ontologically different worlds turn out to be interrelated where the upper city defines itself against the underground city, revealing porosity of boundaries between them” (Aghacy 164). Thus, the imagery of mud finds its place in the upper and lower cities.
The mud covered his brother’s face during the horrendous battles of the civil war mimicking the manner in which the ‘mud people’ come alive in the world below. Similarly, Buṭrus’s own father dies as a result of his asthma attacks; his final words echo the sensation of choking as he claims that the mud in his throat gradually prevents him from breathing.

The labyrinths in *Biritus* and *City of Glass* have an order which is perceived as a disorder by the lost protagonists. In *City of Glass*, Quinn realizes the impossibility of deciphering the rules that govern the labyrinth of language. Unable to find meaning in the labyrinth of language, he resorts to finding meaning in the language within. He realizes the absurdity and impossibility of searching for linguistic permanence. Ultimately, his journey through the labyrinth leads to his own destruction. In the end, he realizes that the world is as fragmented as it was prior to his journey through the labyrinth. The journey itself merely forces him to face the fragmented city and language. Similarly, in *Biritus*, Buṭrus realizes that the stone labyrinth beneath the city of Beirut cannot be assimilated through the lens of the present. The city below is that of the past wherein the relations that have maintained the continuity of the city below are no longer present in the city above. He escapes the labyrinth, for he knows that in succumbing to its order, he is doomed.
Chapter Three
Perceptions of Time in the Labyrinth

“Alice: How long is forever?
White Rabbit: Sometimes, just one second.”
–Alice in Wonderland

Just as the space of the labyrinth imposes a certain order on the lost walker, it undoubtedly imposes a certain time pattern, one which can only be sustained inside the labyrinth. How, then, does the walker perceive time in the labyrinth? In order to address this question, one must attempt to understand the concept of time which has, over and over again, proven to be difficult to define. In The Nick of Time, Elizabeth Grosz describes time as “the most enigmatic, the most paradoxical, elusive, and ‘unreal’ of any form of material existence” (4). We certainly cannot deny the existence of time, yet we remain unable to prove its tangibility. St. Augustine asks, “What then is time?” and proposes the following answer: “If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know” (qtd. in Congdon 97).

In many ways, time is a public concept which links us through history. In his Being and Time, Martin Heidegger describes the notion of public time which Dasein utilizes “with regards to what dates time, the moving sun” (379). Thus, the rising and setting sun becomes the most natural form of measuring time. Dasein divides his time based on the ‘clock’ of the natural world:

This dating of things in terms of the heavenly body giving forth light and warmth, and in terms of its distinctive ‘places’ in the sky, is a way of giving time

3 Dasein is a German word which translates to “presence” or “existence”. Heidegger uses this word when referring to a being, namely any human being.
which can be done in our being-with-one-another ‘under the same sky,’ and which can be done for ‘everyone’ at any time in the same way so that within certain limits everyone is initially agreed upon it…At the same time everyone can ‘count on’ this public dating in which everyone gives himself his time. It makes use of a measure that is available to the public. (Heidegger 379-380)

This measure which is available to the public is organized through the calendar. Paul Riceour states that the “time of the calendar is the first bridge constructed by historical practice between lived time and universal time” (105). Hence, the calendar becomes the instrument by which our cosmological understanding of time is linked to our temporality, our lived experience of time.

However, our perceptions of time are also undoubtedly private; Bergson describes that we alone know what it is like to feel “our own person in its flowing through time…With no other thing can we sympathize intellectually, or…spiritually. But one thing is sure: we sympathize with ourselves” (191). Thus, no two individuals are able to perceive the passage of time in precisely the same manner. The distinction between the public understanding of time and our private perceptions of it is important when one considers the difference between chronology and temporality; “If temporality is, as it must be, human time-consciousness, chronology, as its contrary, appears to take on the role of something more objective or cosmological here: something that exists on the outside of language, of discourse and of the mind” (Currie 96). Temporality, which exists in the realm of language, is directly linked to our private perceptions of time which very often contradict sequential chronology.

In his essay “Time in Literature”, J. Hillis Miller attempts to understand perceptions of time in literature arguing that all words which are used to designate time
are figurative and spatial (87). He states, “The most salient everyday example of the spatialization of time is the movement of the clock's hands through space” (87). Linguistic expressions of temporality (in the Western world) are principally spatial, thus “they transform time into space” (Hillis Miller 87). This is evident through expressions that suggest the movement of time; time can be perceived as moving too fast or too slowly. Likewise, when one states, “I’ll make time for extracurricular activities,” one is initially ‘producing’ time for a certain activity to be carried out in a place of a sort. However, one can also argue that we often use temporal units to describe spatial distance as when one states he will be arriving to a given destination in thirty minutes; this illustrates that distance (space) is also measured through our conceptions of time. Hence, the concepts of time and space are relative and function in relation to one another. As Aristotle describes:

Not only do we measure the movement by time, but also the time by the movement, because they define each other…And we measure both the distance by the movement and the movement by the distance; for we say that the road is long, if the journey is long, and that this is long, if the road is long—the time, too, if the movement, and the movement, if the time. (qtd. in Congdon 60)

Although time cannot be easily defined, it can be perceived and felt through its effects. The passage of time is very much associated with the notion of change. Because “no two moments are identical in a conscious being” (Bergson 193), one is able to experience the passage of time. Nietzsche in “History in the Service and Disservice of Life” contrasts the state of man’s ability to measure time with a grazing herd which is not aware of the passage of time:
Consider the herd grazing before you; aware of no yesterday, no today, it frolics about, feeds, sleeps, digests, and frolics again from morning till night and from day to day, tethered by its pleasures and aversions, pegged to the moment, and therefore neither sad nor satiated. (88)

Thus, if time is a measure of change, then we are only able to perceive time because we can observe change. Unlike Nietzsche’s frolicking sheep, unaware of the past or the future, our notions of temporality are an integral part of our everyday life. Our lives are governed by the passage of each day and the steady ticking off the clock; we are often forced to conform to its rhythms.

3.1 Time in the Labyrinth: Moving Forward by Moving Backward

As illustrated in the previous chapter, labyrinths share common features with heterotopias; however, they also have distinct qualities which characterize them as such. While the function of heterotopias varies depending on the nature of the space, the key function of labyrinths is to ensure that the walker becomes lost in its paths. An important aspect of heterotopias and labyrinths follows from Foucault’s fourth principle of heterotopias:

Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time. (26)

Thus, both heterotopias and labyrinths offer a unique temporal experience. Once inside the labyrinth, the walker is not only geographically and physically isolated from the world outside but also temporally detached. The walker becomes a prisoner of its space
and a captive of its time, for the labyrinth imposes on the lost walker a distinct temporal order.

This temporal order is characterized by a backwards movement in time. Inside the labyrinth, the protagonists are able to move forward in the space only by moving backwards first. Like the historian who returns to the past to reconstruct earlier events, the detective also returns to the past in search of clues when resolving a case. “The detective and the historian share this structure of moving forwards by knowing the past” (Currie 88). As Buṭrus tells Jābir of his journey, he goes back in time. He retrieves the story of his journey and along with it, his own personal memories of a pre-war and war-torn Beirut. Thus, he not only exposes his own past but that of the city, playing the role of a historian. Similarly, Quinn also must return backwards in time. When he gets the call from Stillman Jr. and assumes the identity of a detective, he goes back in time to resolve the case. Furthermore, the discovery that Quinn’s story is a mere reconstruction by an anonymous narrator also illustrates a backwards movement; the anonymous narrator himself becomes a detective as he tries to reconstruct Quinn’s past and resolve the case. Currie contends that “the idea that moving forwards in time involves a backwards narration is more than just a novelistic structure, and might be thought of…as the shape of time itself” (88). For instance, the process of aging is the acquisition of memories after the “hereness and nowness of childhood” (88). Thus, memories play a significant role in relation to how one experiences time the experience of the passage of time. They allow us to keep track of what once was. Memories then belong to the temporal realm; “Why busy memory with reproducing the past and give it a place in space? Its place after all is in time” (Meyer 638). Hence, the role of memories is very
much relevant to our perceptions and conceptions of time, for memories become a form of measuring time; this measurement of time is not based on sequential chronology rather on temporality. An individual’s memory is his experience of time in its most private form.

The role of memories in Buṭrus’s labyrinth is significant as the retrieval of memories permits him to leave the labyrinth. Contrary to Buṭrus, Quinn is unable to retrieve his memories thus cannot escape the labyrinth. The backwards movement implies a return to the past. Buṭrus, who is able to come to terms with his memories, though with great difficulty, manages to escape. Unfortunately for Quinn, he remains unable to return to his memories thus remains stuck in the paths of the labyrinth. As a result of this backwards movement, the journey through the labyrinth becomes an internal one, and the characters leave the labyrinth as changed individuals. Thus, the journey through the labyrinth is as much as about the innumerable futures that result from the choices one makes within as it is about memories of the past. Paradoxically, by going to the past, they temporarily live outside history and time.

3.2 Perceptions of Temporality in Biritus madīna taḥta al-arḍ

The geography of the city below imposes on its inhabitants a certain temporal order. Because the city of Biritus is an underground city, the rising sun is no longer present to indicate the passage of yet another day. The inhabitants of Biritus do not follow the ‘natural’ temporal rhythms as they do not have the passage of night and day. They live in darkness, and their primary source of light comes from that of the candle. They use alternative methods to measure time. For instance, Buṭrus learns to tell time by watching the candles melt (Jābir 60). He knows when his host will be arriving by
determining how much of the candle has melted. Likewise, when he is well enough to walk through the labyrinth, he measures distance using the candle, telling Jābir that it took over three candles to get to a certain neighborhood (Jābir 155). The candles replace the clock in the world below. Similarly, the inhabitants below also measure the passage of time through observing seasonal changes. When Buṭrus regains consciousness after his fall into the underground city, his caretaker Ishāq explains that Buṭrus had been unconscious since the rainy season. Buṭrus finally regains consciousness during the dry season indicating that he has likely been unconscious for months (Jābir 47). Buṭrus recalls seeing a clock on Ishāq’s wall only to discover that it is merely placed there for decorative purposes, as it has ceased to function long ago; the world below is “an oneiric place, an amalgamation of necropolis and pastoral, an antiquated and clandestine version of the upper city.” (Aghacy165). Time, as Buṭrus knows it, is suspended. His new temporal experience takes him back in time. Through telling Jābir of his physical journey below, he recalls his own memories. As such, the memories themselves come to take precedence over the underground journey in the labyrinth. This is illustrated through the manner by which he describes his memories when compared to his description of the underground city. As Buṭrus tells Jābir of the world below, his description is unnecessarily detailed and devoid of emotion. However, when he describes his personal memories of his childhood, his father, and the war description becomes vivid and alive. His memories appear more lively and vivid than his experiences in the dreary world below. Hence, the memories take precedence over the physical journey of treading the labyrinth. His journey is transformed into an internal one where he can only move forward by moving backwards and retrieving his own memories from the past. Only through remembering can Buṭrus move forward.
The journey through the physical labyrinth reflects the manner in which Buṭrus’s memories return to him, for they do not surface chronologically but spatially. With every step Buṭrus takes in the labyrinth, he is reminded of yet another memory. The memories return to Buṭrus passing through a twisting and fragmented path of their own. Buṭrus’s spatial journey below brings to the surface memories of the world above, for “the past comes alive in wavering images and fragmented modes” (Aghacy170). These fragmented memories cling to spaces as much as they do to individuals. Perhaps some memories are best forgotten; they ought to remain in a labyrinth of their own. Like a trap door to another time-space, these memories lock us in mazes of the past. Memory becomes a bulk to be carried around; in his labyrinth, Buṭrus tries to resist “the great and ever-growing burden of the past, which weighs him down and distorts him, obstructing his movement like a dark, invisible load…” (Nietzsche 89). His journey takes him back in time in order to allow him to confront his own memories. He is finally able to escape the labyrinth when he confronts his most terrifying memory. In what is known as the ‘Neighborhood of the Blind’, Buṭrus sees the face of Ibrahim, a cousin who had been kidnapped and never found during the civil war (Jābir 230). Through confronting this memory, Buṭrus realizes that he must choose the present, refusing to carry the bulk of the past. Treading the labyrinth allows Buṭrus into the memories of the past; “His underground journey teaches him not to erase but rather to cope with the past” (Aghacy 172). Hence, his encounter with his past memories permits Buṭrus find his way out of the labyrinth.

_Biritus_ also connects a present-day reconstructed Beirut with its many pasts; the retrieval of Buṭrus’s personal memories brings to the surface memories of the city itself,
taking Buṭrus further backwards in time. The existence of the underground city reminds us of the history that exists beneath us. The aboveground Beirut exists above layers of history that are not a noticeable part of the space. The underground city is a labyrinth where the upper city’s ‘waste’ is eliminated as a means of self-preservation. Decades after the war, the aboveground city is unable to hold on to the memories of the war; they have been replaced by new geographical topographical markers. The astronomer Salmān uses topographical markers of a pre-war Beirut to navigate the labyrinth below; Buṭrus himself is unable to identify these landmarks as they disappeared after the war ended. For instance, Salmān tells Buṭrus that they are located beneath “Souks of the Blacksmiths”. Buṭrus explains that he only has a vague recollection of these souks which had been destroyed during the war (Jābir 89). While he attempts to situate himself in relation to the present aboveground Beirut, the labyrinth forces him to use markers of the past to map his geographical dimensions. He has no memory of this past Beirut or of the many layers of history beneath it, thus he cannot determine how he relates to the space of the labyrinth below. “Individuals without access to memory are unable to accurately situate themselves in their environments” (Hayek 134); only when he recalls his memories is he able to escape the labyrinth.

As he is temporarily eliminated from the upper Beirut, Buṭrus becomes wedged in a labyrinth of memory where the spatial journey through the labyrinth brings to the surface fragments of his traumatic past as well as a city’s past which goes back prior to the civil war itself. Thus, his journey which goes beyond the war itself reminds us of the layers of history existing beneath us. As Samira Aghacy explains in Writing Beirut, “The narrator’s story can be construed as a bird’s eye-view of Lebanon’s tragic history: the
victims of the 1860 massacres from Damascus, Hasbayya, Dar al-Qamar, Zahla and Jizzin; the victims of the famine” (166). The inhabitants below have become a part of history, one that remains invisible and unknown. The historian Mas’ūd tells Buṭrus of the surge of dark-skinned people who fell into the city with burnt bodies and ripped clothes; Buṭrus concludes that Mas’ūd is likely referring to the Mount Lebanon Civil War in 1860 (Jābir 106). Moreover, Buṭrus is taken to visit an area known as the Valley of Hell, he is fascinated at the sight of human-like statues; when he asks how these statues had been created, he is told that they had been created by time (Jābir 194). Buṭrus concludes that they must have survived from Roman times. Jābir’s imagined labyrinth reminds us of the concrete layers of history existing meters beneath; it also reminds us that, one day, we will be amongst these layers.

Furthermore, through exposing the past of the city-labyrinth below, Buṭrus comes to play the role of the historian. The narrator oscillates between story-teller and historian; initially, he tells Jābir that his intention is to tell their (those in the underground city) story and not his own (Jābir 16); however, in telling their story, he also reveals his own personal past. From the very beginning, Buṭrus does not present himself as a historian but merely as a story-teller telling the story of those below. Paradoxically, in the world below, he comes to be known as the historian’s son who is acquiring the stories of the past from the historian. Thus, in many ways, he ends up writing history, a task which he did not embark on. The parallels between the names Buṭrus and Biritus suggest that the city is itself also telling its story through the mouthpiece of Buṭrus. The boundaries between fiction and history are further blurred by the fact that Yasmīna tells Buṭrus that the only person to be trusted is the astronomer
Salmān. The historian Mas’ūd, who has within him many tales and secrets of the past, cannot even be trusted. This causes us to question to what extent history itself can be trusted. His knowledge can never be whole, thus cannot be entirely reliable. As illustrated by Jābir, the underground city of Beirut comprises layer over layer of history that dates back to thousands of years. Many hidden and undiscovered pasts survive time without ever being a part of it.

Memories play an important role, for they are often “assumed to be the making of history” (Middleton and Woods 5). As such, they link us through time. Būtrūs returns to a history that goes back beyond the war itself, to centuries ago. This reminds us of the forgotten and unseen layers of history existing beneath us. It also reminds us that we can never truly assimilate the past through the lens of the present. Būtrūs’s inability to navigate the labyrinth is greatly a result of his inability to assimilate the past. Furthermore, in his construction of an underground city, Jābir illustrates that the past is a dynamic force. The more we delve into it, the more we discover its changing, volatile nature.

3.3 Perceptions of Temporality in City of Glass

In City of Glass, Quinn enters a labyrinth of his creation when he decides to become the detective in the Stillman case. Once inside the labyrinth, he is entirely detached from his former conception of time. This is illustrated after Quinn’s first encounter with Stillman Jr. Quinn felt as though he had spent four hours at Stillman’s house, when in fact he had spent the entire day (Auster 36). After his visit, he tells himself, “I must learn to look at my watch more often” (Auster 36); this indicates the initial changes in his temporal experience.
Likewise, Stillman Jr. and Stillman Sr. live in isolated labyrinths of their own, thus they experience a distinct conception of time. As Stillman Jr. tells Quinn of his past, his detachment from perceptions of time outside the labyrinth is evident through his statement: “But I know nothing of time. I am new every day. I am born when I wake up in the morning, I grow old during the day, and I die at night when I go to sleep” (Auster 18). Similarly, Stillman Sr.’s ahistorical conception of time is revealed when he tells Quinn, “And not to have been born is a curse. And when you live outside time, there is no day and night, You don’t even get a chance to die” (Auster 85). As Quinn is slowly erased from time, he too discovers that he does not get a chance to die; his fate remains forever uncertain.

In the final stages of his journey through the labyrinth, Quinn follows in their paths, as he also lives “outside time.” As Quinn’s identity slowly dissolves, the manner by which he perceives and utilizes time changes. Prior to taking the case, he had time to do as he pleased. He becomes a prisoner of a labyrinth born out of his decision to take the Stillman case. Consequently, the labyrinth imposes its own time on the walker, and Quinn cannot but succumb to its temporal order. When the unresolved Stillman case comes to an end, Quinn’s attempt to return to his former life (and time) is futile. After his discussion with Auster, Quinn returns to search for Stillman Jr. For months, he waits for Stillman in a nearby alleyway, but Stillman never appears. Finding refuge in a garbage can in an alleyway next to Stillman Jr.’s apartment, he gradually adapts to the new temporal order of his labyrinth. Because he is required to remain cautious and alert at all times, he adopts a distinct time pattern. He decides to sacrifice his sleep and instead of sleeping for his usual six to eight hours, he decides to limit himself to three to
four. He realizes that, hypothetically, “the most efficient use of the time would be to sleep for thirty seconds every five or six minutes” (Auster 116). Realizing the impossibility of this task, he decides to sleep for fifteen-minute intervals. The fifteen-minute intervals of ringing bells of a nearby church help him achieve this:

Quinn lived by the rhythm of that clock, and eventually he had trouble distinguishing it from his own pulse. Starting at midnight, he would begin his routine, closing his eyes and falling asleep before the clock had struck twelve. Fifteen minutes later he would wake, at the half-hour double stroke fall asleep, and at the three-quarter-hour triple stroke wake once more. At three-thirty he would go off for his food, return by four o’clock, and then go to sleep again.

(Auster 116)

His journey through the labyrinth forces him into a new temporal order where time is not measured by the passage of days or the ticking off the clock but by the ringing bells of a nearby church. After weeks of living in the alleyway, Quinn finally attempts to return to his former life; he returns to his apartment only to discover that it has been occupied by another tenant. When he tells her that he is a writer who had formerly lived in the apartment, she mockingly responds, “A writer? That’s the funniest thing I ever heard” (Auster 126). Quinn is gradually physically erased and like Stillman Jr. and Stillman Sr., he disintegrates until he is no more a part of time.

His disintegration is complete when he returns once more to Stillman Jr.’s deserted house and falls asleep on the floor. There, he entirely loses his ability to keep track of time, as “night and day were no more than relative terms; they did not refer to
an absolute condition” (Auster 128). He no longer has recognition of the passage of time:

He could never be sure how much time passed during each interval, for he did not concern himself with counting the days or the hours. It seemed to him, however, that little by little the darkness had begun to win out over the light, that whereas in the beginning there had been a predominance of sunshine, the light had gradually become fainter and more fleeting. (Auster 130)

The backwards movement in time is illustrated through Quinn’s attempt to resolve the Stillman case. Quinn is summoned to prevent a crime from happening: Stillman Sr. who is to be released from prison is a potential threat to his son. Quinn is forced to go backwards in time in order to move forward in this labyrinth. He meets Stillman Jr. who narrates the story of his childhood, taking Quinn backwards in time. Furthermore, Quinn goes back in time in search of Stillman Sr.’s past hoping he can find clues that will reveal Stillman’s intentions upon being released from prison. He reads Stillman Sr.’s book about religion and the prelapsarian language which takes Quinn to a past that goes beyond time and language. Unlike the underground labyrinth of Berytus which holds layers of history and extends back in time to thousands of years, the city of New York goes back a mere four-hundred years in history. Auster (through the character Stillman Sr.) gives the city a deeper connection with history through biblical and historical references. In his book, Stillman Sr. argues that the first explorers to visit the new world believed that they had discovered “a second Garden of Eden” (Auster 41). Stillman’s argument centers on the discovery of the new world and its association with the discovery of a second Garden of Eden. He claims that “the discovery of the new
world was the quickening impulse of utopian thought, the spark that gave hope to the perfectibility of human life” (Auster 42). According to Henry Dark, the character invented by Stillman, achieving this perfectibility involves a return to the original language of God where “a thing and its name were interchangeable” (Auster 43) as had been the case prior to the fall. Thus, Stillman (through his alter ego, Henry Dark) argues that, “Names became detached from things; words devolved into a collection of arbitrary signs; language had been severed from God. The story of the Garden, therefore, not only records the fall of man, but the fall of language” (Auster 43). Stillman Sr. associates the city of New York with the city of Babel. The old city of Babel becomes a part of the history of New York; the analogy is also significant through the tower of Babel which mimics the towering skyscrapers of New York. Although the fate of the Tower of Babel was inevitable, Stillman Sr. believes that the city of New York can, perhaps, avoid this fate through preventing the ‘collapse’ of language which had occurred earlier; the collapse of language was a punishment by God inflicted on the people of Earth for attempting to build the Tower of Babel. Stillman Sr. ventures back in time to a period where language was ‘whole’. His (failed) attempt to control language is, in fact, an attempt to control time. Through this process, however, he learns that time “throws language off balance, forcing it to branch and vary” (Meyer 638), thus language remains incapable of being ‘complete’. Our language “is completely linked to, indeed formed by, history, hence always belated and insufficient, but nevertheless a functional and necessary convention” (Söderlind 11). Regardless of the notion that what we say will never entirely correspond to what we mean, language remains the only form through which to express our temporality. Our incomplete language, like our deficient
knowledge of history, will only ever yield a partial understanding of our words and our world.

What remains of Quinn’s identity are his words which linger in his red notebook. Quinn returns to a place with no time and no memories when he finds shelter in Stillman Jr.’s deserted apartment. Like Buṭrus’s journey, Quinn’s own journey through the labyrinth becomes an internal one. Through his backwards movement in time, Quinn returns to a primordial time-space where he “remembered the moment of his birth and how he had been pulled gently from his mother’s womb” (Auster 131). Thus, this rebirth takes Quinn into the unknown, as the reader is never certain of his fate. Like Stillman Sr. and Stillman Jr. who are never heard of again, Quinn dissolves into an unknown time-space. His journey through the labyrinth only takes him to a period prior to time itself. Quinn’s perception of time very much reflects the manner by which he comes to utilize language. He is only allowed to exist in atemporally; similarly his language also cannot but exist as part of an atemporal time-space. Thus, only in the space of his labyrinth, can Quinn’s language and time survive.

His detachment from his memories prevents him from leaving his labyrinth. Even prior to taking the case, Quinn’s connection with his memories had been severed. Five years after the tragic death of his wife and son, he had learnt to detach himself from his past:

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. (Auster 5)

After the Stillman case, Quinn remains unable to return to his former life; “He tried to think about the life he had lived before the story began. This caused him many difficulties, for it seemed so remote to him now” (Auster 128). Unable to retrieve his memories or find his way back to his familiar pre-labyrinth language, a language that however incomplete continues to link us through time, Quinn’s identity dissolves; he remains lost in the paths of his labyrinth.

3.4 *Biritus madīna ṭaḥṭa al-ard* and *City of Glass*: Reinstated Back in Time

Because the labyrinth becomes a structure that represents and houses marginal and invisible individuals and collectives in society, the stories within this space remain, for the most part, hidden and untold; they escape history, for they are not allowed to unfurl in the world outside the labyrinth. Perhaps the only way to be reinstated within history is through the recording of the walker’s journey, for “an event is recorded not because it happens, but it happens because it is recorded” (Currie 11). Only when stories are told are they reinserted in time. They become a trace of the ‘what once was’. The traces of the past linger to remind us that the past is always there, present in one form or another. Ricoeur adds that the trace can be understood as a “passage” (120). He explains:

> Someone passed by here. The trace invites us to pursue it, to follow it back, if possible, to the person or animal who passed this way. We may lose the trail. It
may even disappear or lead nowhere. The trace can be wiped out, for it is fragile and needs to be preserved intact; otherwise, the passage did occur but it did not leave a trace, it simply happened. We may know by other means that people or animals existed somewhere, but they will remain forever unknown if there is not some trace that leads to them. Hence the trace indicates ‘here’ (in space) and ‘now (in present), the past passage of living beings. (120)

Traces, when uncovered, are reinserted in time and history. Because the protagonists’ stories in *Biritus* and *City of Glass* are recorded and retold by external narrators, they are permitted to be a part of time once more. In *Biritus*, the character Jābir (who is also the author of the novel itself) records Buṭrus’s journey through the labyrinth in underground Beirut. Similarly, in *City of Glass*, Quinn’s story is retold by an anonymous narrator, a friend of Auster’s (the character in the novella). The mysterious narrator admits that he is able to piece Quinn’s story together when he finds his red notebook (the only trace Quinn leaves behind) in Stillman Jr.’s empty apartment. When the protagonists’ stories are transformed into written narratives, they function as traces. As such, we (the readers) are involved once again in a process of interpretation. We become detectives and historians, moving back and forth in time inside labyrinths of our own as we read the words to find meaning in order to escape. It is in the space of language that the ‘wordless’ and the ‘worldless’ are given a voice and a space; they temporalize because their stories are told.
Conclusion

Inside the labyrinth, one continuously attempts to make connections in order to find an exit. Perhaps this thesis was about finding connections between two protagonists and two fictitious worlds. The overlapping names of Buṭrus⁴ in Biritus and the two Peters in City of Glass are likely merely a coincidence. The allusions to Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland in the two novels establish yet another connection. Buṭrus’s fall into the underground city resembles Alice’s fall down the rabbit hole. Similarly, Stillman Sr. makes a reference to Humpty Dumpty from Lewis Carroll’s Through the Looking Glass; Stillman quotes, “The question is, said Alice, whether you can make words mean so many different things. The question is, said Humpty Dumpty, which is to be the master—that’s all” (Auster 81). The element of metafiction also connects the two novels. Quinn comments upon his role as an author of mystery novels:

The detective is the one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them. In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable. (Auster 8)

Buṭrus reflects on his own story as he tells his tale to Jābir. He remarks that although his story is tragic and painful, he has no choice but to tell it (Jābir 23). Similarly, in the end of the novel, Buṭrus tells Jābir that he hopes his story, once written by Jābir, will manifest itself as a fictional piece. When his story appears as a fictional narrative, it will seem less real and will no longer continue to haunt him (Jābir 229). Like the lost walker, the reader also treads a labyrinth of words and meanings as he tries to build connections.

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⁴ The name Buṭrus translates to Peter in English.
“What interested him [Quinn] about the stories he wrote was not their relation to the world but their relation to other stories” (Auster 7). Finding connections is, after all, the reader’s responsibility. Whether these connections are there or not does not matter; what matters is the possibility that they are.

In *City of Glass*, the labyrinth is born out of the construction of a unique language that is understood only by those who invented it. Stillman Sr. and Stillman Jr. construct a new language that remains incomprehensible to Quinn; similarly, once inside his own labyrinth, Quinn also produces a language that remains incomprehensible to the reader. Thus, the labyrinth manifests itself through the construction of a language that cannot be ‘navigated’. It remains meaningless until we try to find connections in order to interpret the words and find our way out of this labyrinth with no walls. The labyrinth manifests itself as a hidden mazy underground city in *Biritus*. The order of the city-labyrinth is perceived as a disorder by the lost protagonist. Buṭrus realizes that he cannot grasp the order of the city-labyrinth below, for it clashes with the order of the aboveground city. Furthermore, as Buṭrus treads the path of this city-labyrinth, he is taken backwards in time to confront his own memories; thus, the physical labyrinth is only a tangible representation of a labyrinth within Buṭrus. His journey through the physical labyrinth brings to the surface memories of his past; these memories become active constituents of the space. He escapes when he finally confronts his most painful memory through his encounter with his cousin Ibrahim who was kidnapped and never found during the Lebanese Civil War.

The map, with its structured paths, mocks the labyrinth. The labyrinth cannot be mapped; the walkers bring it to life with their movement and their choices. From above,
the exits are detectable. From within, the walker must try to construct his own map. Drawing the map can give some sense of cogency, for without control of our space, we will continue to be disorientated and lost. Butrus attempts to do this as tries to map the world below using markers of the world above; Quinn attempts to do this as he tries to draw a map of Stillman Sr.’s curious wanderings.

The labyrinth not only imposes on the lost walker its spatial order but also its temporal one. This temporal order is characterized by a backwards movement in time, transforming the journey into an internal one. Only those who are able to confront their internal Minotaurs are able to escape the labyrinth.

The spaces and entities which exist on the margins are the unnoticed labyrinths in today’s world. Spaces such as slums, ghettos, refugee camps, prisons, and subway stations are in themselves hidden labyrinths. Some walkers of these spaces become like Quinn; they eternally disappear. Others become like Butrus as they are forced to encounter forever changing experiences. Many continue to live in labyrinths that exist within. The journey through the labyrinth goes beyond the physical walls and does not end when the lost walker finds an exit. Rather it is a continuous internal journey, for it reflects any individual’s passage through life. The labyrinth resembles our condition: our loss and our fragmentation. More importantly, it illustrates our search for meaning; if and when we do find it, it leaves us changed. After all, the significance of the labyrinth is the journey itself.

It seems fitting to end this thesis by referring once more to Borges’s *Labyrinths*. In his parable entitled “Borges and I,” Borges illustrates our internal labyrinth, namely
the struggle between the selves that exist within. The narrator, Borges, distinguishes between himself and another Borges, “the one things happen to” (246). The narrator knows this “other” Borges from the outside only; “I know of Borges from the mail and see his name on a list of professors or in a biographical dictionary” (246). This distinction between the narrator and the “other” Borges reminds us of the many Minotaurs that exist within. In the end, the narrator states that he does not know which Borges has written the words on the page (247). Yet, in the labyrinth, it does not matter who has written the page. What matters is that the page has been written, the journey told.


