
Metafiction and Claustrophobia in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*

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Abstract

This paper addresses the argument that metafiction and reality are fundamentally identical in that they are both linguistic constructs within which humans experience claustrophobia. Metafiction exemplifies how the postmodern subject strives to escape all closed boundaries that limit their existential, cultural, or personal freedom. In this context, this article analytically examines the relationship between metafiction and claustrophobia in Paul Auster's novel *City of Glass*. It highlights how language plays a major role in restricting people to linguistic realities that have no connection with other realms outside language. The intended purpose is to illustrate how humans have become claustrophobic in a postmodern culture that delegitimizes all major grand narratives or stories that once gave spiritual meaning to their lives.

Keywords : Claustrophobia ; Language ; metafiction ; Postmodernism .

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INTRODUCTION

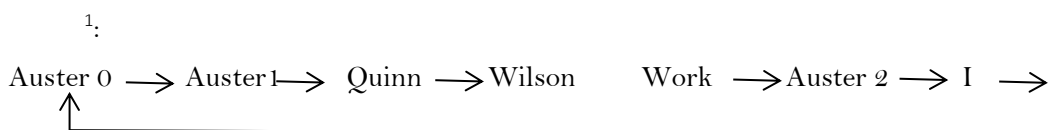
In metafictional novels, characters tend to embody how the postmodern subject suffers from the ambiguity and unknowability of their reality. Consequently, when reading postmodern fiction, readers face the fact that characters attempt to answer metaphysical questions translated into concentrated efforts to go beyond the boundaries drawn by the author. This calls one's attention to an ontological crisis that postmodern writers encounter. The end of all master narratives that formerly provided spiritual and historical meaning to reality has now become a major source of existential loss and alienation. The selected case study, Auster's *City of Glass*, reflects this condition. It presents an author-detective character who feels imprisoned in his own writing and undertakes an arduous journey of self-exploration through writing novels. People's understanding of the world has always been prescribed for them through written texts that draw their identities and worlds. This article argues that metafiction is a typical representation of the postmodern subject's feeling of claustrophobia that arises from their deep disappointment with the closed boundaries of language and reality. Hence, it addresses the following questions:

- 1) Does the end of master narratives have any bearing on people's perception of reality?
- 2) What are the shared characteristics between metafictional narratives and claustrophobia?
- 3) How does language imprison the postmodern subject?

In postmodern theory, reality is not dissimilar to a text wherein words are subject to the control of the author, who is also imprisoned and constructed by and within language. Therefore, the methodology employed is a critical reading and examination of Auster's *City of Glass* with reference to the above-mentioned questions. To prove how metafictional narratives are claustrophobic, this hypothesis is tested on postmodern fictional characters who are made to develop an awareness of their fictional identity and existence, and begin looking for the originator of their worlds. Metafiction is a clear indication of the disillusionment with all previous theories that have tried to give an accurate representation of reality. It is the embodiment of people's struggle to understand themselves and their origins, an attempt to go beyond the limited boundaries of the material towards a spiritual quest for infinity.

I. AUTHORSHIP AND CLAUSTROPHOBIA IN PAUL AUSTER'S *CITY OF GLASS*

The complexity of metafictional stories lies in its foregrounding of the vicious circles of postmodern narratives addressed in the use of the author's real name as a character in the story. In Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, characters question the true purpose of their existence, and in so doing, they attempt to call or find the real author of their fictional worlds. However, the novella, yet again, adds another additional complication, which is the presentation of a detective character, carrying the same name of the real author, Paul Auster, who also writes fiction and embarks on finding the real Paul Auster. Auster's *City of Glass* is challenging because it calls the reader to identify the real author, Paul Auster. To explain, one should refer to William Lavender's diagrammatic representation of the circular movement of authorship and narration, which he describes as "circular and seamless"



"Auster 0" is the first narrator who narrates the story, and in his account of Quinn's life in the beginning of the story, he mentions that "The question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell"². He also continues describing Quinn's cultural life that is typical of a postmodern person who is raised surrounded by cultural fragmentation and isolation. Daniel Quinn lives in New York City, in a flat that is completely sealed off from the outside world. We are told that he is a poet and a writer of detective fiction, adopting the pseudonym, William Wilson. Thirty-year-old Daniel Quinn also suffers from the absence of family affection, having lost both his wife and son. He unexpectedly receives a phone call from a stranger looking for Paul Auster, the detective, and answers that he is not Paul Auster. As he regains his composure and self-control, he remembers that he is a writer of detective fiction, and when the stranger calls again, he says that he is "Paul Auster1" (detective), and determines to investigate the case.

Before meeting "Paul Auster2", the narrator, "Auster0", introduces the unknown caller, who is looking for the detective "Paul Auster1". As is discussed later in section "Postmodernism", this part of the story provokes the postmodern discussion of the paradox of the precedence of speech over writing, or presence over absence, or vice versa. Thus, Quinn meets the Stillman family, the son Peter and wife Virginia, who need protection from Peter, the father, who is also named Peter. Virginia Stillman reveals that Peter's father is a university professor who is obsessed with religion, especially the divine origin of language. He tried to carry out an experiment on his son, Peter, who had been locked in a dark room for nine years, to discover if he was still speaking English or acquiring the language of God or Adam, which leads to the madness of his son.

One should pay attention to how metafictional stories engage readers in questioning the limits or boundaries of their reality, as well as the imprisonment of language. In his article, "How to Get Out of the Room That Is the Book?", Stephen Fredman argues that most of Paul Auster's literary works are haunted by characters who feel "trapped inside the room that is the book"³. In his article, "Paul Auster's Challenge to Theory", John Zilcosky explains that fate, when tied to—or manipulated by—the presence of the author in the story, generally "implies the acceptance of uncertainty"⁴. This state of disorder and distress caused by the presence of the author establishes a connection between claustrophobia and metafiction, because both readers and characters yearn for freedom from the hand and twist of fate, as it were, or an author. Michel Foucault considers that the author's control of and interference in the story undermines every chance of innovation and liberty: "locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance ... and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers"⁵.

Regarding "Auster2", we learn that Quinn has gone mad and decides to stop impersonating—and begin searching for—the real detective, Paul Auster. To his disappointment, however, the Paul Auster he meets is not a detective, but an author. He hurries to inform Peter and Virginia, the Stillman family, thinking that they are still locked in their apartment. Suddenly, Quinn disappears, and the only trace left is his red notebook that "Auster 2", the real author, finds thrown in the apartment of the Stillman family. He hands it to the narrator, who is suspected of being an "Auster3" reading the entire story from Quinn's notebook, which he "professes to be the source of the text." (Lavender 81). As Lavender's diagram shows above, the story ends with a seemingly new narrator, detached and indifferent, who concludes by using "I", infinitely trapping, yet again, the reader in a vicious circle of narration:

As for Quinn, it is impossible for me to say where he is now. I have followed the red notebook as closely as I could, and any inaccuracies in the story should be blamed on me. There were moments when the text was difficult to decipher, but I have done my best with it and have refrained from any

interpretation. The red notebook, of course, is only half the story, as any sensitive reader will understand⁶.

II. POSTMODERNISM

Understanding metafiction requires that we first explain how postmodern theory came into being. Postmodernism began with the belief that the focus should be on one's understanding and experience of reality rather than on art⁷. It is a reaction to the modernists' passionate conviction that works of art are "free of divisive political implications"⁸. Jean Francois Lyotard argues that science has been at odds with metaphysical narratives that have sought to create and justify the development of human history:

I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth⁹.

Postmodernism measures the impact of the first half of the twentieth century on modernist culture, which involves the individual's ability to transcend all barriers to pursue absolute truth. Postmodernism questions the "modernist search for authority, progress, universalization, rationalization, systematization, and consistent criteria for the evaluation of knowledge claims"¹⁰. In this context, postmodernism has spawned a claustrophobic environment that opposes any constraining systems that define the borders of truth. Thus, postmodernism is sceptical of all claims that support the "legitimation" of truth based on "big stories", "metanarratives", or "grand narratives", such as "capitalism" in Marxist theory, "democracy" in the Western world, etc.¹¹. Accordingly, Jean Francois Lyotard defines the "postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives"¹². Consequently, postmodernism advocates a view that disproves and invalidates the myths of grand narratives and embraces the "fragmented, unstable, indeterminate, discontinuous, migratory, hyperreal [...] nature of existence"¹³.

The fragmentation of the world results from the falsification of all systems that claim absolute truth. One of the repercussions is the absence or end of all metaphysical sources of truth, creating linguistic and existential claustrophobia. Derrida's coinage of the word *Différance* validates the belief that language is no longer a universal system: logocentrism claims: "logos meaning word or sometimes logic, and centrisism meaning at the center"¹⁴. Logocentrism also involves "favoring speech over writing, presence over absence"¹⁵. The meaningfulness and purposefulness of the world has always been drawn from the existence of the "logo" that provides existential comfort and security—God and the infinity of the spirit. Claustrophobia manifests itself in the end of religion, wherein the "transcendental signified" gives meaning and hope for people. The "transcendental signified" is "the ultimate place of power and control, which no human being inhabits or can attain"¹⁶. People's knowledge and perception of reality was shaped by their submission and admission of the Supremacy and Ultimacy of God, for it is universally held that "in the beginning was Meaning, and Meaning was with God"¹⁷. In a sense, postmodernity is a cultural condition wherein the postmodern person refuses to be bound by ethical, religious, or moral beliefs. Postmodernity, including all paradoxical conditions, is the culmination of the denial of the existence of God. In *City of Glass*, Peter Snr, who has lost all contact with the real world, worries that the fragmentation of the world also emanates from the separation of language from all spiritual matters:

Most people don't pay attention to such things. They think of words as stones, as great unmovable objects with no life, as monads that never change [...] You see, the world is in fragments, sir. Not only have we lost our sense of purpose, we have lost the language whereby we can speak of it. These are no doubt spiritual matters, but they have their analogue in the material world.¹⁸

Peter Snr infers that a harmoniously balanced existence depends on the restoration of the religious purpose of life embodied in the conviction that language originated from God. His miserable existence demonstrates the separation of language from its Creator. The absence of this harmony and unity induces fragmentation and confinement, because the unity of the material and spiritual worlds means the restoration of faith in the infinite boundlessness of existence. Despite the postmodern world's loss of innocence, man still craves a spiritual affection for the divine source of language, which explains why they suffer from existential emptiness. Peter Snr asks the question, "If man could learn to speak this original language of innocence, did it not follow that he would thereby recover a state of innocence within himself?"¹⁹ Because God is no longer present in postmodern world interpretation, humans are constrained and imprisoned by their material environment, regardless of its freedom or openness. They always tend to feel claustrophobic, for postmodernism has deconstructed all systems that claim universality and divinity.

However, the postmodern subject has met the impossibility of both universal and particular systems: as Derrida claims that the word *Différance* "is the condition of possibility of all systems and simultaneously makes all systems impossible, as systems"²⁰. For instance, the binary opposites, good/evil and male/female, are universally accepted to have certain defining features for the two components. They acquire their meaning from being opposite to each other. Negation connects all binary pairs of oppositions. Derrida argues that social structure is built around binary opposites that "remain the fixed points that cannot be merged or combined"²¹. For example, good is what is not evil, and evil is what is not good. Derrida's deconstruction addresses the question of what would happen to the world if we did not begin with the hypothesis of binary opposition. This would create a new way of thinking that removes the slash (/) between binary opposites, creating new centres between them, namely between good/evil, male/female, culture/nature, master/slave etc. These binary opposites have lost their acceptance and significance and are being substituted by particular or personal judgments. To illustrate, good is not inherently the opposite of evil; or male, necessarily the opposite of female. If you are linguistically or existentially claustrophobic, you should reject all constraints that could jeopardise your exciting and serene life. Examples include the binary choice of "life or death," which typically restricts people to only two options: the idea of death as the beginning of eternal damnation or everlasting paradise. However, postmodern theory has never been satisfied with the interpretation of binary opposites and proposed new centres, such as the end of life is the beginning of nothing; there is no damnation after death; male is not necessarily the opposite of female, etc. The rise of postmodernism is a reaction to people's anxiety about being bound by universal systems legitimised by institutional structures. At all levels of life, the postmodern subject would sceptically question the underlying motives behind any system that attempts to dominate people's beliefs or impose conformity. In other words, people's absolute convictions are simply the creation of ideological apparatus. Eagleton asserts that "the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in"²².

As S. Rachman and Steven Taylor argue in their article "Analyses of Claustrophobia", claustrophobia combines two basic elements: "fear of suffocation and fear of restriction"²³. Their study further reveals that "claustrophobic subjects do not experience fear of closed spaces, but they are afraid of what could happen to them when they are in such a situation"²⁴.

Similarly, postmodern claustrophobia does not only include the fear of imprisonment in language, but also involves anxiety that language and the world will no longer have any connection with spiritual matters. In the absence of any religious or spiritual pursuit, humans start to feel the purposelessness of their existence that results from their falsification and doubt of all historical narratives. In his influential book, *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard concludes that “This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences”²⁵. In *City of Glass*, Peter Jnr typifies the postmodern subject who suffers the consequences of the deligitamisation of all grand narratives. His father, Peter Stillman Senior, subjects him to experimental research into the true nature of human beings when they are isolated from all languages and life stories. As a result, Peter Jnr. becomes completely detached from and quite unconscious of all historical references and backgrounds:

*Thirteen years, they said. That is perhaps a long time. 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. It is not my fault. I am doing so well today. I am doing so much better than I have ever done before.*²⁶

Peter Jnr. lives in a world that is decentred and has no meaning. He habitually engages in practices that he has no control over. For many reasons, he has no history other than that of his father’s imprisonment in the dark room for nine years. He is also imprisoned in the boundaries of the fictional world drawn and dominated by the author. He is frustrated at his lack of control over his actions, and eventually feels entrapped in a timeless space that continually repeats itself.

III. METAFICTION

Metafiction is the offshoot of the postmodern theory that analyses and corrects previous conflicting theories and interpretations of reality. In order to accurately reflect reality, all literary theories must determine the degree of freedom granted to individuals, as well as the epistemological bounds of knowledge and the ontological limits of reality. The necessity of reconstructing and rewriting history has always engendered and weakened people’s confidence and trust in the authenticity of the past. At this level, they have become sceptical of the stories and texts which they have been raised with, incredulously asking whether the world is but a text made up of words that conceal the underlying possibility of the fictionality of the world. Metafiction is the interpretation of these deep concerns that arise from fears of the fictionality of reality wherein people are imprisoned as fictional characters too. Patricia Waugh opines that metafiction embodies people’s pursuit of ontological truth, which “through its formal self-exploration, draw[s] on the traditional metaphor of the world as book”²⁷. Metafiction is a genre of “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality”²⁸. Readers of metafictional novels have the tendency of questioning not only the fictional reality of the novel and its artefact, but also venture to question their reality and subjectivity as being fictionally written for them. Metafiction signals the turning point that individuals are now mapped as performing “roles” rather than having “selves”²⁹. Peter Jr. notices that he has no control over his behaviour or even thoughts: “I know that I am still the puppet boy. That cannot be helped. No, no. Anymore. But sometimes I think I will at last grow up and become real”³⁰. Peter Jr. questions the veracity of his world, for it is a linguistic structure in which words can stand alone and characters are likely to rebel against their creator or author.

Metafiction tries to uncover the true nature of reality that has always been construed as detached from the realm of politics. In so doing, it exposes the underlying forces and motives that shape the form and purpose of literary works. For example, Patricia Waugh

points out that “metafiction explicitly lays bare the conventions of realism; it does not ignore or abandon them”³¹. Metafiction is an investigation and assessment of the implications and legacy of prior literary theories of the representation of reality. Auster’s *City of Glass* comments on the traditional representation of reality in which language immediately and accurately represents reality without any distortion and ideological manipulation. Conversely, metafiction “foregrounds the gap between art and life that conventional realism seeks to conceal”³². It shows how previous novels misled readers into believing that the events and characters presented in fiction are real. In another way, what one perceives is usually manipulated by certain ideological forces that unconsciously influence one’s thoughts and judgement. Therefore, language plays a dominant role in carrying ideological messages, which challenges the view of the transparency of language in representing reality. Peter Snr warns Quinn that words “have not adapted themselves to the new reality. Hence, every time we try to speak of what we see, we speak falsely, distorting the very thing we are trying to represent”³³.

Readers of realist fiction are used to reading novels with a backdrop that the characters they meet in fiction may continue to exist after they close the book, and that the world of fiction is an accurate imitation of life. Realist writers intentionally deceive their readers by weaving into narratives the illusion of reality, lending “verisimilitude” to fictional stories. It is an attempt to reproduce nature in written papers, which implies that nature or the story precedes writing. This form of representing reality exposes the fact, as Robert Stam writes, “that stories pre-exist their telling, that the events of the story actually transpired and are therefore researchable, verifiable like the positivist’s truth”³⁴. It is certainly not acceptable in the postmodern view that stories exist outside writing or are the product of nature; on the contrary, what makes nature the way it is now, is the ceaseless flow of narratives that blind people to the vulnerability of their knowledge and reality to ideological implications. One may cast doubt on the role of art: if art intends to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction, “Here art was attempting to deceive nature, not reflect it”³⁵. This conceptualisation of reality is based on the premise that fiction and reality are separate yet connected, namely that each world has a life and autonomy of its own. As a result, the text becomes closed, with no external references. For this reason, metafiction “opens up the closed text and points towards a potentially infinite literary universe outside”³⁶. It raises the reader’s awareness of the fictionality of reality through the use of some literary techniques of postmodernism such “defamiliarization, self-reflectiveness, irony, metalinguistic play”³⁷.

IV. THE IMPRISON OF LANGUAGE

It is important to distinguish between metafiction and metanarrative, as the former is “the act of foregrounding the fictionality of a text”, the latter is “a self-reflexive comment that does not undercut the mimetic illusion, but puts emphasis on the constructedness of the discourse”³⁸. When combined, it is an intentional process of exposing the fictionality of the text and the illusion of mimetic reality accompanied by self-reflective comments on the discursive nature of reality. “Meta” means the possibility of criticising and understanding a certain system from outside its limits. It is “required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers”³⁹. Metafiction and metanarrative are used to highlight the vulnerability of both fiction and narrative to self-reflexive exploration and study from outside. “Meta” offers the possibility of “explor[ing] the relationship between the world of the fiction (sic) and the world outside the fiction (sic)”⁴⁰. Fiction is the product of an “arbitrary linguistic system” that represents a seemingly “objective world” that has also been constructed by language⁴¹. This calls one’s attention to the similarity between fiction and reality, which also demands one’s reflection on how this system, language, has no reference to something else outside its own linguistic boundaries. Formerly, language was considered as a transparent medium that accurately represents reality. However, postmodernism views it as “an independent, self-contained

system which generates its own ‘meanings’⁴². In this regard, language undergoes a ceaseless generation of itself. The linguist L. Hjelmslev calls this linguistic phenomenon “metalanguage”, which is a language that functions as a signifier for another language, and this other language thus becomes its signified⁴³. Consequently, it is obvious that both the signified and the signifier are constructed by and within language. In other words, one cannot escape the “prisonhouse” of language because the signifier takes another signifier as its signified, which indicates that language does not represent reality but simply itself. Thus, metafiction introduces yet another unsolved dilemma that lies in the paradox of language as the only means of representation. Surprisingly, everything that one knows about the world or oneself is mediated through the arbitrary function of language. This raises lingering suspicions, confirming the fictionality of people’s identity and reality.

Because reality is essentially a linguistic construct, structuralists believe that language is the only means of accessing reality⁴⁴. Due to their confidence in language to accurately depict reality, they find peace and comfort in the centrality of language as a closed structure, which eliminates any intrusion of metaphysical centres. Notwithstanding this, people continue to ponder existential questions about what is beyond the confines of language, because language is the only reality they are aware of. For instance, modernists consider transcendental mediations through language as an epiphanic revelation that should culminate in one’s explanation or understanding of one’s existential origin and purposefulness⁴⁵. This reliance on language has created the illusion that the chaotic world is ordered and stable. They follow the structuralist tenets of the determinacy of meaning due to the stability of the structure of language as a system. For them, the linguistic stability of the text is a reliable indication that the world outside its system is ordered and symmetrical.

Jacque Derrida, however, looks upon language and its sign structures as being a “fluid entity, whereby meaning and writing consist solely in signifiers”⁴⁶. For instance, the word “guest” is etymologically associated with the word “hostis”, which signifies a “stranger” or “enemy”⁴⁷. Because words tend to be “contaminated” by their metaphorical meanings, post-structuralists designate this “slippage” in language as “linguistic anxiety”, which is an indication of a loss of control over language⁴⁸. This slippage in language triggers an ontological crisis that emerges from the co-existence of literal and metaphorical meanings in the same word, threatening the long-held belief in the power of language to reveal absolute truth. Ironically, language as a medium of liberation and attainment of “all knowledge” turns out to be the main reason for the imprisonment of human beings⁴⁹.

The modernists do not notice the imprisonment of language. They consider it a transparent medium of communication that bridges the outer and inner worlds. However, postmodern novels are diametrically opposed to the modernist creed. Peter Stillman Jr always feels that he is condemned to speak words out of his control and repeats some catchy phrases, such as “I say this of my own free will”⁵⁰. He begins searching for the writer Paul Auster in an attempt to put things right. This event makes even the character-detective-writer Quinn, whom Peter thinks to be Paul Auster, alert to the fictionality of his identity: “Quinn tried to pretend to be a Work, but he was condemned to be a Text”⁵¹. Quinn’s mind is haunted by his protagonist’s (Max Work) remarkable achievements and genius. In dangerous and awkward situations, Quinn would always imagine how he would act correctly: “Perhaps Quinn had been misguided in his hopes, momentarily confusing himself with Max Work, a man who never failed to profit from such situations”⁵². He cannot escape this constant identification and intense involvement with his fictional texts and worlds, because they are the creation of his imagination that feeds on words or language. For Quinn, it is impossible to think or live outside language. In this regard, Derrida believes that “We cannot get outside language. Language is an ‘internal,’ self-referential system, and there is no way to get ‘external’ to it”⁵³. The claustrophobic side of language is embodied in its disconnection from physical reality, creating a bottomless abyss of self-referential fictional worlds that cut all ties outside language: “For our words no longer correspond to the world. When things

were whole, we felt confident that our words could express them”⁵⁴. This is articulated in Stillman senior’s conversation with Quinn about his determined attempts to invent a new language that directly corresponds to reality. His understanding of reality emanates from a conviction that to restore the lost unity of the physical world and language, he must find the language that God has implanted in every child: “The father thought a baby might speak it if the baby saw no people”⁵⁵. This disconnection is rooted in the widespread belief that “signifiers have drifted away from what they signify”⁵⁶. Stillman snr is passionate about achieving reconciliation between signifiers and signifieds through the restoration of the “tongue of the innocent Adam by which alone things can be reunited with their right names”⁵⁷. He believes that:

*Adam’s one task in the Garden had been to invent language, to give each creature and thing its name. In that state of innocence, his tongue had gone straight to the quirk of the world. His words had not been merely appended to the things he saw, they had revealed their essences, had literally brought them to life. A thing and its name were interchangeable. After the fall, this was no longer true. Names became detached from things; words devolved into a collection of arbitrary signs; language had been severed from God*⁵⁸.

Peter Stillman senior's search for Adam's prelapsarian language, or the language of innocence, demonstrates that Adam's fall marks the start of a hopeless search for lost perfection, in which language or words are immune to contamination by the material world. He intends to prove the validity of this theory by presenting his son as an example of how language descends from divine unity to arbitrary conventions. He separates words such as "sinister," "serpentine," and "delicious" to demonstrate how “their prelapsarian use was free of moral connotations, whereas their use after the fall was shaded, ambiguous, informed by a knowledge of evil”⁵⁹. Thus, Stillman snr feels claustrophobic as a result of the imprisonment of language and the lack of spiritual meaning in life, and he begins to break free from the confines of language.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This paper has explored the roots and principles of postmodernism, examining its assumptions about the interpretation of reality, specifically the perception of reality in the absence of master narratives and divine authority. Claustrophobia appears to be related to metafiction in the following points: the self-reflexivity of language that imprisons people in fictional reality (we saw how Quinn and Peter Stillman Snr were in pursuit of the originator or author of their lives and destiny); the end of all master narratives that tend to explain the progress of history that gives meaning and existence to one’s present life; and the spiritual emptiness and disconnection stemming from the absence of God in people’s lives, eliminating all hope for eternity and infinity. In a nutshell, claustrophobia is a postmodern condition reflected in postmodern fiction, particularly in metafictional narratives that lock both readers and characters in infinite vicious circles of intertwined worlds.

CONCLUSION

This article discussed the relationship between metafiction and claustrophobia. It views claustrophobia from a linguistic point of view, in which language plays an integral role in imprisoning people in a linguistic reality that self-reflexively represents itself. In this regard, claustrophobia embodies a disappointment with the manipulation of language in representing reality. Metafiction perfectly exemplifies the postmodern concern over the

boundaries of one's world or reality. It demonstrates the author's indifference to his or her characters, which also refers to the disconnection and detachment resulting from the end of master narratives, namely metaphysical narratives about the creation of the universe and humans. As is already mentioned above, the end of logocentrism, which means that language is the word of God, and the beginning of writing as the freeplay of signifiers, ends all ties with divine infinity and truth. By distrusting the writing process of storytelling, readers are driven to question their own reality as well. Metanarrative helps the author focus the reader's attention on the artificiality of the storytelling, which intensifies speculation about the fictionalisation of all stories about the origins of the world. This implies that claustrophobia is the result of spiritual emptiness, since postmodern subjects are always dissatisfied with the limitedness of a world without metaphysical truth. Their desire for infinity and eternity continues despite their complete freedom in the physical world. Thus, in this context, the example is Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, in which the character-author-detective Quinn begins his search for the detective Paul Auster, whom readers sceptically regard as the real author, who is also presented as a character in the novella. This metafictional paradox provides a simple illustration of the imprisonment in language or fictional reality that stretches even to the reality of the author outside the book. The paper also explored the roots and principles of postmodernism, examining its assumptions about the interpretation of reality, specifically the perception of reality in the absence of master narratives and divine authority.

¹ LAVENDER, William, (2004), *The Novel of Critical Engagement: Paul Auster's City of Glass*, In *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: PAUL AUSTER*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Chelsea House Publishers, pp. 77-96: (p.81).

² *City of Glass* p.3 .

³ FREDMAN, Stephen, (2004), "How to Get Out of the Room That Is the Book?" Paul Auster and the Consequences of Confinement, In *Bloom's Modern Critical Views Paul Auster*, Ed. Harold Bloom, Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004: pp. 7-42: (p.11).

⁴ ZILCOSKY, John, (2004), "The Revenge of the Author: Paul Auster's Challenge to Theory", In *Bloom's Modern Critical Views Paul Auster* Ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004: pp. 63-76: (p.67).

⁵ As qtd. in ZILCOSKY p. 67.

⁶ *City of Glass* p. 130

⁷ BUTLER, Christopher, (2002), *Postmodernism: A very short introduction* (Vol. 74), New York. (p.5)

⁸ Butler p.6.

⁹ LYOTARD, Jean-François, (1984), *The Postmodern Condition: A Report On Knowledge*. Vol. 10. University of Minnesota Press, p. xxiii.

¹⁰ TAYLOR, Victor E., and Charles E. Winquist, eds., (2001), *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*, London, p. 304.

¹¹ KLAGES, Mary, (2012), *Key Terms in Literary Theory*, India, p.35.

¹² LYOTARD p. xxiv.

¹³ TAYLOR & WINQUIST p. 305

¹⁴ KLAGES p. 19

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ KLAGES, Mary, (2012), *Key Terms in Literary Theory*, India, p. 46.

¹⁷ As qtd. in MCQUILLAN, Martin, (2001), *Introduction: Five strategies for deconstruction* , In *Deconstruction: a Reader*. Ed Martin McQuillan. New York, p.13

¹⁸ *City of Glass* p. 74-5

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