

(DE)CONSTRUCTING LITERARY SPACE: A POSTSTRUCTURALIST ACCOUNT OF CENTER IN PAUL AUSTER'S *CITY OF GLASS*

Hassan Rouhvand

Faculty of Human Sciences, Shahid Rajaei Teacher Training University (SRTTU), Tehran, Iran

Abstract

Words mirror and/or obscure? The question has been at the core of recent disputes in academic circles. The present study seeks to address this point by drawing upon two major topics of 'binary oppositions' and 'transcendental signified' in language and philosophical scholarship. To this end, the role of language in (de)constructing key assumptions of center and centrality, embedded in the function of the topics, is examined in Paul Auster's City of Glass. The researcher encounters constant reversal of traditionally-endorsed hierarchical structure of center/periphery in the mystery story. Besides, it is shown that literary language does not, necessarily, serve as a transparent medium to meaning and truth of which the detective was purposefully in the quest. Rather, the search results in the fragmentation and postponement of signification.

Key words: Auster, post-structuralism, center, signifier, signified

1. INTRODUCTION

Auster's novel of *The New York Trilogy* comprises three novellas. *City of Glass*, with which the collection begins, introduces a mystery novel writer with the name of Quinn. He lives in New York the city which Auster (1998) describes as "an exhaustible space and a labyrinth of endless steps" (p. 3). Quinn has written his works under the name of William Wilson and has published them behind the mask of this pseudonym. An incident which comes through a phone call tempts Quinn to adopt a new name, Paul Auster, and assume a job as a detective. The Auster, in the story, is asked to guard a man's life against his father, namely, Peter Stillman Jr. against Peter Stillman Sr. It is revealed in the conversation between the detective and the client that the father, as a scholar and a language professor, had imprisoned his son in a room for sometime in the past to teach him God's language aimed at experiments on the nature of language and its developments. An old man upon his arrival in New York is, by chance, picked as Stillman Sr. and followed by Quinn, or Auster, to his junky hotel. Every day, he is watched in close and, at last, Quinn is propelled to examine and to touch arbitrary Stillman Sr. by speaking to him face to face. After several meetings, Quinn proceeds to be absorbed in Stillman Sr., and his words and his identity fade into the air by the end of his book.

The purpose of this research is to explore the implications of post-structuralism in the language of narrative and in the verbal world which seem to submerge the protagonist's thoughts. In the present study, the terms *center* and *centrality* are the variables depending on the reading model of the story. It is assumed that 'if the text is looked through a deconstructionist eyes, then there would be no controlling center to piece the whole structure together'. With the hypothesis as the starting point of the argument, this paper will ultimately answer the questions of

I- What if the represented binaries in *City of Glass* are not binaries all. And,

II- What if the *transcendental signified* is reduced to an insecure locus for the story's primary purpose.

Drawing upon the post-structural and deconstruction theories, this paper aims to experiment a distinct function of language in the novelette which serves as the testing ground for the hypothesis.

2. APPROACH AND READING STRATEGY

Post-structuralism embraces a group of theoretical positions which reflect on language and questions around it. Ironical as it may appear, the key assumption of this trend entails the instability of

signification, the tentativeness of truth and the ambiguity of reality in socio-cultural arena, which stem from the philosophical position that truth and reality perform through language and language lies at the heart of their functions. Post-structuralism is an extension of structuralist propositions and an astray from them. Ferdinand de Saussure (1915), the father of structuralist school, argues that “language is a system”, with linguistic signs as its building blocks (p. 62). Each sign is “composed of signifier and signified” which is “a unified whole” (Saussure, 1915, p. 70). For structuralists, meaning creation is relational and is the result of differentiation between the signs which are usually binaries and oppositions. Difference is a spatial term and, technically, it is the ground for creating spatial regulation between the linguistic or cultural signs, between, for instance, self and other, presence and absence as well as center and periphery.

In post-structuralism, however, language is not a sign system or not a means to unify signifier and signified to help build the preliminary structure of meaning. In a poststructuralist’s eyes, language is a chain of signifiers and a free play of signification. Since the relation between signifier and signified is not settled, meaning is continuously deferred. The meaning and essence are constantly under the influence of this play (Jacques Derrida, 1976, p. 113). Language deters direct experience of reality and truth, as the signification process is floating under such an influence. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida is reluctant to accept the metaphysical proposition that one is supposed to assume an ultimate meaning in occupying oneself with a text. As regards the absence of the referent or the *transcendental signified*, nothing outside of the text is involved, he says, maintaining that “One could call play the absence of the *transcendental signified* as limitlessness of play, that is to say as the destruction of onto-theology and metaphysics of presence” (ibid). Derrida forges the term *différance* to show that a sign cannot be fully present in the sense that the old philosophical parlance used to administer over the centuries.

Différance makes a room for a play on the French word *différer* meaning both ‘to defer’ and ‘to differ’. In his essay “Différance”, Derrida (1968) states that he has kept the structuralist spatial term of ‘differ’, while adding the temporal term of ‘defer’ to enforce the postponement of meaning and presence, i.e., the “interposition of delay” (p. 279). Hans Bertens (2001) recounts Derrida’s doctrine, explaining that “The presence of word we speak is therefore not the true presence, which forever eludes language: ‘spacing’ and ‘temporization’ intervene” (p. 126). Derrida’s clever idea adds a vital dimension to the poststructuralist thought in that texts are the hotbed of instability, disclosure, confusion and game. He coins another technical term of *supplement*, to unsettle the hierarchical structure of *binary oppositions* within language and to further make a text uncontrollable and a field of possibilities. The word “*supplement* seems to account for the strange unity of these two gestures” which is “addition and substitution simultaneously” (Derrida, 1976, pp. 189-90). Expanding on this strange behavior of the agency, Bertens (2001) delineates “Deconstruction tries to demonstrate that the apparent either/or patterns [in the form of hierarchal binaries] in texts mask underlying both/and situation and to reveal those texts’ fundamental undecidability” (p. 131). The approach serves as the outline of reading strategy for *City of Glass* in the present study.

The first step in reading Auster’s fiction, following a theoretical review, is to locate binary oppositions and to examine their unstable relations. This would be done by displacing and repositioning of the concepts in the structure of dichotomies assumed to be un-violable in mystery stories. Through the linguistic hints, we will challenge the *logocentric* notion of centrality and polarity in the narrative and will show that the traditionally-assumed paradigm of center/periphery inside the text does not eke out an existence. Derrida’s *supplement* is instrumental in bringing about the consequences. Next, the researcher will examine the concept of *différance* in the story to investigate for disarray, confusion and numerous possibilities as the story comes to the end. It will be shown that every step of the detective to find the meaning defers the intention further and there is no finality to the game of signifiers. Once different instances of meaning postponement were examined, it will be discussed that *différance* effectively prevents closure. The possibility for a final meaning will be an elusive prospect and the likelihood of numerous readings will be the only possibility at the end.

3. POST-STRUCTURALISM AND CENTER

Traditionally, the idea of center is something that makes the structure a unified and coherent whole. It produces stability and certainty, and controls chaos. Ideally, it upholds a system which tends to be ultimately closed and to eliminate play. For example, when we think of our mental and physical being as centered on 'I', we principle a unity which underlies our whole system of thought, holds all the fragments together and limits the movements of the elements inside the system. Derrida (1966) announces that "The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure ... but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of structure" (p. 90). Derrida's elaboration makes it possible to explain that in the recent practical outlooks on events, life becomes provisional and temporal. Only the dogmatic dare to ask for definite replies or even to make definite statements. Derrida (1966) puts it overtly in his essay that a major shift or break has taken place in the fundamental structure of classical philosophy (p. 89). He talks about divided and ambivalent nature of linguistic signs which makes it possible to think about structure as lacking an ultimate center or having an assortment of centers.

3.1. Performance of Language

Recent studies on language have had considerable impacts on cultural, social, historical and psychological institutions. It is useful to know that language traditionally, as *mimetic theory* suggests, had the significance of a mirror held up to reality. For them, language was a medium capable of imitating outer world. Through language, we were able to see the truth. Words had, they claim, a direct and natural reference to the outer world. Scientific studies by Saussure on language, during 1960s, led to revolutionary outlooks in the following decades. The "rupture" that Derrida (1966, p. 89) talks about is the point where it becomes possible to see that the center is a construct, rather than something simply true and there. Here, we no longer are allowed to think of meaning as natural and eternally settled entity. Meaning is not something that all men and women share everywhere and at anytime. Nobody intuitively shares something out there and present, and reality is not simply the same for all people. Derrida examines it as a "function" rather than "fixed locus":

Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. (1966, p. 91)

According to Derrida, language is not a transparent medium through which reality can be touched. In his terms, "language is inherently unreliable" and "words never achieve stability, not only because they are related to, and take part of their meaning from, the words that have just preceded them, but also because their meaning is always modified by whatever follows" (Bertens, 2001, pp. 124-6). Roland Barthes (1971) also emphasizes that meaning creation process in literature is not something predetermined and injected to the product but "as a massage of signification of things" (pp. 169-70). Poststructuralists borrow a pair of key concepts of *binary oppositions* and *transcendental signified* from classical metaphysics and deconstruct their built-in proposition.

3.2. Binary Oppositions

At the heart of classical studies on language posits the idea of *binary oppositions* which speaks of dual concepts different from one another and defined by each other. The basic rule for the binaries, structuralists claim, is that they always have to be absolutely separate. For each center, there is an opposing concept: good vs. evil, speaking vs. writing and truth vs. falsehood, for instance. Out of every pair, one concept is privileged and is defined by its opposite. Dividing binaries into two opposite poles and privileging one pole as superior creates hierarchies representing center and periphery. Bertens (2001) argues "... one of these terms always functions as the center and it is privileged, in poststructuralist terms. Some terms have always been privileged: [for instance] good, truth,

masculinity, purity, whiteness” (p. 129). Terry Eagleton (1996) calls *binary oppositions* the “beloved of structuralism” and “as long as a distinction is tightly held in place the whole system can function effectively” (p. 132).

In deconstruction, which sometimes replaces post-structuralism, the rule for binaries begins to shake. Deconstructionists look for loopholes, in the process of textual analysis, where something disrupts this neat division. By this, they aim to display the shakable and unstable nature of a well-organized structure and the well-established hierarchies, i.e., in Derrida’s terms, they put all the structure into “play”. *Supplement* is the label Derrida uses to sell the idea that not only are the binaries opposites but they are supplements, addition-substitution. In his terms

This movement of play, permitted by lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*. One cannot determine the center and exhaust tantalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center’s place in its absence- this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*. (1966, p. 99)

Bertens (2001) translates *supplement* into both/and formula: “It is not only that the opposites shift within the structure, but that they also would seem to collapse into each other. Either/or turns into both/and” (p. 133). Discussing the necessity for complementary roles of man and woman to each other, Eagleton (1996), as well, expounds that considering one of them as the “other” is just due to the fact that they are not the same (p. 133). Not only is man’s being “parasitically dependent upon the woman and upon the act of excluding and subordinating her, but one reason why such exclusion is necessary is because she may not be quite so other after all.” Poststructuralists extend their discussion to the realm of *transcendental signified* to further disturb the a priori assumptions in literary language and its structure.

3.3. Transcendental Signified

Transcendental signified or an ultimate point of reference is the basis of beliefs upon which an ideology or a system of thought is built. *Self*, as an example, is a unifying concept for all that we try to include or exclude in the world around us. In other words, *self* is regarded as the central truth which allows/disallows inclusions. Long-established metaphysics have invented, constructed and functionalized several of these centers to give meaning and purpose to the existence and to guarantee its being. Eagleton (1996) draws upon some terms and discusses their absolute nature and unquestionable meaning in this tradition:

Western philosophical tradition ... from Plato to Levi-Strauss, has consistently vilified writing as a mere lifeless ... form of expression and consistently celebrated the living voice ... ‘*phonocentric*’, ... so also it has been in a broader sense ‘*logocentric*’, committed to a belief in some ultimate presence, essence, truth or reality which will act as the foundation of all our thought, language and experience. It has yearned ... for anchoring, unquestionable meaning to which all our sign can be seen point (the ‘transcendental signified’). (pp. 130-1)

With deconstructionists, who speak about a break apart from traditional habit of value formation and meaning construction, we start to doubt that there can be a high profile center outside of a text to obscure meaning(s) inside of it. Derrida (1966) contends that “the central ... or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside of a system of differences. The absence of transcendental signified [therefore] extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely” (p. 91). Stocker argues, “The concern of Derrida is “to show that difference should not be transcendental” (2006, p. 171). The argument is suggestive of the oscillation of signification as we seek to examine center and centrality in *City of Glass*.

4. CENTER IN CITY OF GLASS

The question is the story itself and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell. (Auster, 1998, p. 3)

No sooner does Auster start to construct the *glassy* space of the city in his narrative than he disavows any responsibility and intention for meaning creation of any sort. He is perhaps suspicious of the elusive search for a stable and immobile center in the city's textual space. Quinn, Auster's protagonist and mystery writer, "leaves his apartment to walk through the city- never really going anywhere, but simply going wherever his legs happened to take him" (ibid). It is learned immediately at the outset that there is really no purpose for any step that he is going to take in New York which stands for him as the "labyrinth of endless steps" in "an exhaustible space" (ibid). Endless steps and meaninglessness of his walk makes "it impossible for him to dwell on any one thing for very long" (Auster, 1998, p. 4). For Quinn, his paces are not the signs to accommodate unified structure of signifiers and signifieds, which turns out to be a sore in his daily activities.

To tackle the issue, he resolves trying a hand in a mystery novel which, he fantasizes, would provide "a reasonable solution" (ibid) to his aimless journey around the city. In order to escape the uncertainties of his life, Quinn assumes there is a meaning, a purpose and virtually a truth which he would be able to grasp by practicing on mystery stories. He decides "In good mystery there is nothing wasted no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has potential to be so" (Auster, 1998, p. 8). Later in the story, when Quinn assumes the role of a detective, it further plunges him into a grapple with the old conventions of the genre. He reminds himself of the premises for a detective mission and infers that "... no circumference can be drawn until the book [that he has started to write and the case that he is involved in] has come to its end" (ibid), hence the closure. Quinn, ironically, resorts to the words to thematize stability, certainty and purpose in his life, the move which further eludes the intention.

4.1. Binary Opposition

The claim for the operation of *binary oppositions* in the tradition of detective stories assumes a red line on the sides of which the opposites stay apart. They are opponents to the end, and their roles are neatly defined and never contaminated. The protagonist or the detective, as we desire, has always the privileged position. The conflict, through gradual and logical reasoning on facts, is finally resolved in favor of the presumed hierarchy. In *City of Glass*, however, the roles that binaries assume undermine the principle. The amicable relationship between the protagonist and the opponent, sensational conversation between them, their constant and confusing change of positions and their supplementary roles are suggestive of a play, a hoax. The rivals grow sameness of intellect and proximity which is opposed to the code of virtual distance, rivalry and clash. They watch each other, which blurs the task of surveillance traditionally assigned to the detective. These gestures in the narrative highlight the poststructuralist claim for subversive function of the opposites in the literary space.

Quinn the writer/detective initiates his venture by asking "What is it that Dupin says in Poe? 'An identification of reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent'" (Auster, 1998, p. 40). Assuming that Dupin's theory requires the detective to learn about the opponent's intellect, Quinn spends time to read Stillman Sr.'s dissertation expecting to find a way to his mind. He reads his thought and logic to keep safe distance from him and to wait for a proper moment to launch his deadly blow on his foe. Auster's protagonist learns through the words of Stillman Sr. that 'good' and 'evil' are both separated and supplements at the same time: "...good and evil leapt forth into the world, like two twins cleaving together" (Auster, 1998, p. 42). Quinn encounters such an elaborate idea of his opponent on the complementary role of the opposites and is almost disappointed about penetrating into the mentality of his rival to get the idea of how Stillman Sr. would manage to stay away from the threats which might be leveled against him by his chaser.

Immersed in the thoughts of what he has encountered in Stillman Sr.'s dissertation, he faces a similar case in his own writings. While he is busy to sort out his detective task's requirements, his attention is grabbed by a lady in the train station who is reading one of his own works titled *Suicide Squeeze*. When Quinn turns to her to ask whether she likes the book, the answer comes: "I've read better and I've read worse" (Auster, 1998, p. 53). The answer is bewildering for Quinn as another evidence of problematic nature of language to which he has, ironically, resorted to escape his agonies. The idea that both 'worse' and 'better' are present in the same collection, staying side by side, is confusing since the desirable answer, for him, is either Yes or No, either worse or better. Quinn seems to be lower on spirit from loss of hope and fears the ground upon which he stands not to be secure enough. He is deeply disillusioned since he had always imagined that the key to good detective work was a close observation of details, to construct order and final coherence through the words (Auster, 1998, p. 67).

To overcome the failure in discovering Stillman Sr.'s riddle through his dissertation, Quinn decides to change the method of his experiment. He thinks perhaps there is a meaning in Stillman Sr.'s wanderings in the city. Stillman Sr. may write something on the ground by his paces. Quinn ponders and starts drawing a map of his steps to verbalize them into a meaningful pattern, a clue to decipher the secrecy of his opponent's plan. To his amazement, the outcome is weird since this adds another dimension to the reversal of the old hierarchical structure of metaphysics of presence, *phonocentrism*. Stillman Sr. has moved on the streets and by his movement has created letters to convey a message, but because the letters have not been inscribed onto the space, they have vanished into the air, hence no presence of words. Quinn says: "... Stillman Sr. has not left message anywhere. True, he had created the letters by movement of his steps, but they had not been written down. It was like drawing a picture in the air with your finger. The image vanishes as you are making it. There is no result, no trace to mark what you have done" (Auster, 1998, p. 70). Metaphysics of presence, according to Derrida (1976), claims for *phonocentric* supremacy (p. 58). When Quinn acknowledges inscribed words as present and spoken or unwritten words as absent, he reverses the *phonocentric* hierarchy and puts the binary of speaking/writing in play. This is Quinn's own trial with binaries in language after he encounters two amazing examples of good/evil and better/worse.

About to the end of the story, we find Quinn developing further similarity of reasoning to his opponent. When, in the final chapter, after a long sleep, Quinn hesitates whether it is night or day, he decides that it does not matter what time and when:

... if it was in fact night here in New York, then surely the sun was shining somewhere else.... Night and day were no more than relative terms; they did not refer to an absolute condition. At any given moment, it was always both. The only reason we did not know it was because we could not be in two places at the same time. (Auster, 1998, p. 125)

As the readers, we are tempted to sympathize with Quinn and to justify his new developments of mentality. After facing Stillman Sr.'s expansion on 'good' and 'evil', facing the girl's bewildering answer for 'better' and 'worse' and Quinn's own elaboration on the inscribed and un-inscribed words, it seems natural for Quinn to dismiss 'day' and 'night' as an absolute binary structure. Contrary to the expectations created in the middle of the narrative, 'identifying' with the opponent's intellect, rather than leading to a clash, has resulted in proximity and sameness in reasoning. The word *identify* has turned into a locus of ambivalence and does not signify the meaning which Dupin originally intended to instruct. Stocker (2006) draws our attention to the contradictory meanings of the words within language, arguing that

Language is not a set of meanings preexisting words and fixing them in relation to the outside world. Language exists as rules for combination of words, syntax, and the syntax does not exclude contradiction. There would be no syntax without contradiction. If it is possible to use words, it is possible to use the same words with contradictory meanings.... [Language] does not prevent contradiction, or undecidability, appearing in the meaning (p. 159)

By and by, Quinn's detection develops into a wandering and aimless task. He starts to doubt "if he had not embarked on a meaningless project" (Auster, 1998, p. 60). Monotony of task results in forgetting Stillman Sr. signifying his absence from the scene. It is just to reason that when the case is forgotten, his steps unconsciously overtake and cross those of his opponent. This is a paradox: the more Stillman Sr. vanishes, the less distance is created; the more distance from the conventions, the more proximity to Stillman Sr., which signifies the gradual reversal in the hierarchy of distance/proximity and presence/absence in *City of Glass*. The effect is dubbed as *supplement* of roles and dualities by Derrida to put the traditional hierarchical order in play. Who has chased who, who has watched who, and who has talked to who? These are the questions left unanswered as we linger on the dramatic language of the narrative. In this paper, the departure from the conventional readings of a mystery story results in deconstructing the long-established binary of detective/detected and in destabilizing the center/margin order. This study aims to further de-center the center by questioning the authenticity of supreme points of reference in the fiction.

4.2. Transcendental signified

Quinn's desire to find a structured center in his writing practice and a meaning to the case in which he is involved ends in the signified's nonexistence or in its continuous postponement. The more he tries to find a center, the more it eludes him. Quinn's first step in creating a link between signifier and signified is symbolically a submission to chance. The picture of Stillman Sr., which Quinn is provided with, is too young to match his person. When in the subway station Quinn chooses one to follow by chance, he takes the first step in constructing the signified with doubts and "Uncertainty would haunt him to the end" (Auster, 1998, p. 56). Although he began to watch with precision and recorded every detail dutifully, "the meaning of these things continued to elude him" (Auster, 1998, p. 58). Furthermore, wanderings of the old man leads Quinn to think of him as being aimless in his journeys through the streets and makes him feel that he is cut off from his original intentions. Lack of purpose to the case makes him, once again, try decoding the language of Stillman Sr.'s steps on the streets of the city.

When he starts to sketch a map of Stillman's movement through the streets, he remembers that he has failed to record the steps of Stillman's travel in the earlier days. Writer by profession and detective by genius, he hopes to construct the missing letters. This is the process of meaning construction that he thinks he is capable of doing. He supposes that verbalizing the movement would be of help to know what Stillman Sr. is up to, or it can make the case readable. Conversely however, this adds to the fragmentation and deferment of meaning and to his confusion. The narrator comments "Stillman [Sr.] had nothing to do with it. It was all an accident, a hoax he [Quinn] had perpetrated on himself" (Auster, 1998, p. 71). All the facts that he has collected appear mere fragments and nothing comes out of them. He feels sort of "discouraged and ready to abandon the ship" (Auster, 1998, p. 64), since the collected signifiers "seemed not to be substance to the case" (ibid). He is deeply disillusioned.

He had always imagined that the key to good detective work was a close observation of details.... The implication was that ... beneath the infinite façade of gestures, tics, and silences, there was finally coherence, an order, a source of motivation. But after struggling to take in all these surface effects, Quinn felt no closer to Stillman Sr. than when he first started following him.... Instead of narrowing the distance that lay between him and Stillman Sr., he had seen the old man slip away from him, even as he remained before his eyes. (Auster, 1998, p. 67)

Quinn's disillusionment to the deferment of meaning is further amplified when, in the final touch, he meets Stillman Sr. with the fake identity of Peter Stillman, the son, in an attempt to explore the hidden layers of his character. To his amazement, the father gives some pieces of advice and they part. Quinn again is left unsettled because "Today was to have been the crucial day and Quinn had made elaborate and meticulous plans for it. Now his calculations were for naught. It disturbed him that he had not taken this contingency into account" (Auster, 1998, p. 87). Again, the meaning has fled away from him, and he has missed the end and the purpose to his venture. He echoes his rival's words, saying that even if a truth is found, it would be an invention, a construction.

Immersed in thought of the theories that he has made, Quinn plays with the signification of the concepts and develops his own example of what he has touched in his experience as a detective. He picks the simple task of 'eating' and theorizes that it does not necessarily solve the problem of food. A meal is no more than a fragile defense against the inevitability of the next meal. Food itself can never answer the question of food: it only delays the moment when the question would have to be asked in earnest (Auster, 1998, p. 114). He thinks of the meaning as always being steps ahead. He feels he may run for a hundred years and still he will arrive just as the doors were closing (Auster, 1998, p. 121). Disappointed with the absence of truth in his quest, Quinn "felt sorry that he bothered to write about the Stillman's case at all ... its meaning had been lost" (Auster, 1998, p. 130). To the end of story, Quinn's self and his centrality is even lost in his own writing and his identity fades away. Barthes (1968) puts his signature on the cases like that of Quinn, explaining that "writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away" (pp. 147-8).

In *City of Glass*, life is experienced through words which do not function as a mirror to reality outside. The facts collected by Quinn's surveillance cannot be verbalized without trouble, and when they are turned into language, they do not make sense as intended. Quinn's endlessness theories to the case postpone the meaning further. In fact, by each move that he makes he merely adds to the number of signifiers and their fragmentation. As Barthes (1971) states, Auster's text remains "off-centered, without closure" and "practices infinite deferment of the signified ... the generation of perpetual signifier" (p. 168). Derrida (1989) also echoes the implication, saying that there are moments in a text, including literature, which resist transcendent reading (p. 45).

5. CONCLUSION

After a discussion of the theories within the poststructuralist trend, the study aimed to (de)construct spatial concept of *center* in the language of Auster's *City of Glass*. *Center* and centrality were examined under the two headings of *binary oppositions* and *transcendental signified* through a deconstructive reading model. As for *binary oppositions*, the researcher at times encountered operations of the binaries different from those traditionally endorsed by language philosophers. It was noted that binaries, either minor or major, are constantly changing their roles and functions. Contrary to our earlier expectations in the story, the detective was constantly moved from his privileged position and the hierarchy was dismantled in times. Besides, the detective and the opponent's gradual proximity made them stand on the same front. A number of semantic items linked to the role and logic of the dual opposing forces were examined to this effect. It was discussed that the oppositions, either linguistic or non-linguistic, are the poles with no hierarchical advantage but with a desire to be defined by one another, hence the poststructuralist concept of *supplement*: addition-substitution.

The discussion on center was then geared to examine finality and eventual meaning in *City of Glass*. It was shown that the detective's attempt to look for a coherent center in the case ended in the signified's non-existent or its constant deferment. It was found that Quinn's initial step to create a link between signifier and signified began with uncertainty and this haunted him to the end. Besides, Quinn's attempt in building a coherent structure, out of the collected facts, resulted in the fragmentation of the signifiers, with the implications for him that he was lost and had missed the meaning. The postponement of meaning significantly provided a proof for the poststructuralist position in that it is always one step ahead. The theories of Quinn did not lead to the progression of the case, they rather contributed to the labyrinthine web of fragments which made Quinn disappointed with the absence of truth and made him feel regretful to enter the case. The role of language, as the dominant concern of post-structuralism, was rendered to be highly important in that the detective experienced his life and his cases through the words more intensely than ever. Language turned out to blur the facts and the reality, and it did not behave as a transparent medium to the meaning. Rather than lightening, words darkened. They neither supplied him with any purpose for his life nor for his case. Therefore, there is a category of literary texts that confess to their own impotence, their inability to establish a center.

REFERENCES

- Auster, Paul 1998, *City of Glass*, in Paul Auster, 1998, *The New York Trilogy*, Faber and Faber Ltd, London, pp. 3-130.
- Barthes, Roland 1968, 'The Death of the Author', in David Lodge and Nigel Wood (eds.), *Modern Criticism and Theory, A Reader*, 2nd ed., 2000, Pearson Education Limited, New York, pp. 145-72.
- Barthes, Roland 1971, 'From Text to Work', in Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory, A Reader*, 1989, Routledge, Chapman and Hall Inc, New York, pp. 166-71.
- Bertens, Hans 2001, *Literary Theory: the Basics*, Routledge, London.
- Cicero, Karina R. 2011, 'Wading into semantic depths: a poststructuralist approach to *Toni Morrison's Beloved*', Tesis de Licenciatura, Universidad Católica Argentina.
- Derrida, Jacques 1966, 'Structure, Sign and Play, in the Discourse of Human Sciences', in David Lodge and Nigel Wood (eds.), *Modern Criticism and Theory, A Reader*, 2nd ed., 2000, Pearson Education Limited, New York, pp. 89-103.
- Derrida, Jacques 1968, 'Différance', in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (eds.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2nd ed., 2004, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pp. 278-299.
- Derrida, Jacques 1976, *Of Grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
- Derrida, Jacques 1989, 'This Strange Institution Called Literature: An Interview with Jacques Derrida', in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, 1992, Routledge, London, pp. 33-75.
- Eagleton, Terry 1996, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de 1915, 'Course in General Linguistics', in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (eds.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2nd ed., 2004, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pp. 59-71.
- Stocker, Barry 2006, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Derrida on Deconstruction*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, London and New York.