

Journey of Solitude and Reconstructing the Self in Paul Auster's *Moon Palace*

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Abstract

This paper explores with the journey of solitude and reconstructing the self in Paul Auster's *Moon Palace*. Solitude was the state of being alone from the society. The main protagonist Marco was emotionally hidden, avoids to contact others. It was the story about families and generations. It talks on the series of lost chances and tragedies. At each stage of his life, his thoughts and emotions drastically changes. He retreats from the society and spend all his time all alone. He stopped thinking on future and avoids commitments. Then, he reconstructs his self from mishaps. Finally, he tolerates his own ambiguities, and accepts the

reality. This paper brings out the inner and outer exposure, hardships, sufferings, challenges in reconstructing the self to pave the way for the future.

Keywords: Paul Auster, *Moon Palace*, Solitude, reconstructing the self, journey, coincidence

Introduction

American literature started with oral legends, myths, and lyrics. Before the arrival of Europeans in America, tribal cultures existed in North America. The Native American Oral literature was diverse, and it focuses on America's injustice and society. It values the concept of justice and moral conscience. It also concentrates on the individual's life and journey. Some of the American writers are Anne Bradstreet, who started American literature and the journey was followed by Edward Taylor, Michael Wigglesworth, Samuel Sewall and so on. In the 18th century, writers focused on the ideals of justice, liberty and equality of a common man. In the 19th century, writers concentrated on the religious sense of writings. Some of the writers of this century are Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Henry Wordsworth Longfellow and so on. After that American civil war emerged. Writers like Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe and the transcendentalists were the great literary authors of America.

In the 20th century, modernist writers wrote on the explorations of themes of personal, racial and ethnic standards. Many writers focused on the World War II, the aftermath of post war and its impact on society. During the Second half of the 20th century, writers like John Updike portrayed contemporary American life in a reflective form. Early 21st century of post war, writers like Philip Roth focused on the autobiographical characters, explores the American culture and the distinction between reality and fiction in literature. The contemporary fiction practices the postmodern movement. Some of the writers of this century are Toni Morrison, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Don DeLillo, Cormac McCarthy and so on. Paul Auster was a well-known contemporary writer known for his distinctive, experimental and metafictional narrative style. His works emerged prominently in the late 20th and early 21st century and began to appear in 1980's and 1990's. His works were associated with postmodern literature.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 24:7 July 2024

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Author and His Works

Paul Benjamin Auster was an American Writer, Novelist, Memoirist, filmmaker and translator. He is a popular representative in Contemporary American fiction. He was born on February 3, 1947 and died on April 30, 2024 due to Cancer. He graduated from Columbia University in 1970. His genre writings were mostly crime, mystery, absurd and dystopian fiction. He translated French literature thereby earned money for living. His novel closely linked with detective stories- *The New York Trilogy* (1987) consists of *The City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986), and *The Locked Room* (1997). His Other Writings are *Moon Palace* (1989), *The Music of Chance* (1990), *The Book of Illusions* (2002), *Oracle Night* (2003), *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005), *Man in the Dark* (2008), and *Invisible* (2009). His books have been translated into more than 30 to 40 languages.

Paul Auster's writing style and narratives blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. His novels travels with a sense of reflexivity and motifs that delves in depth into the complexity of his narrative structures. His writings explores with philosophy and existential sense. Most of his character's in the novels quest for identity, existence, meaning and fate in life. His themes are existential, philosophy, chance, coincidence, absurdity, identity and meaning. He invites the readers on a journey of human existence and experience, a thought-provoking narrative. He is a unique writer who always looks inwardly, the inner journey of oneself. In this novel *Moon Palace*, he portrays American life, its tradition and culture. He wrote on the protagonist's escapist life. He focuses on the physical and mental health of an individual in this novel.

An Overview of *Moon Palace*

Paul Auster's *Moon Palace* was first published in 1989. Paul Auster is a writer who delves into the inner self. He contributed to the contemporary writings. The narrator in this novel is Marco. The main protagonist of this novel is Marco Stanley Fogg. It sets in Manhattan and U.S. Southwest. The previous two generations of his family were focused. Marco, the narrator was an Orphan. The only caretaker of Marco, was his Uncle Victor. Suddenly, his uncle died leaving Marco with no family or friends. Marco inherits money from his uncle, and manages to pay for uncle's funeral rites. And, he even spends the remaining money without going to job. He sold books, loses his apartment, and finally went to Central

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park for Shelter. And, later, he was rescued by Zimmer and Kitty Wu, finds a caretaker job for an elderly man, Thomas Effing. Soon, Marco learns about the complicated history of past about his parents. Effing dies leaving Marco his money. Marco settles in a house together with Kitty Wu in Chinatown and later breaks up with her, due to abortion. Marco travels to U.S. in search of himself and begins journeying with his father, Solomon barber, who dies shortly after an accident. He was then buried with his wife. Now, Marco ends up journeying all alone in beach. *Moon Palace* is a novel that probes notions of ancestry and history of three generations. It is a mixture of reality and history. Quest for identity plays an important aspect in this novel.

In this novel *Moon Palace*, the author explores themes such as identity, self-discovery, fate, chance, loneliness, isolation, memory and nostalgia. Marco faces challenges, losses, and unexpected turns in his life. He understands that experience shapes one's self and endures everything. He encounters a series of chances and coincidence, thereby meeting his grandfather, Thomas Effing and his father, Solomon Barber, without knowing their real identity in relation to him. He also experiences the emotional detachment due to tragedy and struggles to overcome from it. The past happenings made a great impact on his present life. For instance, Marco's mother hides the details of her husband. Then, she met with an accident and died, leaving Marco with no identity. His Uncle Victor, too hid the details of Marco's identity because of his promise to Marco's mother and died suddenly leaving him as an orphan in this world with no support to lean.

Journey of Solitude

Marco's mother met with an accident and he was adopted by his Uncle Victor. Uncle Victor taught human values to Marco, thereby shaping him in understanding the life better. He lost his mother, and left with no family or friends. He spends his time in solitude. His uncle dies before finishing his studies. Once again, Marco becomes Orphan. He pays off his uncle's debt and secluded himself from the world, doing nothing. He sold books one by one instantly after reading it. He spends money lavishly. Left with no money, he visited his friend David Zimmer. There Marco meets Kitty Wu for the first time at Zimmer's House. The moment he meets Kitty Wu, he falls in love with her. Marco loses his apartment and stays in Central Park.

As I sold off my apartment went through many changes. That was inevitable, for each time I opened another box, I simultaneously destroyed another piece of

furniture...My life had become a gathering zero, and it was a thing I could actually see: a palpable, burgeoning emptiness. Each time I ventured into my uncle's past, it produced a physical result, an effect in the real world. The consequences were therefore always before my eyes, and there was no way to escape them. (23-24)

She misses Marco after the first encounter and searches for him. He gets sick, sheltered in cave, enters into the verge of death, and later found out by Zimmer and Kitty Wu. He recovers discovering his love for Kitty Wu. He was treated for several months at Zimmer's apartment. Then, he leaves Zimmer's house and hunts for job. His proposal was rejected by Vietnam draft. He applies for a care taker job through advertisement. He is in need for money. Thomas Effing, an elderly bad tempered blind man gave job to Marco. He travels in wheel chair with Marco. He knows that he is going to die soon, prepares obituary. He started to narrate his life story to Marco. Effing's former name was Julian Barber, a famous painter. He was born in a wealthy family. He disliked his wife. So, he decided to stay in wilderness. He went out, found an empty hermit's cave and lives there. He paints only for himself. That's how he fixes his new identity as Thomas Effing. He has a son named Solomon Barber. He thought of handing over the robber's money back to the society. He forces Marco to take him to the cave despite his bad health. He was affected with pneumonia that leads him to death. Once again, Marco was left alone. Later, he realizes that Effing decided to die so.

Effing left a sum of money for Marco. Marco enjoys his life with Kitty Wu to the fullest, leading a carefree life. But unfortunately, Kitty Wu decided to do abortion. He tries to console her, not to abort his child. He confronts her which leads in conflict. He breaks up with her due to abortion, she had. He says that it was like "an earthquake in the heart of my solitude" (94). Solomon barber don't know that Marco is his son but he was eager to meet him. He befriends Marco, and in order to distract him from breakup, rushes to Utah to find the paintings of Effing. There he stops at Marco's mother grave. Marco found out that Solomon Barber was none other than his father. When relieving the truth to Marco, Solomon slips and gets hospitalized. He dies. This leaves Marco to face solitude alone.

Marco unable to bear his father's death, rings Kitty Wu for emotional support. But, she answers his call and feels sorry for him. She refuses to accept him. This made Marco feel

extremely devastated. Now, she has someone in her life and states the reason as, she nearly went to verge of death because of him and hardly survived. Marco lost everyone and everything in life. He tries to find Effing's cave. But, of no use. He lost his car, inheritance, wallet and walks towards the beach. As Marco puts it,

It went on like that for the next several days. My moods charged recklessly from one extreme to another, shunting me between joy and despair so often that my mind became battered from the journey. Almost anything could set off the switch: a sudden confrontation with the past, a chance smile from a stranger, the way the light fell on the sidewalk at any given hour. I struggled to achieve some equilibrium within myself, but it was no use: everything was instability, turmoil, outrageous whim. At one moment I was engaged in a philosophical quest, supremely confident ... at the next moment I was in tears, collapsing under the weight of my own anguish. My self-absorption was so intense that I could no longer see things for what they were: objects became thoughts, and every thought was part of the drama being played out inside me. (53-54)

Marco's experiences various socioeconomic conditions through his life journey that shapes his identity. After the death of his uncle, his socioeconomic status shifts from middle class to homelessness and extreme poverty. He took up various jobs as working in bookstore and caregiver. It reflects his attempts to stabilize and improve his economic condition.

Reconstructing the Self

Reconstructing the Self is an act of restoring or rebuilding the self. It is a sort of improving the self. The transition in oneself is the result of transformation in character. It focuses on the problem and finds solution to lead the life. It impacts the value of being in this world. Life is full of sufferings and challenges. To overcome this, one has to reconstruct the self. It is the continuous process carried out over time. Factors such as tragedy, trauma, accident, pain, disease may happen due to uncertainties in life. One cannot predict what will happen in the future exactly. It is inevitable to reconstruct our self whenever it faces damages. He says, "I wanted to live dangerously, to push myself as far as I could go and then see what happens to me when I got there". (2)

Paul Auster's *Moon Palace* probes into the notions of Solitude and Self. Marco lost his mother at the age of eleven. He was unaware of his origin or where he belong to. He was looked after by his Uncle Victor. He sends him to college for higher studies. With the support of his Uncle, he grew up, facing many difficulties in life. When he heard that his uncle was dead, he was completely devastated. He was self- imposed with a state of isolation. He was jobless without any goal in life. He literally spend all the money he has and became homeless. He didn't think of future plans and remains secluded from the outer world. He lost his apartment and settles in central park. "... the park offered me the possibility of solitude, of separating myself from the rest of the world." (55) He undergoes physical and mental decline. He goes to a cave, where he stayed for three days and later he was rescued by two of his college friends. His friends Zimmer and Kitty Wu searches him. This shows the concern of love, care and affection of his friends. Later, he loves Kitty Wu and started to live his life. Zimmer provided accommodation and took care of him. Marco reconstructs his self and thereby creates hope to live. He says,

That was the trouble. The land is too big out there, and after a while, it starts to swallow you up. I reached a point when I couldn't take it in anymore. All that bloody silence and emptiness. You try to find your bearings in it, but it's too big, the dimensions are too monstrous, and eventually, it just stops being there. There's no world, no land, no nothing. It comes down to that, Fogg, in the end, it's all a figment. The only place you exist is in your head (176)

Then, he was employed by an old man, Thomas Effing as a caretaker. He socializes with them and lived his life. When Effing died, Marco faces loss once again. Then, he meets Solomon Barber. Accidently, Barber reveals his secrets with Marco's mother, thereby found out his origin, gets into a huge shock. Solomon Barber died accidently leaving Marco. Marco faces a cyclic process of regaining and losing. It was a sort of emotional adjustment where he continuously faces loss and negative impact on reconstructing his self. He break up with kitty wu for a specific reason. He seeks support and consolation from his lover after break up. But, she started a new life leaving Marco. And, she claims Marco for all her suffering and pain in her life. He lacks emotional and social support. He reconstruct from his emotional breakdown, there by stating, "No regrets, no pity, no weak- minded sentiments. By refusing to find out ... I kept myself strong" (218). At each and every stage of his life, he reconstruct himself from

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mishaps and moves forward to embark on the journey of self. He was an optimistic person, who reconstructs his self-stating, “There’s hope for everyone, sir. That’s what makes the world go round” (216). Marco’s journey reflects the complexities of identity formation amidst socioeconomic challenges in a rapidly changing world.

Conclusion

This paper analyses the journey of solitude and reconstructs the self in Paul Auster’s *Moon Palace*. Marco faces trials and tribulations throughout his life. Due to the struggle he faces at each and every stage, he gives up his life, and even stop caring his future. He encounters the tragedy and lived a pathetic life. The author presents the fragmented personalities with uncertainties and creates an ability of a self of an individual to lead the life in contemporary society. The creation of new self to survive in this world is the challenging task to accomplish throughout the end of the life. The author depicts the mishaps, and the will power to encounter a challenging life by reconstructing the self is the positive inspiration of the readers to face the real world through this novel.

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