

Autobiographical Elements in Paul Auster's Fiction

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ABSTRACT

The themes used by Auster in his novels are complex identity, solitude, and self-realization and his novels can be read as an exploration of identity problems in the postmodern age, where the idea of the autonomous subject and identity are characterized by instability and complexity. In almost every work of Paul Auster, the major character may be suffering from an identity crisis and finds a new life by finding out solutions to his problems. He writes in a unique manner and he introduces himself as a character in his novels. His works chiefly indicate the life of people in the postmodern era. He uses different strategies in his writing and depicts reality. Auster also deals with the theme of love toward his father. His father was irresponsible and never cared about Auster when he was a child. After the death of his father, Auster writes about his father and the artifacts left behind.

KEYWORDS: *Auster; identity; reality; sufferings; post-modernism; artifacts*

INTRODUCTION

Literary work of any kind is prone to be a depiction of the autobiographical elements of the creator. Many works of fiction, created by celebrated writers often reflect a handful of facts, events, and individuals belonging to their personal life though not deliberately done. Thus, the depiction of the creator's autobiographical elements in a work of art including a literary work of fiction is a natural process that often adds color and power to the creation.

Paul Auster is an illustrious writer of post-modern American literature. He has shared the belief that a true writer enters literature by the compulsion or instigation of life itself. Through writing, according to Auster, an author releases his pressure, relieves himself from struggles, and reveals his or her own life in an interaction with the other members of the society in which the writer lives.

Paul Auster's contribution to postmodern literature is highly valuable. He is a writer's writer who continually reinvents or breaks the rules of conventional fiction in order to comment on the construction of fiction itself. Auster is simultaneously a unique writer whose style is impossible to characterize and pin down and yet also one who is so open in his interventions in other forms of writing.

Auster appeared to have mixed feelings in his personal life about his father. In his novels, he often described himself as a man who was bored with books, who fell asleep in movies, and whom his mother tried to leave after their honeymoon. Something that people often speculate about in reference to Paul Auster is whether he writes himself into his characters. For example, in the *New York Trilogy*, one of his characters is named Paul. The narrator of *Leviathan* has his initials, Peter Aaron. In *Oracle Night*, one of his characters is named Trause, an anagram of Auster. These enigmatic touches are fascinating and charming. He is the writer of chance, of destiny, of love, and above all, of that city that defines and inspires him: New York. Auster has the unique ability to transform the banal into the extraordinary and capture us in his bewitching narrative. His novels reveal human complexity, which helps the reader learn more about themselves, and survive in their own way.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

THE PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF VARIOUS WRITERS

Sylvia Plath (1965) The autobiographical details that Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy" blatantly reveals and represents include Plath's father's illness and death when she was a young child, her prayers for his recovery on the Nanset beach, her marriage to Ted Hughes', and the first suicide attempt she made when she was twenty. In this poem, "Daddy," Sylvia Plath writes about her father after his death. This is not a standard obituary poem where she mourns the loss of her loved one and hopes to see them again. Instead, Plath is relieved that he is no longer in her life. In this poem, she explains the causes of her emotions. In this poem, Plath describes her father as a 'Nazi' and probably her mother as a 'Jew.' She describes her father's shoes as something that has trapped her like a vampire, a fascist, and a Nazi. She must kill her father in order to get rid of him and she explains that her father was already dead before she manages to do so. She is not confessing in regret. She also describes her father as a 'Frisco seal,' a sea lion that can be seen in San Francisco. This shows how enormous and overbearing her father seemed to her. She compares him to a statue that lacks feelings and emotions.

Sylvia Plath never talks to her father and she considers him as a German indicating that he is not intimate with her. She compares her father to God who surrounds her life fully with clouds. She too describes her father as a 'black man.' But this is not an indication of his skin color. It shows the darkness of his soul. As a child, Sylvia loves her father and she hopes for his love. But her life was filled with her father's cruelty. She finally decides to commit suicide but was unable to do so. This leads her to revelation. So that she recreated her father. In order to show her love for him she used the theory of Freud on the Oedipus complex. She just explains the opposite. She describes the theory of the Electra complex in which girls fall in love with their fathers as children as well as the boys the boys fell in love with their mothers as children. This also suggests that these boys and girls grow up to find husbands and wives that resemble their fathers and mothers. Again, Sylvia reveals that the man she married was enjoying the torture. She wants to get rid of her by recreating him as her husband and this shows that she no longer loves to mourn for her father's death. She describes her relationship with her father as a phone call which she hung up and the call is forever ended. She also refers to her husband as a vampire like her father. She also becomes able to let him stop torturing her from the grave.

Sylvia tries to put an end to the torture of her father by comparing him to a Nazi and a vampire. Later she mourns for his death and in order to show her love she even marries him. In all those ways she was trying to escape from her father forever. In all these aspects the readers understand that Sylvia was not leading an enjoyable life and was living like a slave under her father. Her life itself made her sense depressed and that leads to her suicide.

Sylvia Plath (1963) "The Bell Jar" is a semi-autobiographical work of Sylvia Plath. The book was initially released in 1963 under the alias "Victoria Lucas," which is quasi-autobiographical; however, places and people's identities have been changed within. Because of the protagonist's decline into mental illness and Plath's own experiences with what may have been clinical depression or bipolar II disease, the book is frequently referred to as a Roman a clef. In "The Bell Jar," the issue of socially acceptable identity is raised. The work focuses on Esther's "quest to forge her own identity, to be herself rather than what others expect her to be." Without the means to become independent, Esther is expected to settle down and become a housewife. "The Bell Jar denoted craziness in Esther. She experiences the feeling of being trapped in an airless jar during periods of insanity, which distorts her view of the world and hinders her from interacting with those around her. This implies that the materialistic life in America has made her life absurd and as an impact, she loses her identity.

V.S Naipaul (1957) In creating his imaginary world, V.S Naipaul extensively and effectively incorporated his own life experiences as a youngster and adolescent. It is evident that he rejected the traditional foundation of the society and adopted a sardonic or ironic attitude, or there may even be a hint of rebellion and protest. Naipaul arranges his autobiographical writing in a logical and chronological order in "The Mystic Masseur." Ganesh, the protagonist of the novel represents events and actions that are real in the life of both Naipaul and his father. The novel is set in Trinidad and it highlights the success of Ganesh. The book depicts his apparent struggles following the completion of his studies at Queen's Royal College, a Christian University in Port of Spain, where Naipaul himself had attended before moving to England. Naipaul used Ganesh to express his distaste for the thread ritual, which takes place over his family's vacations because he is terrified of seeming ridiculous in front of his college classmates who have their heads shaved. As a fellow immigrant student at the college, Naipaul endures the same humiliations that Ganesh does in the book.

In "Mystic Masseur," which covers nearly twenty-five years of the first immigrant generation of East Indians, Naipaul reflects his understanding of the community. He discusses issues like arranged marriages, the inevitableness of one's Karma or fate, tradition versus modernity, and the act of writing as a way of appropriating one reality. He had attended

Queen's Royal College, where he learned for the first time in his life that being an Indian put him at a disadvantage. At the college, he sought to hide his Indian heritage and grew ashamed of his cultural background. Ganesh, like Naipaul, is assigned to study at the Queen's Royal College for four years. Ganesh retains his clumsiness forever. He feels so humiliated by his Indian name that he briefly spreads the rumor that his real name is Gareth. He gains little from this. He keeps up his appearance, and he doesn't engage in any games, but his regional Indian accent remained too clear depicting his identity.

In the novel, Ganesh starts his career as a teacher which he could not deal with. Ganesh was forced to marry Leela, and his in-laws have trapped him for their daughter without a dowry. But on the wedding day, Leela's father offers Ganesh Kedgerie and he refused to eat his unless he gets a big dowry. Later, Leela's father offered him money in front of other people. This shows that Naipaul hopes that his father could get a big dowry from his in-laws that would help him live in a house instead of moving from one to another. In addition to particularly referencing the connection between Ganesh's life in Trinidad and the history of the East Indian population in the West Indies, Naipaul appears to be making a wider allusion to the rising isolation in the modern world.

Gunter Grass (2006) "Peeling the Onion" is an autobiographical work by Gunter Grass. When the Second World War breaks out, the author's boyhood in Danzig (Gdansk) comes to an end, and the book ends with the author finishing "The Tin Drum," his first major literary achievement. Grass stirred up feelings in the literary community in August 2006 when he revealed in his biography "Peeling the Onion" that he had joined the Waffen-SS as a youngster. The news was met with an immediate outcry, with many asking to return the 1999 Nobel Prize. Others were more sympathetic towards Grass and noted that he had already suffered the consequences of his teenage deeds by spending all those years struggling with his guilt about having served in the SS. Grass discusses his involvement with the Waffen-SS in "Peeling the Onion." He acknowledges that he did not fire a shot and that the humiliation and guilt of his involvement have tormented him ever since.

"Peeling the Onion" remembers the sufferings of his early life including his brief ventures into religion, his passionate thirst for numerous young ladies, and his early attempts at becoming a writer. Grass' life is chronicled in "Peeling the Onion" from his birth until "The Tin Drum" (1959) was published. Grass compares the phases of his life in "Peeling the Onion" to being hungry. After the conflict, he literally had no food to eat. Soon, his bodily need was rivaled by another hunger- a young man's sexual longing for a young lady. But his thirst for art was the one that drove him most in life. He had saved coupons from cigarette boxes that had been replicas of famous works of art when he was a little child. He was an avid reader as well, viewing literature as a portal into other worlds. He apprenticed himself to a tombstone maker in the late 1940s in order to become a sculptor. During those years, he began writing poetry and discovered the power of words to sate a new longing. Grass continued to live in the world he was creating while he wrote each novel.

ELEMENTS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHIC NATURE IN PAUL AUSTER'S WORKS

1. MOON PALACE

Some aspects of the main character's life in Moon Palace mirror the life of the author. He was a descendant of an Austrian Jewish Family, born on 2 February 1947 in Newark, New Jersey, which is about 15 miles west of New York City. He also attended high school there. In his childhood, Auster's father Samuel Auster was often absent. Samuel Auster was a businessman who left the house in the morning before his son was awake and returned home when he was already in bed. Auster always searched for someone to replace his father. Unlike his father, his mother gave Auster very much attention. Some of the autobiographical elements in this novel are:

1. Paul Auster and Marco Fogg were both born in 1947.
2. Marco's, Solomon's, and Paul's father were all absent during their sons' childhoods.
3. When Paul's uncle traveled to Europe, he stored several boxes of books at Auster's home.

Paul Auster read one book after the other. The same goes for Marco, who read his uncle Victor's books.

4. Auster and Marco studied at Columbia University, New York.
5. Both of them were involved in the student demonstrations at Columbia University.
6. Both Paul and Marco lost a lot of weight after running out of money.
7. Effing kills the robbers who killed the hermit and like Effing finds twenty thousand dollars

In the saddlebag of the three gangsters he killed, Paul's son has stolen three thousand dollars out of the bag of a dead guy.

2. THE INVENTION OF SOLITUDE

The relationship between Auster and his father is composed of a great part of remoteness and absence. His father noticed him rarely but Auster wants his father's care. Auster's success or failure is never affected by his father. Like the opposite sides of a wall, their relationship was cut off. However, her father's sudden death makes Auster frustrated and he examines the last memory of the man who had been his father, his own feelings about both their lives and to put it all into words. 'The Invention of Solitude' starts with Paul Auster's urge to save his father's life from vanishing along with his father. It leads initially to an evocation of his father's conduct and oddities, a reconstruction made of remembered scraps and impressions. This work indicates the behavior of the writer's father towards his family and business acquaintances, as well as his social life after his divorce. Auster saw a photograph from his father's childhood in which his grandfather's image was torn out. Auster's grandmother shot and killed her husband in 1919 and has been acquitted. The murdered man's brother tried to kill her in revenge but failed. The violence that occurred in the childhood days of Paul's father impacted him deeply. Auster asserts that these incidents may have affected the life of his father.

The first part "*Portrait of an Invisible Man*" depicts Auster's isolation from his father including those that convey glimpses of remoteness, absence, and speechlessness. Auster writes about his emotion toward his father in the first part. When his subject proved invisible, he moved in the second half of the book to an extended examination of analogous situations bearing on his relationship with his father and to the themes of isolation and speech, memory, and the present. Auster's attitude towards his father gets softened as he describes how his properties were vandalized constantly: "The only way to get rid of them was to abandon them and let the cities take over." Auster recalls visiting his father's office and being affected by the degradation his father suffered every day. Thieves had stripped the office contents and it was not really a workplace anymore, but a room in hell where no one come out, no one went in. Auster asserts that as a son he fails in front of his father. He knows that his father will still haunt him and is intrinsically bound to his search for self in *The Book of Memory*.

In *The Book of Memory*, he again explains the father-son relationship. The account of Auster's maternal grandfather's life and death in the second part is a clear and unhesitating evocation of a touching, likable man. He describes his love through the story of a son who saved his father and this is an instance of Auster's revelation. Here, Auster explains that writing was the only way to help him grieve and continue his living.

3. WINTER JOURNAL

This memoir is a history of the author's body and it deals with the theme of family, lovers, travels, and residences as he enters what he calls the winter of his life. It is a rambling, informal collection of memories, musings, and minutiae, presented in the second person. It strives to give the impression that it was written extemporaneously, for the author's own pleasure and never intended to be published. It was published posthumously. He presents us with impressions of his life from early childhood to late middle age and tries to offset their ordinariness with wide-eyed rhetorical patterns. In an effort to describe the spring times of his childhood, he informs us those four-leaf clovers "did indeed exist but were found only rarely and therefore were a cause for much celebration." He explains about a brown, red-breasted bird Robin hopping around on the grass and digging for worms. Later he describes the public school where everyone can go for free. Auster describes himself as the single self, the lone person, a silent man cut off from the rest of the world, day after day sitting at his desk for no other purpose than to explore the interior of his own head. His actions remind him of the great writers of the past, including Joyce and Moliere. In this memoir, he explains the things around him.

4. REPORT FROM THE INTERIOR

This is a companion text to the 2012 *Winter Journal*. *Report from the Interior* is a chronicle of post-war America, with its anti-Soviet antagonisms, baseball culture, and B movie science fiction industry. This one is a history of Auster's psychological development, from childhood through early adulthood. Auster describes his childhood by presenting a series of objects. "In the beginning, everything was alive. The smallest objects were endowed with beating hearts, and even the clouds had names." In one heartbreaking scene, Auster's father buys a small collection of Army surplus items and claims them as he is afraid to disappoint his son with the truth that he had never served in the military. This first part, dotted with serendipities and nearly magical coincidences, recalls Auster's volume of "true stories," "The Red Notebook."

The second section consists of the summaries of two films Auster describes as “blows to the head”: “The Incredible Shrinking Man” and “I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang.” The approach recalls his 1997 book “Hand to Mouth”, in which he recounts the various jobs he took in his 20s and 30s, including writing a synopsis of a screenplay.

The third section collects annotated passages from Auster’s letters to the writer and translator Lydia Davis, his college sweetheart and first wife. The most interesting moment here is that the older Auster realizes the letters were a proxy for a diary. This journal includes the details of his late adolescence and early adulthood. It becomes a door that opens into his past. In his trademark plain prose, Auster explores his parents’ unhappy marriage.

The book’s fourth and final section consists of 64 pages of captioned photos, a visual annotation of the preceding text, and a collection of generic photos to stand in for typical family snapshots. The concept carries the potential for tremendous emotional resonance. These photos include familiar portraits of writers, baseball players, etc.

A brief account of the works of fiction authored by Paul Auster from “Moon Place” to “Report from the Interior” gives us a clear understanding of the influence of the author’s personal life in his literary works. At times, Paul Auster renounces the hesitation in becoming his character himself and plays determinant roles in his own works. Auster’s style of literary articulation serves as a model for many post-modern writers who attempt to involve themselves personally in their literary writings. However, lifting all veils and becoming part and parcel of one’s own literary works by the author cannot be viewed as a simple task in the complex post-modern literary world.

CONCLUSION

It has been much interesting but surprising to go to investigate the autobiographical elements in the works of Paul Auster. In personal life, as a son he never gets the love of a father, but later on in order to show love for his father he used to write about his father. Auster needed his father’s care but both failed to keep up their strong relationship as a father and a son. In most of the works, Paul Auster writes about some incidents that happened in his real life, and through this, he wants the readers to think and live independently or he wants to become a character in his own works. Auster focuses on all these possibilities through his works. In most of his works, the father character is always absent which indicates that his father too was absent in many real-life situations. Auster also describes his grandfather’s life as that of the one who was killed by his own wife. This shows one more fact that Auster’s father was never cared for by his parents and he has not enjoyed his life but fell into a depressed state due to the attitude of his parents and he Anyhow, Auster’s style of writing and narration makes his works more important to the readers to be aware of their existence. In order to exist, Auster began writing incidents from his own life and the blend of tradition and modern themes made his works largely successful.

No writer can interact with literary engagement by avoiding all autobiographical elements from his or her own life. Memories, experiences, struggles, etc often make a writer resourceful and rich in literary communication. Thus, the writings and the life of Paul Auster cannot be easily differentiated as they were intertwined and connected deeply to enrich the way he writes as it happens with many celebrated writers in the world of literature. In fact, art, in any form is prone to reflect the experiences, aspirations, attitudes, and perspectives of the creator.

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