

Narrative Deconstruction and Dystopian Possibilities: Identity, Time, and Space in Paul Auster's 'Man in the Dark'

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Abstract

Auster uses a complicated network of tales in which the presence of a conventional narrator stays elusive and the unique identity of the protagonist becomes mysterious to expertly immerse the reader into his literary works. Paul Auster uses a dual narrative framework in his work "Man in the Dark," with characters whose identities are not entirely clear, to question the veracity of grand stories. Because it tends to ignore the variety of voices present in literary works, Lyotard's theoretical framework on postmodernism scrutinizes the idea of embracing great narratives. Brill and Brick are essentially the same person in the story, although they have different goals and responsibilities. Brill crafts a story well and on purpose, trying to create an imaginary storyline revolving around the persona of Brick. Throughout his investigation into an America that differs from the current political status quo, Brill uses Brick as a surrogate character, a kind of created embodiment of his own identity. The novel's examination of dystopian themes, identity issues, and spatial and temporal confusion serves to highlight the possibilities of storytelling in its many forms. This literary work successfully challenges the truth of tales offered by interrogating the chronological link between the past and the present via the prism of reinterpretations and imaginations. Auster expertly constructs and deconstructs identities and narratives within an American setting in his writing. His skillful writing implies that the hidden or ignored details of these stories weaken the overall story and cast doubt on its veracity.

Keywords: Alternative, Dystopia, Suppressed, Grand-Narrative, Incredulity

Introduction

Paul Auster, born in 1947, is a major figure in American literature for his work as both a writer and a filmmaker. His creative pursuits have profound roots in the postmodernist movement, and he expertly combines the many parts of fiction into a unified whole, full of shifting perspectives and identities. The release of Paul Auster's magnum masterpiece, *The New York Trilogy*, in 1987 was a watershed moment in his distinguished literary career. This seminal book, which captivated readers with its cutting-edge storytelling methods and provocative issues, cemented his status as a postmodernist genius. Auster's writing skill steadily improved with each new book he published, especially 1990's *The Music of Chance* and 2008's *Man in the Dark*. These works demonstrated his unrivaled skill at weaving complicated stories that dive into the depths of human life, further solidifying his status as a leading figure in modern literature. American postmodern critics quickly accepted Auster's books, seeing in them examples of a variety of postmodern and poststructuralist ideas (Dimovitz, 2006). In his writings, Auster explores the weighty problems of his day, including the disintegration of the human soul in the face of the turbulent experiences that shape identity. Paul Auster expertly weaves a story about stories inside the framework of "Man in the Dark," a metafictional novel. Auster creates a fictional protagonist called Owen Brick who falls into a figurative abyss and is forced to commit an assassination on the person responsible for starting the civil war in which they are now entangled. The accused instigator of the altercation is none other than August

Brill, an old man whose life has been ruined by the mental and physical aftereffects of a catastrophic vehicle crash. So, Brill has no choice but to limit himself to a small, poorly lighted chamber where he is literally and figuratively shrouded in nighttime shadows. The work deftly utilizes parallel storylines, neatly splitting the overall plot into Brill's story and Brick's story. Brick, a main character in Brill, suffers from severe amnesia that leaves him unaware of who he is. Brick, motivated by an insatiable curiosity, sets out on a relentless journey to decipher the mysterious events occurring around him in order to discover who he really is and make sense of what is going on. Jahshan (2003) argues that as a writer, Auster leaves the reader and the critic in a constant state of chase as they try to grasp a meaning that stays tantalizingly elusive throughout his work.

Auster deftly interweaves many stories in *Man in the Dark*, probing the complex interplay between the novel's main plot and its tangential subplots. In the context of political beliefs and actions, this dialogue between narratives helps to contest the prevailing one. Auster skillfully creates a parallel world, another America, that makes us examine the central story and how we define ourselves. The protagonist also struggles with a significant identity crisis that is fundamental to the story's development. Auster explores the protagonist's inner world and reveals his effort to repress the epic story that he has always known to be there. However, the memories' dogged persistence and the burden of his conscience gradually overpowered this surface story, giving birth to a new one that is more in tune with his experiences. *Man in the Dark*, by Auster, is a powerful demonstration of how stories can form and reform our perceptions of the world and ourselves. Auster encourages critical examination of the impact of political orientations and actions on the building of personal and social narratives via the research of alternative narratives and the intricacies of identity formation. Lyotard's postmodern theoretical framework, which seeks to undermine overarching narratives, provides a useful prism through which to analyze Auster's examination of potentialities and the probability of alternate conditions at the micro level. At the macro level, a vivid depiction of a political dystopia unfolds, with each possible iteration serving as a painful reflection of the individual's political agency and its consequential influence, finally emerging as a powerful weapon against the individual's own life. Nonetheless, this research, in light of Lyotard's rejection of grand narratives, analyzes Auster's preoccupation with the individual's participation in self-destruction as the root cause of the larger existential crisis. Benziman (2013) claims that Auster uses writing to probe the complicated process of self-formation and deconstruction.

In the field of postmodern philosophy, Jean-Francois Lyotard, a renowned French philosopher who lived from 1924 to 1998, is considered a forefather. His ground-breaking research shook up the industry by boldly calling into question the veracity of grand-narratives and the accepted wisdom on the subject at the time. Lyotard's 1979 classic, *The Postmodern Condition*, explores postmodern discourse and is notable for its introduction of the notion of "incredulity toward metanarratives." Lyotard claims that modern skepticism has reached the point where people no longer hope to find meaning or salvation inside such grand stories (xxv). Particularly within sociology and critical analysis, Lyotard's theoretical framework for the postmodern situation focuses heavy emphasis on the complex interaction between knowledge and the ensuing paradigm shift. Deep "transformations within the setting of the crisis of narratives" have resulted from this ideological shift (Lyotard, xxiii). With all the talk about science and the scientific community's unwavering dedication to the truth as a viable narrative, it is hard not to consider the possibility that scientific knowledge, although crucial, is incomplete. For the purpose of clarity, I will refer to this other kind of information as narrative knowledge, although it has always existed side-by-side with and sometimes battled with scientific knowledge.

When compared to scientific narratives, the credibility of big tales in the area of subjective disciplines is much lower. This is mostly because it is difficult to put a number on the measures related to social narratives. Hello, and thank you for joining us for this fascinating discussion.

Permit me to explore the postmodern narrative world, where the very idea of a tale takes on a fascinating new meaning. To those who see tales through this lens, they are complex expressions of the human mind, skillfully weaved by narrators or affected by ideological institutions that have left their indelible stamp on the composition of the book. Lyotard, in his key book, accurately describes the postmodern situation as a natural distrust of overarching narratives (xxiv). Lyotard uses the term "incredulity" to emphasize the idea that established narratives cannot be automatically deemed legitimate because the truth of a statement describing a concrete reality does not guarantee the ethical soundness of a statement deduced from it. Lyotard's major study from 1979 makes it clear that...

Lyotard (1979) argues that postmodern stories shed conventional narrative conventions over time. Historically significant narrative elements such as protagonists, antagonists, plot twists, and overall goals are losing ground in this setting. Postmodern tales are characterized by a clear implication in which the author deliberately relocates the protagonist, or hero, and questions the veracity of preexisting ideals within larger narrative contexts. Lyotard (1979) argues that exposing oneself to other points of view improves one's ability to spot differences and appreciate similarities. A remarkable phenomena presents itself in the field of postmodern narratives: the acceptance of personal or unique tales that diverge from the usual center. An individual story has less weight here since it is only meaningful when embedded in a web of many others. According to Lyotard's theoretical framework, what we are seeing is the breakdown of the social connection, with the result that social aggregates break down into a collection of isolated individuals. These particles now live in a web of interconnections that is both intricate and fluid to an extent never before seen.

Auster's significant interest with narrative and the baffling nature of identity in his writing is best explained by Lyotard's postmodernist framework, which is especially clear in "Man in the Dark." This book depicts its protagonists and protagonistines as being on two separate journeys: one to discover the hidden layers of their own identities and the other to break free from their shackles. By suppressing certain identities and forming and dismantling others on purpose, we might examine the precariousness of grand narratives, even those about our own mental creations. The subsequent discussion digs deep into the knotty ideas of identity and narrative confusion, political dystopia, a reimagined version of America, and temporal and geographical disorientation. Our investigation will focus on testing and strengthening these hypotheses.

Discussion

Paul Auster's "Man in the Dark" makes use of a narrative approach reminiscent of a collage by skillfully interweaving two main themes. August Brill, playing both protagonist and narrator, begins the story by discussing the complex relationships of his own family. Everyone seems to be living in relative peace, yet they all keep secret a deep pain that comes from the specter of times past. The development of the second story is fascinating to see, with a fascinating interaction that flows naturally into the first. Owen Brick has a fantastical dream that takes place deep inside his mind and takes him to a turbulent environment deep in the throes of the Second Civil War, which previously decimated the United States. The story that follows is, without a doubt, a fabrication born of the narrator's sleepless nights. Auster expertly handles the dueling storylines, presenting them in a way that is both parallel and sometimes connected. The New York-based prologue serves as the main plot and infuses the drama with reality and credibility. The secondary storyline, meanwhile, refers to real-world events like the Iraq War and the horrific events of September 11, while deftly avoiding giving away any location specifics.

Unraveling the novel's complex web of stories and mining its layers of meaning for their hidden depths is a herculean task. Through the deft use of collage, quotes, and conversation, the author is able to weave together various narrative strands that run concurrently with the main plot, thus breaking down its structural unity. This method injects the story with fluidity and instability by

abandoning conventional organizing rules. There seems to be a promising line of inquiry that might provide evidence for the pervasiveness of chance in both the material world and the complexities of human cognition.

The novel's overriding topic is dystopia, and it does this by deftly depicting the contrast between reality and utopia, indicating the lack of either. Brill is now located at his New York apartment, more particularly his daughter's home. Brill has built a story inside the world of his writing that takes readers to a parallel America that lives only in his head. This made-up story delves into the interesting idea of a parallel present, where the results of a political election might have far-reaching consequences for the future. Nonetheless, Brill's story develops as a self-contained narrative inside the larger plot, which revolves mostly on Titus's death in Iraq and the tragic fall of the World Trade Center.

At first, the book's story seems to be based on fact, which is how the novel opens. An old guy who had been just released from a hospital is our protagonist. His daughter and grandchild have both died tragically young. Because of what has happened, he now has to deal with the crippling affects of sleeplessness and hallucinations. The person in issue has a serious problem with staying on topic and constructing reasonable arguments. He says, "I lie in bed and practice the fine skill of telling stories to myself." The aforementioned entities may not be very significant, but they function as a buffer, protecting me from recalling painful past experiences that I would rather forget (16). The narrator claims that the story he is now spinning is an autobiographical account in which he plays several parts that act as guardrails, stopping him from wandering down unproductive avenues. The author wisely admits that concentration is difficult since his mind often wanders away from the story he is trying to tell and toward unwanted ideas (Auster 16). The author tries to convince the reader that he is really interested in telling a story that he has kept buried for a very long time because he is afraid of what he may find there. To this purpose, he makes concerted efforts to recall and bring into the domain of conscious consciousness the kinds of experiences that are more often associated with the unconscious. For the sake of this mental exercise, I would want you to imagine three stories: the larger plot, the protagonist's internal development, and the fascinating story the guy is telling you. Thus, the author's narrative, the narrator's narrative, and the protagonist's narrative all take place in the first person.

As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that it is the heartbreaking account of a man who finds himself trapped in a hole while wearing military garb but has no memory of ever having been in the military. The story of a man named Owen Brick who held the prestigious rank of corporal in the military piques interest because of the unusual coincidence that the storyteller also goes by that name. The tale indicates that the protagonist, despite his claim to be a trustworthy storyteller, is really not trustworthy at all because of his tendency to daydream and his difficulty to retain concentrate due to chronic sleeplessness. In a striking change, the story's narration moves from the first- to the third-person, using the pronoun "he" to tell the account of an individual struggling with a dualistic nature. The author effectively emphasizes the idea that the "he" figure is really the author embodying the narrator function in the novel's second narrative. The narrator, following the rules of narrative structure, becomes the focal point of his own autobiography.

The protagonist then reveals a profound insight, considering the possibility that his entire life has taken place within the four walls of his bedroom, ensnared in a world of such extraordinary clarity and vividness that the line between dreaming and waking life has become indistinguishable. This discovery is a tribute to the protagonist's self-awareness as he analyzes the identification documents in front of him and comes to terms with the fact that he is, in fact, Owen Brick, born in June of 1977. He also learns (Auster 17) that he is married to a lady called Flora and has become a skilled magician. In stories where everything is always changing, the

main character's sense of self is similarly malleable, living somewhere between his former and current selves and the future one he is creating.

The story of the battle and Brick's complicated dilemma may seem like a well constructed fable with no basis in truth. When Sarge Serge unexpectedly finds himself in the depths of the ocean, he reaches out to lend a hand, prompting the profound realization, "So, if I understand correctly, you are positing that this is nothing more than a narrative, a tale being penned by an individual, wherein we all play integral roles" (21). Brick symbolizes an intriguing dichotomy, existing as both a fictitious creation and an actual participant in the unfolding historical battle. As a result, this literary work has not one but two storylines, each of which stands on its own. The first storyline goes into Brill's fascinating backstory, while the second reveals Brick's fascinating origins. Initially, the reader meets the mysterious "guy in the dark," who serves as narrator in this work of literature (Panzani, 2011). Author August Brill depicts his protagonist as an old literary critic who, after a car accident, chooses to spend his time alone in his dingy bedroom. In contrast to the author's genuine attempt to prove Brill's story is true, Brick's story is full of mysteries and fictions. Yet the novel's complex narrative structure, which includes several narratives inside narratives, hints to the intrinsic unreliability of any one overall story.

This book deftly and carefully explores the complexities of the political scene in the wake of September 11th. It deftly interweaves narrative and identity, giving both concepts equal weight within its overarching story. People living in a war-torn country have to make do with brief periods of calm interspersed with constant threats of violence. As a result of the constant turmoil they are subject to identity loss as the unexpected and devastating hits of war leave them reeling from acute confusion. When Brick looks in the mirror and sees himself decked out in full military uniform, he is confused about his identity and where he is. Therefore, he goes to the highly regarded Sargent Serge for clarification. "Such is the prevalent condition of things," he says in answer. The remark "One minute you are living your life, and the next minute you are in the war" (20) captures the swift transformation from the mundane routine of daily existence to the terrifying world of warfare.

Artfully blurring the lines between truth and fiction, this story's rich tapestry weaves together the ethereal concepts of sleep, sleeplessness, and dreams. It is worth noting, however, that the fanciful components are perverted in a way that defies expectations. Brick's depiction of America is like that of a made-up country where a different kind of reality prevails. The question provokes thought on what it might be like if Al Gore were elected president and what it may mean for the United States. Comparable to the airy domain of sleep or the scary realm of nightmares, the discussion at hand goes into the realm of possibilities and the infinite scope of the human imagination. Panzani (2011) describes Brill's business as an intriguing venture that explores the depths of the American Civil War (1861-1865), successfully reviving the horrific memories of a war that divided Americans against their own countrymen. Brick faces out against Brill, the creator of his alter ego, in this counterfactual situation. This idea represents serious thoughts of ending one's life and the innate propensity towards self-destruction. Does Auster believe the United States' military strategy amounts to an act of self-destruction? How does the book represent this idea, specifically? How well does the characters' identity crisis function as a metaphor for the futility of war? Rogobete argues that the events of the year 2000, when the American presidential elections sparked widespread debate, provide a unique viewpoint. There was widespread disenchantment when the Supreme Court proclaimed George W. Bush the winner in the presidential election over Al Gore. This shared disillusionment was the impetus for creating a counterfactual history that speculated on a parallel universe's version of the present. Gonzalez insightfully draws attention to commonalities in themes, plot, and protagonist to prompt musings about Auster's intent in creating an other America. Specifically, an elderly person who, in the face of physical and mental decline, sets out on a journey to find answers in the domain of fantasy. The user just offered a very general, vague description.

Subplots abound throughout the story, especially when Brik and Katya watch movies on DVD. These exchanges provide a forum through which characters may discuss and analyze the events transpiring elsewhere in the story. Randomly placed videos function as semi-narratives that only provide little background information. In his narration of the classic film "The Bicycle Thief," the author gives a concise summary of the plot before moving on to another film classic, "The World of Apu." The later film goes into the experiences of an Indian man who enters into a marriage against his will, presenting him with a number of challenging choices. Indeed, the disjointed stories soothe the pain and unspoken memories that Brik, out of apathy, prefers not to share.

This academic inquiry centers on the novel's latent narrative, which is there but unspoken. Brick states brilliantly, "I find myself recollecting the tale that I began yesterday evening," which sets the tone for our story. When I can not sleep, I try to distract myself with things that do not include sleeping. I like to relax and let my mind wander when lying in bed and telling myself exciting stories. Although none of the aforementioned items is very significant, just having them in my immediate vicinity acts as a mental shield, preventing me from ruminating on a subject I would rather forget (Auster 16). Brick has a tendency to suppress a crucial story from his past, one that he has pushed to the margins of his mind on purpose. In the book's last chapters, González (2011) deftly explores the narrative's hidden layers, revealing the truth about August's complex relationship with his late wife, Sonia. The person in issue cheated on Sonia with another, younger woman, and eventually ended their relationship with Sonia. Reconciliation occurred nine years after the first act of betrayal, but the person still struggles with guilt and shame over their behavior. Brik's graphic description of the tragedy that "has stubbornly escaped my efforts to flee throughout the whole night" (Auster 168), his recurring nightmares about Titus, had once again entangled him. Titus offers a string of petty excuses for staying out of the Iraq war, while Brick feels deeply responsible for how his life turns out. Given the above, Brik's contrasting identities in American and native settings function as the outside layer of a story that intentionally departs from his actual experiences, which he hides deep inside his unconscious.

The story's overarching topic is time and space travel confusion. Brick is in the middle of an uncharted route, passing through a world where most people do not seem to notice his existence. In spite of this dismal truth, Brick finds some comfort in a chance meeting with an elderly lady who tells him that nobody really cares where he is. Brick, though, is still determined to find out all there is to know about himself, thanks to his unquenchable curiosity. In addition, he has doubts about how long he will stay in Wellington when he considers the possibility of moving there. When it comes to this issue, I have my doubts. Auster (34), a writer, lyrically mulls on time's passing, reflecting the ambiguity and changeability that comes with it. Perhaps for a day, perhaps for a week, perhaps for all of eternity; the expression "maybe a night, perhaps a week, perhaps all of eternity" captures the fleeting quality of life well. By using this intriguing phrase, Auster urges his readers to consider the fleeting and illusive nature of time. In the restaurant, Molly responds to his assertion by pointing out the speaker's lack of time awareness: "your elucidation on the topic lacks accuracy" (Auster 34). The novel's examination of time and space supports the idea that these dimensions are less important than they once were. While Brick's conflict is strikingly similar to the U.S. military's involvement in Iraq, Molly reveals an intriguing plot twist in which New York, asserting its autonomy, initiates a belligerent campaign against neighboring states. Brick's plot is, at heart, a metaphor for the violent civil war that broke out inside the United States's constituent states. Artfully reflecting the real-life conflict between American and Iraqi citizens, it depicts the struggles of underrepresented populations and political groups. War is a notion whose significance extends well beyond the confines of either time or space. When war breaks out, people get enmeshed in a web of antagonism in which they struggle not just against one another but also against their own best

selves. Lyotard argues that it is crucial to examine the effect of narrative information on the temporal axis in great detail. Auster uses a non-linear storytelling approach throughout the book, playing deftly with the time confusion around the Brick. The book does this by skilfully switching between many tales, which adds complexity to its chronological framework.

Brick uses time as a metaphor to take us to a world that is quite different from our own and features an America that is very different from what we know now. Brick asks Molly,

if I said the words September eleventh to you, would they have any special meaning?

Not particularly.

And the World Trade Center?

The twin towers? Those tall buildings in New York?

Exactly.

What about them?

They're still standing?

Of course they are. What's wrong with you? (Auster 35)

Possibility of a Substitute The United States seems to be a country facing several challenges. In the actual world, the Iraq War is the dominant story, but in the fictional world where Brick is the protagonist, the war between the countries represents a dystopian landscape full of unequal possibilities.

Brick asks Molly about the Iraq war,

Lifting his head and looking Molly straight in the eyes, Brick asks her a final question:

And there is no war in Iraq, is there?

If you already know the answer, why ask you?

I just had to be sure. Forgive me. (Auster 35)

It becomes apparent that Brick has a keen understanding of the grand story that underpins our world. One may argue that his questions would be meaningless if this is not the case. The idea of a parallel narrative portraying a battle between American states offers a fascinating alternate future for the United States. The book draws attention to the unavailability of utopia by imagining a world in which a different president is in charge, and it explores the many various ways in which the big narratives of human history may have played out in such a society. Auster's investigation of time and space in the book serves to challenge accepted epistemological models by splicing together the spatial dichotomy of internal and external worlds with the temporal dichotomy of the past and the present.

The novel's main focus is on thinking about the big stories that shape our world, such war and natural disasters. It encourages us to think beyond the box, which calls for the dismantling of prevailing grand narratives and the investigation of viable alternative ones. Scholarly discussion indicates a widespread faith in the existence of an Infinite God, a being with infinite potential who can create an infinite number of universes. By deftly blending a metafictional discourse with a meta-cinematographic story, renowned novelist Paul Auster masterfully expands the possibilities of his fictional world. This well implemented method adds complexity and depth to the overall plot by integrating supplementary storylines into the greater structure of the work (Rogobete). The novel's central narrator, however, skilfully shifts between a variety of unresolved micro-narratives. Amazingly, the narrator is able to keep his own tale going while weaving in all these other stories, each of which provides a deeper perspective on his own life.

Conclusion

Auster's "Man in the Dark" skillfully combines two stories into one, while also alluding to a larger, hidden story that includes the protagonist's life. This literary piece depicts August Brill's life in New York City as he struggles with the frustrating condition of sleeplessness. Brill, seeking relief from the weight of his memories, sets out on a narrative journey that weaves together the story of Brick, a young man suffering from profound amnesia that leaves him with no memory of his own identity beyond the fragments found in official documentation. The study delved into complex topics including narrative and identity ambiguity, as well as dystopian aspects, time and space confusion. Two stories, running in tandem, explored these ideas and provided an intriguing look into America's potential future.

Auster expertly depicts a political dystopia in his work, which both reflects society's profound disillusionment with present political currents and demonstrates the universality of moral dilemmas. This claim suggests that these stories had already taken form in Auster's mind, with some being motivated by personal events, and that they are again emphasized in Rogobete, highlighting his contemplative life and discontentment with both reality and its alternatives. The main difficulty was in figuring out how to link personal experiences and recollections with larger political and military events. In a subtle examination of the American experience, Auster expresses his dissatisfaction with the grandiose speeches of politicians, whose idealistic choices frequently end in a sad dystopian reality, without being overt about it.

Through Paul Auster's examination of identity ambiguity and the existence of various fragmented narratives, we see that his protagonist, Brill, is a person whose creativity and attention have led to a shattered sense of self. It is clear throughout the voyage that the protagonist's life and experiences are challenging and rewarding in equal measure. Auster's rejection of conventional narrative conventions like straightforward plot development, accurate character representation, and satisfying denouement is on full display in Brick's portrayal, in the meticulously created persona and the unresolved story around him. Russell (1990) claims that Auster's works have the impressive capacity to dismantle logocentrism. Auster's body of work effectively explores the complex relationship between fictitious and real-world identities via the lens of fictional characters. By digging into the unconscious, where traumatic memories are typically buried, this kind of storytelling highlights the great awareness that humans have of important events.

Particularly in Brick and Brill's lives, the book uses a purposeful interplay of temporal and geographical confusion. These examples illustrate what may have happened if certain events had gone differently, and hence serve as prospective or alternative stories. Auster alludes obliquely to potential outcomes resulting from other actions. Writers' capacity to mould and mold their creations in a variety of ways is on full display in the deliberate placement of characters inside distinct tales. Therefore, it is clear that depicting a utopian realm is still impossible, since it depends on the work of people who form this world as a whole. Furthermore, it becomes clear that there cannot be a single story or overarching grand-narrative since it would be unable to effectively include the many viewpoints and experiences of the people involved. Brill's reveal of the hidden history acts as a spark, displacing the status quo with its own great story. In light of Brill's revelation, it seems that all other narrative threads inside the plot are essentially subnarratives.

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