

The Journey of Fragmented Self in Paul Auster’s *Moon Palace*

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 3

Month: April

Year: 2025

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

Citation:

Priyanga, S., and K. Rajkumar. “The Journey of Fragmented Self in Paul Auster’s *Moon Palace*.” *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2025, pp. 212–14

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12iS3-Apr.9092>

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Abstract

Paul Auster’s Moon Palace reflects the social change in terms of self- discovery, societal norms and personal transformation. The protagonist Marco Stanley Fogg faces trauma and loss at the early stage of his life. His emotional and psychological journey begins with the loss of his mother which leads to the fragmentation of his self. His traumatic experiences reflect the uncertainty and emotional detachment in his life. His attempt to reconstruct the sense of self mirrors the inner world of Marco, his search for meaning and identity. Moon Palace portrays the complexities of life, relationships, and empathy to understand the process of self-reconstruction in the face of loss. This paper attempts to examine the psychological consequences of trauma, the fragmented self and the reintegration of the self. The journey of Marco presents both the internal and external forces leading to the fragmented self and identity.

Keywords: Trauma, Journey, Fragmentation, Self, Identity, Reconstruction, Reintegration

Introduction

American literature encompasses the history, culture and ethnicities of America. It promotes American society with rich and varied literary tradition. The Native American literature begins with the oral traditions of history, myths and beliefs of the indigenous peoples of America followed by the written literature. Then it significantly evolved over time, periods include colonialism, enlightenment, revolution, gothic, romanticism, transcendentalism, realism, naturalism, modernism, postmodernism and contemporary literature. These literary movements impacted on American history contributed to the development of American Literature and Society. Some of the famous American novelists are Samuel Richardson, Herman Melville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edward Eggleston, Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, Henry James, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, Don Delillo, Saul Bellow and so on. Most of the American literature themes focus on identity, freedom, social injustice, inequality, war, conflict and so on. Postmodernism explores the themes of fragmentation and skepticism, reflecting on the complexities of modern life.

Author and his Works

Paul Auster was an American author, poet, essayist, novelist, translator and screen writer. His novel portrays the complexities of human life featuring the mysteries concerning the search for meaning and identity. He was born on February 3, 1947 in U.S. and died on April 30, 2024 in New York. He graduated from Columbia University. His fictional works are *The Music of Chance*, *The New York Trilogy*, *Moon Palace*, *Leviathan*, *Mr. Vertigo*, *The Book of Illusions*, *Oracle Night*, *The Brooklyn Follies*, *Travels in the Scriptorium*, *Man in Dark* and *Sunset Park*. Marco Stanley Fogg's personal history and his search for meaning in this fragmented world after the death of his parents, navigates his journey, inner turmoil, experiences and evolution. He confronts his past and understands the worldview in shaping one's identity. It contemplates on the search for meaning in life. The themes of loss, love, survival and unpredictability of life dealt in this novel.

Paul Auster's *Moon Palace* was published in the year 1989. This novel deeply rooted with the theme of identity, concentrated through the lens of fragmentation and self- discovery. The protagonist, Marco Stanley Fogg, embarks on a journey of self-identity that mirrors the sense of self. The theme of the depiction of loss, abandonment and the psychological turmoil portrays the fragmented identity. This paper aims to explore the fragmented self in the novel *Moon Palace* focusing on the struggles of healing and reconstructing the self amidst chaos.

Fragmented Self

The term fragmented self is often associated with the psychoanalytic theory, existential philosophy and the postmodern literary criticism. In this context, the fragmented self arises due to trauma, loss, identity crises and existentialism. In Kafka's *The metamorphosis*, Gregor's transformation and struggle to attain human form exemplifies the fragmented self. Due to societal changes, characters face fragmentation. Some of the fragmented narratives include Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*, Cervante's *Don Quixote*, Lawrence stern's *Tristram Shandy* and so on. In the context of postmodernism, individuals influenced by social, cultural and technological factors struggle with multiple identities. The fragmented self often leads to breakdown of identity and disconnected experiences in facing reality. Philosophers like Jean- Francis Lyotard and Michael Foucault contributed to the fragmentation of self in their writings.

Marco's personal tragedies, his parental loss, trauma, isolation, existential crises prompts the fractured nature of his identity amidst psychological fragmentation. Marco's early life begins with the trauma of loss of his mother, resulted to live a life as an orphan and the abandonment of parental caring at the early stage of his life arouses emotional and psychological fragmentation. He was raised by his uncle, feels alienated from the world, the lack of parental guidance and care impacts the fragmented self in himself. He struggles to overcome from his trauma, loses his identity. He relies on literature and his work at bookstore, creates self- awareness, sense of identity and existence to cope up with the self and the world.

I felt myself slipping into something that was neither one thing nor another, something that was not me, but something like me. And the more I thought about it, the more I began to realize that I had no idea who I was, or what I was doing here. It was as if I had been scattered across the landscape, my thoughts broken into pieces, my identity nowhere to be found. (57)

Marco feels emotionally hollow inside him. He fears of abandonment and loss in his inner world after the death of his uncle, Victor. His relationship with his father and his death prolonged with trauma and inability to move on fragments his identity. He feels emptied inside the self filled with chaotic and echoes of unattainable connections.

It took me a long time, but eventually I realized that I couldn't live as a man who had no past, no future, no direction. I began to piece together the fragments of my life, not to make a perfect

whole, but to create something that made sense to me. The world wasn't as it once seemed, but that didn't mean I couldn't find a way to live within it. Slowly, I put together a new self, a self that was different, yes, but one that could move forward. It wasn't about returning to who I had been; it was about learning to live with what I had become. (202)

Marco begins to reconstruct his fragmented self to re-evaluate the sense of wholeness. He attempts to patch the scattered pieces of identity to create sense of self. He reconciles the parts of his life together in the process of journey towards reintegration.

Conclusion

Marco's journey in search for the quest for reintegration of the fragmented self formulates to reconstruct the sense of self. Marco is forced to confront his past, unraveling his identity which discloses his family's history. His encounter with his grandfather is full of mystery and tragedy. It helps him to reconstruct and redefine himself. His setbacks, struggles, existence generates the process of reintegration. Marco's journey in *Moon Palace* reflects the fragmented self and self discovery. The acceptance of loss, self-awareness, reconstruction of meaning contemplates on reintegration. It is not easy to restore from the fragmented self but Marco reclaims his sense of self shows the continual process of self- reconstruction.

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