



REVERSE JOURNEY IN PAUL AUSTER'S *THE MUSIC OF CHANCE*

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Abstract

This paper explores the reverse journey of the protagonist faced during the cycle of events that helps him reassess the identities and examines the concept of reverse journey in Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance*. Jim Nashe, a former fireman, spends his fortune lavishly travelling to and forth in America. He meets Jack Pozzi, a Poker game player, lives a carefree life. Nashe confronts setbacks in life, decides to live his life without meticulous thinking or planning. He focuses on the path of freedom, discovery, choices and decision leads him into the deeper entanglement of circumstances, reveals the reality of societal expectation and self-realization. This paper attempts to contemplate the past journey and understands the reality of life in this unpredictable world.

Keywords: *journey, identity, reverse, chance, discovery, transformation, fate*

Introduction

Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance* was published in the year 1990. This novel finalised for the PEN/Faulkner Award for fiction in the year 1991. Paul Auster is a contemporary American writer, poet, novelist, memoirist and filmmaker. Some of his notable works *The New York Trilogy*, *Moon Palace*, *The Music of Chance*, *The Book of Illusions*, *The Brooklyn Follies*, *The Sunset Park*, *4 3 2 1*, *Invisible* and *Winter Journal*. His books translated into forty languages. In this novel *The Music of Chance*, Paul Auster explores the theme of fate, chance and the randomness of human existence. The main protagonist Jim Nashe encounters a poker game player, Jack Pozzi, and the combination of these characters involve playing game with two wealthy parties leads to face tragedies in their life. Nashe and Pozzi's journey deals with resolution, confronts and dives into deeper complex situation of life.

Overview of *The Music of Chance*

Nashe, a former firefighter, in order to escape from his past, starts a new life to regain control over his life. Nashe left by his wife, decides to raise his two-year old daughter at his sister's place. He visits his daughter once in six months, pays debts with inheritance money, bought a car and travels across the country with full freedom. He meets Pozzi, a poker game player and ends up facing misfortune and debts losing hope and confidence. The two millionaires induce them to lose all their possessions. Nashe instead of confronting his past, he indulges in confusion. Choices are often uncontrollable forces behind every

action and reaction. The inability to escape from his own desires in gambling and his impulses trapped him in chaos.

Retrospection and Introspection

In Reverse journey, retrospection is tracing the reflecting of the past experiences and actions whereas introspection is examining the own thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviour. In this novel *The Music of Chance*, retrospection in Jim Nashe traces the reflection of the past and introspection analysis his self. Nashe's journey implies revisiting the past to understand in retracing thoughts, decisions and actions. As both retrospection and introspection interact with one another closely helps in personal growth and understanding. It is the tool for confrontation consciously in reshaping the future. Nashe registers in his diary about the wall, the stones, the building and its day-by-day progress represents his parallel thoughts and emotions, a travel of time into the past experiences. His intimate thoughts, decisions and journey resembles his self- analysis of construction and deconstruction of both the wall and his mind. The physical confinement parallels with mental confinement expressed in his diary serves as outsource of revealing the inner self of his journey. At first, when the two millionaires demanded to build the wall forcibly, Nashe assumed it would be easy to finish the task. But the thought differs from reality when experiencing the weight on the own. The next morning, Nashe and Pozzi learned that building the wall was not as simple as they had imagined. (Auster 1990, 112)

Nashe without Pozzi, drifted as other option is left, unless the debt vanishes when the wall is done completely. He assumes, Now, little by little, he was beginning to suspect that he had been wrong (Auster 1990, 185). He decided to focus on the present rather dwelling on the past, he decides,

The best way to handle it was to do nothing, he decided, just go on working and ignore the whole business... (Auster 1990, 187)

Reverse Journey in *The Music of Chance*

The Reverse journey is a psychological one rather than a physical one. The reverse Journey is a process of rediscovering. When thinking back, a clear view of journey reflected where all sorts of experiences along with regret break one's journey. It becomes a historical context, impacts on the complex issues and challenges faced in the process of decision making. This backward journey always bridges the gap between past memories and future opportunities.

The reverse journey appears in many works of literature, refers to moving backward in time or idea of returning to the starting point. It often deals with self-discovery and reflection. It also confronts the unresolved aspects of the past. It is a sort of journey to revisit the previous stages of life of characters retracing their steps. Some of the literary works deals with reverse journey are Homer's *Odyssey*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Cormac Mccarthy's *The Road*, James Joyce's *Ulysses* and so on.

In Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance*, the novel explores the concept of reverse journey. In Literature, the journey of the characters path delves into the quest for goal or purpose in life which results in personal transformation. Auster's characters in this novel attain entrapment and regression in their journey. Nashe and Pozzi's life begins with the journey of freedom. It reflects through their thoughts and actions. This intention escorts them in building a stone wall, ended with endless loop of trap that deprives them completely. Their attempt to gain financial stability and control over circumstances herald losing everything they owned and falls into debts. It illustrates the inability to break free from the situation and entangled in trap beyond control. Nashe and Pozzi's characters delineate the reverse journey motif.

Nashe and Pozzi lost in poker game with two millionaires and ended up things beyond their control. The effort to gain control over financial means reinforces them to escape from their fate. The poker game itself is an unpredictable and uncontrollable entity. The predictability of winning is to attain power and money. The sense of helplessness and regression prevails if lost. The obsession in game oblige individuals to suffer loss.

If nothing else, Nashe felt certain that he had come to a turning point, that no matter what happened in the game that night, his days on the road had come to an end. (Auster 1990, 53- 54).

The interplay of chance and fate are the backbone of the reverse journey. Nashe and Pozzi's lives dominated not by choices but by external forces. As a result, they experience regression and fall into the spiral of loss rather than fulfilment. Usually, in literature, the protagonist faces trials and finally transformed in his/ her journey. In *The Music of Chance*, Nashe and Pozzi's journey does not follow this pattern. Instead of acquiring enlightenment they remain trapped. The reverse journey reinforces the growth and realization of the individuals.

The reverse journey in the novel delineates the return to previous point of time or an attempt to undo or understand past events or decisions. In certain aspects, the choices shape the events. In reverse journey, recollecting the past and rectifying is a futile process. The effort to reverse time and actions is inherently absurd. A reverse journey re-examines the belief systems. It represents a deeper internal journey and analyzes the meaning of past actions. The act of reconciling with the past in present is a difficult journey because it questions the emotional beliefs. A reverse journey acts as an agent between past and present, either leads to realizations or blocks the forward path. In reverse journey, revisiting the past and choices reflects the perception but cannot alter the path. The positive note in reverse journey is the new understanding of what is done, paves way for self- determination and chance.

Reverse journey from psychological perspective associated with deep introspective process traces the thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviours backward to their origins. It is a psychodynamic reflection exploring the past to understand the present patterns illustrates the process of decoding the past. Reverse journey is an evolutionary process and instead of dwelling onto the past, it assists to shape the future better. The very first line of the novel presents the absurd behaviour of Nashe as,

For one whole year he did nothing but drive, traveling back and forth across America as he waited for the money to run out. (Auster 1990, 1)

Nashe's outer journey of roaming across America fails to satisfy the inner journey. The inner or reverse journey is tangled with loss of self and disconnection. His failed relationship strikes unconsciously tracing emptiness which acts as he leaves his daughter and opted to pursue freedom. He spends his inheritance without proper plan dismantling his responsibility. The reverse journey into the self, mirrors the repetition of unresolved inner conflicts that drives his recklessness.

After three or four months, he had only to enter the car to feel that he was coming loose from his body, that once he puts his foot down on the gas and started driving, the music would carry him into a realm of weightlessness. (Auster 1990, 17)

Pozzi, a professional player remains as a symbol of young and energetic man who indulges in poker game. His choice and decision represent vitality and control over his life ruled by randomness. He descends into realization as luck outsmarts him and stripped from illusion, forced him to confront vulnerability. When he lost in game with millionaires, his illusion of obtaining victory is shattered. But

he had to win. If he lost, that would be the end of it (Auster 1990, 94). His reverse journey illustrates his psychological regression.

Nashe and Pozzi chase freedom and chance but they are pulled back into confinement and inevitability. Auster portrays the two-dimensional sides through the characters of Nashe and Pozzi reflecting their reverse journey and exposure.

His money was gone, his car was gone, his life was in a shambles ... It was almost a relief to have the decision taken out of his hands, to know that he had finally stopped running. (Auster 1990, 100)

Nashe on building the meaningless wall retraces his past and steps back on reflecting his past decisions. These backward experience serves with personal retrospection traces the choices in reverse to gain insights, healing and direction to find out the way. When tracing backwards, Nashe identifies his realization of major life change and understands his journey. There are two possible ways to get rid of the circumstances. One is probably to escape from the trouble but it is impossible to escape from Murks, the watch guards and from their eyes. Every action and move were monitored and it leaves no gateway to escape. The next possible way is the only solution that is to complete the meaningless wall and then leaving the place at the earliest.

Nashe and Pozzi adopted two ways of leaving the place. As Nashe does the building work at day time, digs a secret passage in the place where they currently stay escaping murk's eyes. But this decision and action exert a tragic event for Pozzi as he falls victim. He escapes through the passage, got hold by Murks and was beaten to death. This incident affects Nashe psychologically as he was also sole responsible for the cause. Pozzi's impatience and Nashe's eagerness to leave the place teaches a bitter journey. Upon the next way, Nashe sticks to complete the meaningless wall, a worst experience that shoulders on him to bear full responsibility. He would never have a better chance to escape, and he wasn't going to squander the opportunity. (Auster 1990, 159)

Reverse journey in this context helps one to reflect on the present circumstances when rewinding the past actions and decisions to avoid the previous experience and misfortune. Auster portrays his characters as they turn from responsible to irresponsible after being abandoned by their own family. His life becomes irreversible as his decisions cornered him to the truth of being lost than he won.

Conclusion

In this novel, *The Music of Chance*, Paul Auster explores the reverse journey with vivid human condition, limitations of individual and randomness of existence. Through the experiences of Nashe and Pozzi, their journey reveals the pursuit of control and unpredictability of life. Nashe understands the pros and cons of decision making and reflects on mistakes done. But it is too late to regret. The two millionaires detained Nashe and Pozzi in building a wall with no chance to escape. Nashe's freedom turns into confinement paves way to understand the role of chance and fate in exploring the transformation. Transformation bridges the gap between the past and present. This paper examines through the lens of reverse journey and re-examines the past happenings that delivers realization of the characters in this novel.

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