

Research Article

A Postmodern Study Of Selected Novels Of Paul Auster

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Abstract

The term Postmodern literally means "after what is now," according to Latin etymology. It refers to a philosophical and cultural movement whose basic assumption is the rejection of all "meta-narratives"—modes of thinking that bring together knowledge and experience in the search for, and provision of, a final, universal truth. Postmodernism is famously difficult to describe, in part because understanding modernism is required before understanding postmodernism, and modernism and modernity are difficult to define in and of themselves. According to postmodernists, modernity is defined by a unified mind-set that is hard to preserve in today's culturally varied and divided globe. Postmodernism, on the other hand, accepts a variety of viewpoints and often refuses to favour one "truth claim" over another. Provisional, decentred, local 'petit recits' replace utopian aspirations of universally applicable truths, pointing only to other ideas and cultural artefacts, themselves open to interpretation and reinterpretation, rather than to an underlying universal Truth.

Keywords: *Postmodern, modernity, visual media, exodus, universal truth, canonical, artefacts.*

Individuals' roles, particularly their bodies and actions, are stressed above conventional or canonical forms of knowledge. Rather of being tested against all-encompassing universal patterns, knowledge is understood based on one's own local experiences. In this way, postmodernity owes a lot to its related school of thought, post-structuralism or deconstruction, which aims to disrupt the connection between language and the things it refers to. In the arts, this has emerged as decontextualized "cut-ups" of sound and visual media.

Postmodernists are frequently sceptical of the Enlightenment's endeavour to understand the nature of truth and reality. The works of French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard provide some of the most remarkable examples of this scepticism. In his book *Simulations*, he claims that social "reality" in the traditional sense no longer exists, and that it has been replaced by a continuous stream of simulacra. The mass media, as well as other forms of mass cultural production, constantly appropriate and re-contextualize known cultural symbols and imagery, essentially changing one's perception away from "reality" and toward "hyperreality."

Paul Auster, like other postmodernist authors, is a deeply embedded writer. He is regarded as one of America's most prominent postmodern writers, whose works frequently combine realism, experimentation, sociology, absurdism, existentialism, and crime fiction. Pastiche, intertextuality, artistic dignity, and the apparition of Auster himself in his works, such as *City of Glass* (1985), are all characteristics of his work. *The New York Trilogy* (2015), *Moon Palace* (1989), *The Music of Chance* (1990), *The Book of Illusions* (2002), and *The Brooklyn Follies* (2002) all deal with the search for identity and self-discovery (2005). "The bulk of Auster's fictional protagonists appear to be replicas of himself, and he usually blends parts of reality and fiction within his novels." Auster creates postmodern autobiographies in this sense, and his characters reflect his own experiences" (Martin 5). In Auster's

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writings, the fuzzy lines between truth and fiction lead to scepticism and a lack of cohesive assurance. Auster distances himself from authorial authenticity by employing specific narrative perspectives in his writings. Auster's view of chance also validates his status as a self-aware postmodern novelist. Auster's books are mostly situated in *New York City*. Meanwhile, Auster's works allude to the postmodern concept of urban exodus. "His novels, written in isolation rather than in solidarity, address issues like as the ego, the nature of language, and the power of storytelling." "Probably the most important cultural critic working in English today," according to Fredric Jameson (1934), an American literary critic and Marxist political theorist. He analyses contemporary cultural trends in architecture, science fiction, nineteenth-century novels, film, philosophy, and experimental avant-garde art, among other things: "Jameson's work has done more than any other thinker to form our perception of ourselves as an evolving global civilization." At Duke University, Jameson is a professor of Comparative Literature and Romance Studies (French). He received the Modern Language Association's Sixth Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement. Jameson, according to Adam Roberts (1965), is the world's premier spokesman of Marxist ideology. "Jameson is first and primarily a Marxist thinker, and the bulk of his work has directly or indirectly dealt with the traditions of Marxist thinking in the twentieth century," he writes, analysing Marxist principles via his postmodernist writings. Jameson argues in his book *Political Unconscious* (1981) that postmodernism is a cultural dominant rather than a style. In his opinion, several characteristics of postmodern works, including literature, are gone, one of which is historicity. Postmodernity, he claims, has turned the historical past into a succession of emptied-out stylization that can be commodified and devoured. In fact, he considers historical deafness to be one of the postmodern era's symptoms. However, he feels that postmodern thought is a frantic attempt to make sense of the era, but it rejects old means of comprehension "History is another one of those code terms, like allegory, that Jameson relies on throughout his work, attaching to it his own special set of valences," he says of his interpretation of both reading (consumption) and writing (creation) of literary texts (Buchanan 58). According to Adam Roberts (1965) in his book *Fredric Jameson* (2000), people must understand that interpretation must be rooted in a sense of history, they must be aware of how commodification dominates today's culture, and they must have a deep sense of the past in order to understand the world accurately. Returning to Auster, it is worth noting that his works hold a unique position in modern American literature. Through his fiction, he passionately engages in discussion with other texts, such as the American Renaissance or the works of European writers such as Kafka. Many of his fictional characters and scenes in his works are based on true events, and the impact in later novels is one of misleading realism: "At the same time, Auster's fictions are, if anything, overdetermined, full of allusions and connections to other books and writers." Even if such were not the case, claiming that his writings "came from the actual world" would be questionable. Given that Auster is a postmodern author whose works depict a postmodern world and postmodern man, as well as postmodernism's qualities, it is possible to study his works using Jamesonian terms of postmodernism such as pastiche. After all, Auster's outstanding work *The New York Trilogy* (2015) may be explored via the Jamesonian idea of pastiche. These questions appear to be important based on the above argument: Is it possible to analyse Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (2015) in light of Jameson's idea of pastiche? To what degree does *The New York Trilogy* (2015) adhere to Jameson's definition of pastiche? To what degree does *The New York Trilogy* (2015) adhere to Jameson's definition of pastiche? Is it possible to apply this principle to all three stories? Auster's appearance as a character in the narrative serves what purpose? Is he to be misunderstood by the author? What is the relationship between the novel's metafictionality and the novel's pastiche? "The past as referent finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts," Jameson writes in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), believing that pastiche will cause readers to lose their connection to history, which will turn into a series of styles and superseded genres, or simulacra, "the past as referent finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts. To what degree does the novel break from the detective genre's historical roots? Is Auster able to maintain a crucial distance from the source material? To take a quick look at Fredric Jameson's (1934) concept of postmodernism, it can be said that his work on the subject is one of the most influential analyses on

which he has offered a particularly significant analysis in his books, particularly in his magisterial one, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). As mentioned in this book, postmodernism is primarily seen as a style that describes the logic of current culture and literature with certain notable distinctions from the modern era: "This is precisely why I believe it is critical to understand Postmodernism as a cultural dominant, rather than a style: a theory that allows for the presence and persistence of a variety of quite distinct, though subordinate, traits." Postmodernism, he claims, may be described as the current period when history is regarded in an age when historical thought is forgotten. Postmodernism may now either unveil or sufficiently block and redirect certain fundamental irrepressible historical motives. Postmodernism, according to Jameson, seeks out breaks and events rather than new worlds; it seeks out modifications and permanent changes in how things are represented and how they change. Unlike modernism, which focuses on the objects themselves, postmodernism focuses on the variations and treats the contents as pictures. Postmodernism is a totally human world in which the modernization process is complete and nature has vanished; in his opinion, culture has become a product, and postmodernism is the process of utter commodification consumption. In reality, postmodernism is the superstate's way of life. This notion is related to Karl Marx's (1818-1883) idea of commodity fetishism, as well as Horkheimer's (1895-1973) and Adorno's (1895-1973) ancient concepts of cultural industry (1903-1969). In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson (1934), who is highly critical of the current historical situation and emphasises several times that his conception of postmodernism is historical rather than merely stylistic, pinpoints some specific symptoms and associates them with postmodernism; among them, a breakdown of the distinction between high and low culture, the erosion (geopolitical aesthetic), The schizophrenic self, a fragmenting, eclectic schizophrenia in place of the modernist unifying paranoia, the waning of affect, a whole new type of emotional ground tone, depthlessness, lack of historicity, pastiche, and so on, mutation in built space (cognitive mapping), breakdown of the signifying chain in the use of language, schizophrenic self, a fragmenting, eclectic schizophrenia in place of the modernist unifying paranoia, the wan Pastiche, which is a copy of a weird style and opposed to Linda Hutcheon's idea of postmodern parody, is one of the essential conceptions of postmodernism in Jameson's perspective (1947). Unlike Jameson, Hutcheon supports postmodern culture and sees parody as a sophisticated recycling of old forms. Hutcheon favours parodic self-reflexivity in postmodern writing, thinking it an implicit political critique and historical awareness, in contrast to Jameson, who defines postmodern parody as blank parody with no political objective. Pastiche, according to Jameson, has supplanted mockery in the postmodern period: "Pastiche is, like parody, the copying of a special or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speaking in a dead language." However, it is a neutral practise of such mimicry, free of parody's ulterior objectives, devoid of the satiric urge, and devoid of laughing ". He sees this return to blank parody as a step back from modernism, when individual authors were primarily identified by their distinct and distinctive styles: "Modernist styles... become postmodernist codes" in postmodern pastiche, on the other hand, leaving individuals with nothing but "a field of stylistic and discursive variety without a standard." As a result, postmodern cultural outputs are on the rise "the cannibalism of all previous styles, the game of stylistic allusion at random". People lose their connection to history in such a world of pastiche, and history reverts to a succession of styles, genres, or simulacra. This concept is also used by Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), who, like Jameson, is highly critical of the current historical situation; indeed, he paints a dystopic picture of the present and links it to a loss of people's connection to history: "The new spatial logic of the simulacrum can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time." People can no longer perceive the past except as a storehouse of genres, styles, and codes available for commodification in such a setting, where "the past as referent finds itself steadily bracketed, and eventually effaced entirely, leaving us with nothing but words." Pastiche in *The New York Trilogy* (2015) is a fantastic collection of three stories by Auster, including *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986), and *The Locked Room* (1986). This book has been classified as a detective storey. He is claimed to combine the classic elements of the detective genre with postmodernism's experimental, metafictional, and sarcastic elements. Auster examines the main characters' shifting identities in this storey. At the same time, he explores the disparity between the

physical author, the person who has signed his name on the cover, and the true author (material derived directly from the author's personal experiences). Auster wrote a philosophical apologue about a solitary guy and his subconscious mind in his debut storey, *City of Glass* (1985). *The second tale, Ghosts* (1986), is a detective fiction about a guy who is obliged to follow his own trail. The last tale, *The Locked Room* (1986), is an autobiography written by an unknown acquaintance about a missing writer. Despite the fact that the storylines and writing styles are diametrically opposed, they are all part of a single plot that is concluded in *The Locked Room* (1986). The author's pen name in *City of Glass* (1985) is William Wilson, which is also the title of one of Edgar Allan Poe's (1809-1849) short works. The opening phrase of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* is represented by the narrator's name and the absent author in *The Locked Room* (1986). (1851). After all, *The New York Trilogy* (2015) is the poster child for postmodern literature. It's open-ended, yet the storylines appear to be finished. An Overview of the *City of Glass* *Ghosts* (1986) and *The Locked Room* (1986) appear to be detective films, as does *City of Glass* (1985). In the first narrative, Daniel Quinn, a traditional detective fiction author who is mistaken for a detective, Paul Auster, is trailing Peter Stillman, a philosopher and former criminal. This philosopher had spent twenty years in prison for isolating his son from human speech and touch for seven years in order to carry out a weird language deprivation experiment in order to find the primal language of innocence. Quinn is meant to be following him and keeping his son away from him. *City of Glass* is a Jamesonian mash-up. Despite the fact that Quinn, the protagonist, is the creator of mystery books in which he creates a "private eye-narrator, Max Work," who solves a number of cases, this is not a true detective narrative. In detective fiction, there is a mystery that the detector finally solves. However, the true mystery in this novel is the identity of the main character. In truth, the novel's format is a parody of the detective genre, transforming it into a philosophical one. "*The New York Trilogy: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction*," written by Alison Russell (1958) and published in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* in 1990, claims that "the three novels comprising the Trilogy-*City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room*-are essentially retelling the same storey." All three use and deconstruct traditional detective narrative themes, culminating in a recursive linguistic exploration of language's nature, use, and meaning." The narrator claims at the start of the first narrative that Quinn's knowledge of the crime is no more than that of regular people. Quinn, like most individuals, has little knowledge of criminality. He'd never killed someone or stolen anything, and he didn't know anyone who had done either. He'd never visited a police station, never seen a private investigator, and had never spoken to a criminal. He had learnt what he knew about these topics through books, movies, and newspapers. As a result, Quinn, as a mystery novelist, has no tangible facts regarding actual crime. So, how does he manage to compose such books? All it takes is reading books. "What attracted him about the tales he created was not their relevance to the reality, but their reference to other stories," the narrator continues. Quinn had been a voracious reader of mystery novels even before he became William Wilson." As a result, his writings aren't true detective stories, but rather parodies of the genre on which he has basic knowledge. Further, if the actual author misunderstands Paul Auster as a character in the novel, it might be assumed that Auster uses the same imitation of the detective genre in writing the entire work. In this regard, Dennis Barone argues in his edited book *Beyond the Red Notebook* (2011): To be sure, Quinn's understanding of crime and detection is fully conditioned by their depictions in films, novels, and newspapers, Quinn's dependence on the literary model of detection eventually lessens as he realises its inadequacies in a "actual" circumstance, despite the fact that it serves him well as an author. Quinn doesn't seem to mind that he has little experience with real crime and detection at first, because "what attracted him about the stories he created was not their relevance to the reality but their relation to other stories." As the story's narrator points out, "What he admired about these novels was their feeling of plenitude and economy." Nothing is wasted in a good mystery, no sentence, no word that isn't vital. Even if it isn't significant now, it has the potential to become so in the future, which is the same thing. In light of these words, what the book's author believes is at odds with what is actually written. In reality, there are a lot of pointless words, sentences, and events in this book. Nothing is completed in this tale, although in detective novels, everything, even the most little details, might be a hint to solving the problem and bearing a relation to the story's conclusion. In truth, this work appears to be a detective novel at first,

but as the stories go, particularly *City of Glass* (1985), it shifts to a philosophical genre known as metaphysical detective. Conversion of a genre in a tale to another is, of course, one of the characteristics of postmodernism. One of the other characteristics of the detective genre is that readers may empathise with the investigator and win interpretative triumph alongside him, or close behind him. The investigator serves as "the figure for the reader within the text, the one character whose behaviours most closely reflect the reader's own," according to Glenn W. Most (1952), in his book *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory* (1983). However, readers will be unable to relate with the protagonists in this work, who are obliviously following something they know nothing about, leading them to ridiculousness. The reader cannot relate with an investigator who sleeps in the garbage and does not use media information to discover, for example, that Stillman has committed suicide. According to Glenn W. Most (1952), in his book *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, the investigator acts as "the figure for the reader within the text, the one character whose behaviours most closely resemble the reader's own" (1983). Readers, on the other hand, will be unable to identify with the characters in this work, who are obliviously following something they have no knowledge of, bringing them to absurdity. The reader will have difficulty empathising with an investigator who sleeps in the trash and does not rely on media reports to learn, for example, that Stillman has committed suicide. However, readers in this work not only disapprove of its heroes' interpretative abilities, but also blame them for squandering time in quest of nothing and growing closer to losing their identities and even their everyday lives. As a result, the link between events in *City of Glass* (1985) departs from what readers would expect to discover in a detective novel right from the start. Consider Sherlock Holmes' final words to Watson in Arthur Conan Doyle's (1859-1930) *The Hound of the Baskervilles*: "The entire course of events "From the point of view of the man who called himself Stapleton, it was straightforward and direct," Holmes observed, "but it all seemed extraordinarily complicated to us, who had no way of knowing the motivations of his actions and could only discover part of the facts at the time." According to Dennis Barone's book *Beyond the Red Notebook: For Holmes*, the only seemingly complicated or random events are governed by a basic, "simple and straightforward" structure. As a result, the investigator takes on the role of an archaeologist, documenting the importance of the crime's evidence or artefacts, with the answer already in place. Items that are inexplicably relevant and beg to be analysed and slotted into their correct context. The storey of detection leads us to a form of interpretation that, in some ways, works backwards from the body to the perpetrator. By establishing a figure named Paul Auster in *City of Glass*, Auster not only defies standard norms of time, location, causality, and unity of action, but he also breaches ontological bounds (1985). Apart from what has already been stated, it is important noting that Auster is a postmodern novelist, not a political one. He has no political goals in mind when he writes his novels. As a result, there is no political sting to this work. This is only a parody with no real purpose. It isn't productive. "Pastiche, like parody, is the impersonation of an unusual or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speaking in a dead language," (Postmodernism 17). Jameson explains. However, it is a neutral practise of such mimicry, devoid of any of parody's hidden objectives, amputation of the satiric urge, and laughing" (Jameson, Postmodernism 17). According to him, and as can be seen in the novel's structure and substance, everything loses its link to history in the world of pastiche, which is reduced to a collection of styles and superseded genres or simulacra. Considering Linda Hutcheon's (1947) conceptions of parody and Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra (1929-2007), *City of Glass* is a parody of the detective genre that features many of the classic characters of postmodern literature, according to Brendan Martin's *Paul Auster's Postmodernity* (2008). He says in this regard:

These include an indeterminate and ironic relationship between character and author; an ambiguous narrative voice; the blurring of fact and fiction; and doppelgangers as a central theme. As the novel's protagonist Daniel Quinn is a writer with the literary pseudonym William Wilson, Auster alludes to Edgar Allan Poe's eponymous story that deals with duality.

In short, as Linda Hutcheon (1947) writes in *The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History* (1989), "Jameson argues that in postmodernism "parody finds itself without a vocation," replaced by pastiche, which he (bound by a definition of parody as ridiculing imitation) sees as more neutral or blank parody" (186); and because there is no political bite in Paul Auster's works, including this novel; it can be When you go deeper into the narrative, you'll discover that Stillman wrote a book called *The Garden and the Tower: Early Visions of the New World*, which is separated into two parts: "*The Myth of Paradise*" and "*The Myth of Babel*." Stillman claims that the first men to visit America felt they had unintentionally discovered paradise in the first half, and that the discovery of the New World was the igniting impulse of utopian thinking, the spark that gave hope to the perfectibility of human life in the second part. America was supposed to be known as the "*City of God*." However, when Stillman is freed from prison, he discovers a *City of Glass* rather than a City of God, and glass fractures easily. "I have come to New York because it is the most desolate of cities, the most squalid," (*City of Glass* 160) he says Quinn. The chaos is global, and the brokenness is everywhere. To see it, all you have to do is open your eyes. People who are broken, things that are broken, and ideas that are broken". It's worth noting that America has been portrayed as a promised country since the arrival of the first European settlers in the New World; a nation of both openness and possibility, a new Eden where man may recover the paradise he's lost or claim the biblical land he's been promised. Man would regain the edenic harmony that formerly existed between himself, his environment, and his community in this promised place; he would once again speak a natural language that God had given him. It's possible that this reference to "*Paradise Lost*" is a parody of Jameson's *City of Glass* (1985) The film is set in late-twentieth-century America, and it uses terminology that is far from outdated to show the perils of such an edenic promise. Furthermore, one language and one venue cannot accommodate the world's diversity of colour, sexualities, and culture. God has punished the builders by demolishing the *Tower of Babel*, which is a symbol of both unity and division of language. This artwork, according to Peter Stillman, is a symbol of freedom and unity. However, this is a powerful picture of tyranny and homogeneity. "Once completed, the Tower would be huge enough to contain every person of the New World," (*Tower of Babel* 97) says the graphic, which seems more like a jail than a paradise. Each individual would have his own space, and once inside, he would forget everything he knew. He'd emerge a new man after forty days and forty nights, speaking God's language and ready to enter the second, everlasting paradise." In fact, Auster shows how a utopian vision of land and language may quickly devolve into a dystopian nightmare in the novel. Of course, Auster's writing throughout this demonstration runs the risk of replicating the merger of terrain and language that his tale wishes to depict. Stillman had shut his kid up in a closed chamber and deprived him from language for many years, as previously said. This had a long-term impact on him. He appears to be caught between the actual and the imagined (two notions developed by Jacques Lacan (1901-1981)). In Peter Stillman, Senior's ludicrous hunt for the ideal language, the desire to realise the genuine can be observed. According to him, the perfect language is one that corresponds to the world and is not subject to the arbitrary relationship between (Lacan's) signifier and signified: a language that will finally communicate what we need to say. Because the world no longer corresponds to our words. We were certain that our words could describe things once they were complete. But, one by one, these things have disintegrated, splintered, and crashed into chaos. Despite this, our words have stayed unchanged. They have not adjusted to the new circumstances.

His ideal language is one in which the signifier and signified are an exact match, yet the search for such a language generates postmodern creative writing issues. Stillman's greater purpose of restoring harmony to American society includes this ambition to close the gap between signifier and signified. He feels that the world is fragmenting and that it is his responsibility to reassemble it. The act of collecting trash from the street and labelling it in order to bridge the gap between signifier and signified is a parody of the structuralist theory that language creates the world as a language in which there is no distinction between its signifier and signifier and signified is a pastiche of the structuralist idea that language creates the world because a language with no distinction between its signifier, signified, and referent is not a desirable language because the divisions between signifier and signified, as well

as the slippages and ambiguities of language, are what give language life and allow for inventive texts. As a result, Stillman's search for such a language is incoherent, even in his own philosophical terms. He admits in his book that life could only begin to grow after the fall, that good could only exist in the face of evil, and that the new world, even in its early stages, was never a peaceful place. Similarly, Scott claims that the *New York Trilogy* (2015) is a pastiche of Beckettian narrative, implying that the novel's storey serves no purpose, much like the Beckettian narrative, which has no objective except defeat. "Written into a solipsistic container, spewing words to the city or composing texts with no meaning other than their own subversion, *The New York Trilogy* (2015) shows that the Beckettian narrative ultimately serves no purpose other than its own defeat," he argues. It's maybe no surprise that, following *The New York Trilogy* (2015), no other Auster work has the same strangely difficult and comprehensively antimimetic structure". Indeed, utilising and rejecting the Beckettian technique, in Dim Ovitiz's opinion, makes Auster's writing more realistic. He explains it like this: The storey was able to progress to the significantly more realistic, if still somewhat symbolic writing that makes up the remainder of Auster's oeuvre by performing and rejecting the Beckettian parental influence. Auster's anti-postmodern effort almost unintentionally responds to his contemporaries' critical discourses, and he manages to deny postmodernism through a criticism of its essential moments. Of course, Beckett takes precedence, and his works served as a model for postmodern theorists who would follow him in transforming art into theory. Auster criticises such theorists by rejecting their inspirations, while misreading Lacan, claiming he never read a word of Derrida, and only appearing to be familiar with structuralist-era Barthes. Although *The New York Trilogy* (2015) has no overt connections to Beckett, structural and thematic similarities to Beckett's *Trilogy* are assumed. In reality, in his *New York Trilogy*, he rewrites Beckett's *Trilogy of books* (2015). In light of this, one may argue that Auster imitates Beckett's approach in *The New York Trilogy* (2015), particularly in terms of narration, but as this type of narration has no end in and of itself, any copy of Auster will be aimless as well. Pastiche is the term Jameson uses to describe this type of mindless replication.

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