

**ISOLATION VERSUS SALVATION
THEMATIC STUDY OF PAUL AUSTER'S TIMBUKTU**

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Abstract

Divine religions teach us that eternal happiness and salvation can be achieved by sincere worship of God. Paul Auster's Timbuktu illustrates the harsh realities of contemporary American society and the way its citizens try to find their own place in it. It depicts the relationship between the world and the human's desire for salvation. This study aims at investigating Paul Auster's idea of humans' alienation in Timbuktu with respect to the events and circumstances of living in America. The researcher makes use of descriptive method in order to analyze the selected work. To conclude, the true path to happiness can be paved by having a loving, caring and close-knit human society. It is the materialistic ambitions that isolate the individuals and hampers the way of salvation.

Keywords: *Isolation, Salvation, Contemporary World, American Literature*

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ISOLATION

SALVATION

Introduction:

The fact that God created mankind's soul with an eternal destiny should have a significant impact on our choices and priorities. Salvation and heaven are two sides of the same coin. Both of them refer to the places of peace whether they are located in one's mind or situated on the land. In *Salvation* (2007), Earl D. Radmacher offers an in-depth look at the most fundamental element of the Christian faith. This book walks readers through the spiritual meaning, motives, application, and eternal result of God's work of salvation in our lives. He states:

Salvation, in the spiritual sense, is the most exciting and promising deliverance available to human beings. It reaches to the depths of our need and lifts us to the highest grandeur imaginable. Spiritual salvation involves three senses-past,

present and future. Doctrinally these are expressed as justification, sanctification and glorification, but each one is part of the broad scope of salvation. (1)

Paul Auster's *Timbuktu* (1999) is the symbol of the American Diaspora. It alludes to the city of Timbuktu located in the north of Mali.

The term sense of place has been used in many different ways. To some, it is the characteristic that some geographic places have denoted. While to others it is the feeling or perception held by people not by the place itself. It is often used in relation to those characteristics that make a place special or unique.

As well as to those that foster a sense of authentic human attachment and belonging, others such as geographer Yi-Fu Tuan have pointed to sense of place as the creative function of literature. In his book titled as *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (2001), which is one of the landmarks in the domain of place study, Yi-Fu Tuan states:

Many places, profoundly significant to particular individuals and groups, have little visual prominence. They are known viscerally, as it were, and not through the discerning eye or mind. A function of literary art is to give visibility to intimate experiences, including those of place..., Literary art draws attention to areas of experience that we may otherwise fail to notice.(2)

Paul Auster's characters feel and think about space. They form attachments to home, neighborhood, and nation, and are affected by the sense of time. Postmodern fictional writers engage in place-based writing in order to improve their readers' sense of place as well as to use various aspects of places' educational truths in general. Geographic space is differentiated from inner space inside the mind.

Paul Auster's 'sense of place' is exhibited in his novels where he gives reference to several countries such as England, Ireland, France, Poland, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Russia, China, Vietnam, Iraq as well as various American states, cities and boroughs

including New York, Washington, Florida, Missouri, Maryland, Baltimore, Brooklyn, Kansas and Manhattan.

Such places steal the identities and disrupt the relationships of Paul Auster's characters. Auster depicts the solitude and similitude of the individuals living in postmodern hostile world. The researcher scrutinizes the sample texts now. These themes have been investigated by different researchers and we will refer to some of the most important articles, theses and books in the next part of this study.

Review of Literature:

There have been few number of cultural criticisms made on Auster's works. So, this article proves to be innovative and encouraging on this domain. In their joint paper entitled as "**American Diaspora: A Post-Colonial Criticism of the Timbuktu by Paul Auster through the Application of Structuralist Binary Oppositions**" (2011), Saleh Haghshenas and Daryoosh Hayati have scrutinized how the application of Binary Oppositions to the selected novel can represent cultural hybridity, identity crisis, displacement and rootlessness as well as hopelessness in accordance to the Post-Colonial theories of Edward Said.

In *Paul Auster and Postmodern Quest: On the Road to Nowhere* (2002), Ilana Shiloh examines Auster's writing in a multi-layered context of literary and philosophical paradigms relevant to his practice, such as the American tradition of the open road, the generic conventions of detective fiction, postmodernist concepts of the subject, Sartre's and Camus's existentialist theories, and Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalytic models, all of which offer enriching and insightful perspectives on Auster's poetics.

In his M.A thesis titled as "**Where Flitcraft Lives: An Examination of Chance, Choice and Fate in Paul Auster's Fiction**" (2005), Jeffrey Ross demonstrates how Auster's re-writing of Dashiell Hammett's Flitcraft tale, as told in *The Maltese Falcon*, has not only informed but been the driving force behind Auster's body of work.

Limitations of the study:

In this paper, the researcher has selected only one novel among the various literary works of Paul Auster. Moreover, the analysis of all the aspects of "Isolation" as well as the theological concept of "Salvation" demands interdisciplinary study which is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, the selected text will be analyzed and scrutinized by making use of descriptive methodology.

Discussion:

A. Paul Auster: *Timbuktu* (1999)

Paul Benjamin Auster is a prolific writer whose works range from novels to screenplays, essays, poems, plays, and more. Born on February 3, 1947 in New Jersey, Auster is the postmodernist American writer who blends absurdism, existentialism and crime fiction in his fictional works. His parents, Queenie and Samuel, belonged to the Jewish middle-class of Polish descent. *Timbuktu* (1999) is the emotional narration of self-titled dog who is present in the human's world. Mr. Bones is a dog belonging to an ailing vagabond, Willy G. Christmas. This dog understands the language of his owner perfectly. Indeed, Timbuktu is a place, a promised land. Mr. Bones reviews all the memories and advices of his owner, Willy. He knows that Willy will go to Timbuktu after death. The place is defined as follows:

..., where people went after they died. Once your soul had been separated from your body, your body was buried in the ground and your soul lit out for the next world. Willy had been harping on this subject for the past several weeks, and by now there was no doubt in the dog's mind that the next world was a real place. It was called Timbuktu, and from everything Mr.

Bones could gather, it was located in the middle of a desert somewhere, far from New York or Baltimore, far from Poland or any other city they had visited in the course of their travels. (3)

Mr. Bones gets acquainted with a Chinese boy named Henry Chow. After a while, the boy's father, Mr. Chow who is the owner of a restaurant in Baltimore gets aware of his son's relationship with the dog and beats him. Witnessing the beating scene, Mr. Bones runs away. The narrator states:

All bad things lived in this city. It was a place of death and despair, of dog-haters and Chinese restaurants, and it was only by the skin of his teeth that he hadn't wound up as a bogus appetizer in a little white takeout box..., what good was a home if you didn't feel safe in it, if you were treated as an outcast in the very spot that was supposed to be your refuge? ..., To be alive meant to breathe; to breathe meant the open air; and the open air meant any place that was not Baltimore, Maryland. (4)

The leading idea behind all his literary works is the necessity of connection between individuals regardless of their cultural, racial, and national background. Auster summons them to unite the opposing cultural elements within them and beyond them. In the following passage, Willy, the master of Mr. Bones, urges the animal to remain aloof from the Chinese area.

Willy continued “there’s a thousand other things that will. I’m warning you, kemo sabe. You get yourself some new gig, or your days are numbered. Just look around this dreary burg. There’s a Chinese restaurant on every block, and if you think mouths won’t water when you come strolling by, then you don’t know squat about Oriental cuisine. They prize the taste of dog, friend. The chefs round up strays and slaughter them in the alley right behind the kitchen—ten, twenty, thirty dogs a week. They might pass them off as ducks and pigs on the menu, but the in-crowd knows what’swhat, the gourmets aren’t fooled for a second. Unless you want to wind up in a platter of moo goo gai pan, you’ll think twice before you wag your tail in front of one of those Chink beaneries. Do you catch my drift, Mr. Bones? Know thine enemy—and then keep a wide berth.”(5)

Here, the narrator of the novel, Mr. Bones, is revealing the attitudes of Willy and his mother toward the world:

From hard-won experience, Mrs. Gurevitch knew that the world was out to get her, and she lived her life accordingly, doing everything in her power to stay clear of harm’s way. Willy also knew that the world was out to get him, but unlike his mother he had no qualms about fighting back. The difference was not that one was a pessimist and the other an optimist, it was

that one's pessimism had led to an ethos of fear, and the other's pessimism had led to a noisy, fractious disdain for Everything-That-Was. One shrank, the other flailed. One toed the line, the other crossed it out.

(6)

Mr.Bones' idea of the hereafter is reflected in the passage below:

It didn't matter how hot it was there. It didn't matter that there was nothing to eat or drink or smell. If that's where Willy was going, that's where he wanted to go too. When the moment came for him to part company with this world, it seemed only right that he should be allowed to dwell in the hereafter with the same person he had loved in the here-before. Wild beasts no doubt had their own Timbuktu, giant forests in which they were free to roam without threat from two-legged hunters and trappers If there was any justice in the world, if the dog god had any influence on what happened to his creatures, then man's best friend would stay by the side of man after said man and said best friend had both kicked the bucket. More than that, in Timbuktu dogs would be able to speak man's language and converse with him as an equal.(7)

Willy is talking to Mr.Bones regarding his mother's compulsion for leaving Hungary during the war and her immigration to New York in the following dialogue:

{Willy}: "Do you remember Mom-san, Mr. Bones?"

{Mr. Bones}: "Of course I remember her. What do you take me for?"

{Willy}: "Well, they tried to kill her, too. They hunted her down like a dog, and she had to run for her life. People get treated like dogs, too, my friend, and sometimes they have to sleep in barns and meadows because there's nowhere else for them to go. Before you start feeling too sorry for yourself, just remember that you're not the first dog who ever been lost."(8)

Conclusion:

The researcher would like to conclude this chapter by a discussion on the characteristics of 'Sense of Place'. It is the creative function of literature and the important part of identity. 'Place attachment', 'Place identity' and 'Sense of Place' are the main concepts in environmental psychology. Although they are used interchangeably, 'Sense of Place' is more personal, emotional and impassioned. Paul Auster shows the particular impact of 'place' on the characters' identities. In turn, 'places' are affected by characters too. Characters identify themselves in larger and smaller scales. While the former includes country, state, and city the latter covers neighborhood, room, school and workplace. The true path to happiness can be paved by having a loving, caring and close-knit human society. It is the materialistic ambitions that isolate the individuals and hampers the way of salvation.

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