

The Localized Hero And Escape From Freedom In *The Music Of Chance* By Paul Auster

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ABSTRACT

Paul Auster is a prominent American novelist, critic and poet; he was a Pen/Faulkner Award for Fiction finalist for his novel, *The Music of Chance*. This book's protagonist, Jim Nashe, is an ex-fireman who has left his job and family to drive around the country and to earn money while running out of money. He and his friend named Pozzi found wounded on the motorway by him decide to gamble to make money easily; yet they are trapped in a house and forced to make a "wailing" wall because of their gambling debts for their losing. On the other hand because Jim was a vagabond before his enslavement, Auster invokes Thomas Nashe's picaresque novel, *The Unfortunate Traveller*. Critics allegorically address Jim's home confinement from both spiritual and physical perspectives.

The Music of Chance deals with a sense of meaningless in modern life. Oberman sees Jim "in an existential confrontation with his own freedom" (192). He continues to say that modern people stick "within the culture of late capitalism" (192). In fact, Jim Nashe is a traditional American picaro who "forsakes his family ties, breaks from the past, and seeks to re-create himself through the freedom of the open road" (Shiloh, and Auster, 492). In this sense, Auster blends the history into modern American life which is focused on the same problems and contradictions in life. It is a kind of fall of American dream

Jim's ethnic and cultural foundations inform his behaviors. An ethnic Jew, Auster illustrates the suffering of Holocaust survivors. Jim Nashe's experiences are similar to those of Jews in the Holocaust or the Pogroms. He lives in a space that limits his freedom; he prefers death to living this way. The same characteristics of protagonist/writer offer a sophisticated plot for readers. Because the reader must know both the writer's life and novel's witty nuance. In this study, we examine Jim's incarceration and the reasons for it.

Keywords: Jim Nashe, Paul Auster, Picaresque, *The Music of Chance*.

Paul Auster'in *The Music Of Chance* Adlı Romanında Sınırlandırılmış Kahraman ve Özgürlükten Kaçış

ÖZ

Paul Auster önemli bir Amerikalı romancı, eleştirmen ve şair olmakla birlikte bu *The Music of Chance* adlı romanıyla Pen/Faulkner Kurgu Ödülünün Finalisti olmuştur. Romanın başkahramanı Jim Nashe ülke boyunca yeni almış olduğu arabasını kullanabilmek ve parasını tükenmek üzereyken para kazanabilmek için işini ve ailesini terk eden eski bir itfaiyecidir. Nashe ve O'nun tarafından bir otoyolun kenarından yaralı halde bulunan Pozzi isimli arkadaşıyla kolay para kazanabilmek için kumar oynamaya karar verirler fakat kaybettikleri için kumar borçlarını ödeyebilmek için "ağlama" duvarı yapmaya zorlanırlar. Öte taraftan Jim tutsaklığından önce bir başıboş olduğu için Auster Thomas Nashe'in pikaresk romanı *The Unfortunate Traveller* romanına atıfta bulunur. Eleştirmenler alegorik olarak hem ruhsal hem bedensel açıdan Jim'in ev hapsine değinirler.

The Music of Chance modern hayatın anlamsızlığıyla da ilgilidir. Oberman Jim'i "kendi özgürlüğüyle varoluşsal bir karşılaşma" (192) olarak görür. İfadesine modern insanın "geç kapitalizm kültürü arasında sıkıştığı" (192) sözleriyle devam eder. Gerçekten de Jim Nashe "aile bağlarından vazgeçen, geçmişten tamamen kopan ve açık yolların özgürlüğüyle kendini yeniden yaratmaya çalışan" (Shiloh ve Auster, 492) geleneksel bir Amerikan serseridir. Bu bağlamda Auster'in yaşadığı aynı problem ve ikilemlere odaklandığı tarihi modern Amerikan hayatıyla birleştirmiştir. Bu Amerikan rüyasının bir nevi çöküşüdür. Böylelikle Auster yaşadığı ülkenin ikilemini ve Amerika'yı ayakta tutan mottunun aslında bir eleştirisini yapar.

Jim'in etnik ve kültürel normları davranışlarını belirlemektedir. Etnik köken olarak Yahudi olan Auster Nazi Soykırımının neler çektiği ve deneyimlerini bu romanda yansıtmaya çalışır. Jim Nashe'in yaşantı ve hayat tecrübeleri Holokost veya Pogrom'lardaki Yahudilerle benzerlikler arz eder. Başkahramanın/yazarın benzer özellikleri okuyucu adına karmaşık bir kugu sunar. Çünkü okuyucu hem yazarın yaşam ve kökeni hakkında hem de romandaki ince göndermeleri kavraması gerekir. Bir de bunu tarihsel ve günlük yaşama endekslemesi olayları biraz daha mudilleştirir. Ancak Auster bunu yaparken iki farklı insan tipinin

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aynı problemlerle karşılaşması ve aynı sonuçların ortaya çıkması modern insanın ikilemidir. İşte bu çalışmada Jim'in bedensel ve ruhsal hapsi ve bunun nedenleri irdelenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Jim Nashe, Paul Auster, Pikaresk, *The Music of Chance*

Introduction

Paul Auster is one of the most distinctive postmodern American writers in world literature. His novels vary from the detective story *New York Trilogy* to the story of a dog's life in *Timbuktu*. His complicated novel *The Music of Chance* deals with a vagabond, ex-fireman Jim Nashe who travels around America, living in his brand-new car. He encounters a young gambler and expects to make great sums of money. However, after losing his money and his car, Jim and his gambler friend, Pozzi are forced to build a wall to pay their debt to two millionaires.

In Woods's critical summary of this novel, he states; "The narrative moves from freedom (for example, Nashe's discussion with Fiona Wells, the United States as the embodiment of freedom, and the open traveling across the states on "freeways"), to a lack of movement and complete isolation and enforced fixity: utter imprisonment" (1995; 148-9). On the other hand, Varvogli summarizes his viewpoint in a description of the protagonist: "Nashe quits his job and travels around the country until he meets Pozzi, a meeting that will eventually lead to his imprisonment in the Flower and Stone mansion grounds" (2001; 62). Beyond any doubt, the wall symbolizes the Wailing Wall; Auster employed this theme in his play *Laurel and Hardy Go to Heaven*. He presents his most striking descriptions of events and explorations of themes in this part of the novel. Jim's journey of freedom has become one of inhibition; this resonates with Jewish history and modern prison life.

As an American Jew, Auster's heritage and ethnicity play an important role in *The Music of Chance*. Jim Nashe's imprisonment intimates restriction of Jews to ghettos; his wall-making mirrors an important feature of Judaism and blends past and future. Jim, a modern man, is virtually indistinguishable from Holocaust or Pogrom survivors; he prefers death to life. Nashe plays a predictable game, as described by McCaffery, Gregory, and Auster in an article about the novel: "a taut, Kafkaesque parable detailing what happens when its central character, Nashe, attempts to live a life of freedom by joining forces with a vagabond gambler" (1992; 2).

Auster professes to be a realist in *The Music of Chance*. Moreover, a number of critics regard this novel as Auster's autobiography (McCaffery, Gregory, and Auster, 1992; 9). When we consider this perspective, the novel cannot be considered only a fictive world. Irwin astutely renames the novel "The Music Of Chance, The Music Of Truth" (1994a). Jim Nashe's fictive world is Paul Auster's portrait of himself and other Jews.

Paul Auster blends the experiences of historical and contemporary Jews. The lives of twenty-first-century people in skyscrapers may be little different than those of Jews living in World War II ghettos.

In this paper, I discuss Jim Nashe, the protagonist of *The Music of Chance*, other characters, the events of this novel, and the reasons such as imprisonment, making wall, Nashe's problems.

1. Freedom Or Imprisonment?

Auster depicts Jim Nashe as a vagrant who has run away from his responsibilities. He prefers drive across the US to stay home and work as a fireman. Owing to being a maintainer, Nashe feels trapped and imprisoned. His only ambitions are to drive and wait for his money to run out:

On a day off from work, he drove up to Maine and back, but that only seemed to make it worse, for it left him unsatisfied, itching for more time behind the wheel. He struggled to settle down again, but his mind kept wandering back to the road, to the exhilaration he had felt for those two weeks, and little by little he began to give himself up for lost. It wasn't that he wanted to quit his job, but with no more time coming to him, what else was he supposed to do? (Auster, 1990; 7)

Jim's experiences mirror those of historical Jews who were incarcerated or expelled from various countries. Deportation and compulsory expedition have long held a place in the Jewish destiny.

By naming his protagonist Jim Nashe, Auster refers to Thomas Nashe, the 1594 author of *The Unfortunate Traveller*. He was obviously inspired by Nashe's picaresque novel. Shiloh and Auster indicate the picaresque features of Auster's novel: "The picaro is a dialectic figure, alternately affiliated with the stock characters of the jester, the adventurer, the explorer, or the noble savage; but from whatever perspective he may be seen, he invariably remains an outsider. With no home and no family ties, starting his life's adventure from point zero, he hits the open road, pursuing the favor of Lady Luck" (2002; 490). Nashe's loss of his possessions is a reference to the past.

The notion of freedom is important to Auster, who writes, "Freedom, for Nashe, is associated with anonymity, lack of commitment, and absence of human contact. It is also closely associated with chance" (Shiloh and Auster, 2002; 491). Freedom is a prominent theme of *The Music of Chance*; throughout the novel, Auster directly or indirectly examines this concept. Jim Nashe's freedom transforms into incarnation or a kind of self-punishment.

Irwin considers chance to be truth itself and examines the meaning of Nashe's job: "Nashe's prior occupation, a fireman, was to confront the unexpected and unpredictable, fire, and to attempt to control it. Fire represents the freedom to which Nashe abandons himself: the random drives across America. But the fact that he is a firefighter hints at his later escape from freedom" (1994a). Jim's psychology is subverted by his uncertainty.

No matter what happens to Jim Nashe, he is determined to seek freedom. Attempted suicide is a crucial element of his captivity; it demonstrates his determination and perseverance. When Nashe observes fatal accidents, he considers the risks he takes: "They added an element of risk to what he was doing, and more than anything else, that was what he was looking for: to feel that he had taken his life into his own hands" (Auster, 1990; 11-2). On the other hand, Irwin says, "Jim Nashe, in *The Music of Chance*, crisscrosses America for an entire year, and yet, in some sense, he's a prisoner. He's imprisoned in his own desire for what he construes to be a notion of freedom" (1994b; 111-12). However, this kind of freedom is unsuitable for Jim; he must accept his responsibilities. Ignoring his alimony obligations to his wife and daughter only brings him more suffering.

The two millionaires, Flowers and Stone, to whom Nashe and Pozzi owe great debts, are very important characters in *The Music of Chance*. The millionaires force the failed gamblers to build a "wailing" wall. Auster puns on the millionaires' names, piecing together "flower" and "stone".

From Pozzi's perspective, "they're ignoramuses, those two. You sit down with them, and it's like playing with Laurel and Hardy" (Auster, 1990; pp. 28). Pozzi thinks these millionaires are suckers; at first, he easily takes their money. Later, they become Laurel and Hardy who make the wall in Auster's play.

After evaluating two important activities in *The Music of Chance*, playing cards and wall-building, Varvogli asks, "Which is orderly, and which chaotic? A game of cards is largely a matter of chance, but players can improve their chances by studying and practicing; the whole point of a game of cards is to defeat the random" (2001; 77). However, Flowers and Stone have done their homework with a master poker player.

Nashe notices discrepancies between these characters and the house:

Of course it was charming, of course it was deft and brilliant and admirable, but there was a kind of warped, voodoo logic to the thing, as if under all the cuteness and intricacy one was supposed to feel a hint of violence, an atmosphere of cruelty and revenge. With Flower, too, everything was ambiguous, difficult to pin down. One moment, he seemed perfectly sensible; the next moment, he sounded like a lunatic, rambling on like an out-and-out madman. There was no question that he was gracious, but even his joviality seemed forced, suggesting that if he did not bombard them with all that pedantic, overly articulate talk, the mask of fellowship might somehow slip from his face. (Auster, 1990; pp.79)

In *The Music of Chance*, Flowers and Stone became wealthy millionaires as lottery winners and stock investors. Both men have bizarre collections and hobbies. Flowers collects expensive and historical items. Putting them under glass and exhibiting them to his guests fills him with pride; however, Jim Nashe finds these collections dull and dreary. When Flowers talks about the cost and importance of these objects, Nashe thinks, "The room was a monument to trivia, packed with articles of such marginal value that

Nashe wondered if it were not some kind of joke. But Flowers seemed too proud of himself to understand how ridiculous it was” (Auster, 1990; 75). Though he possesses great power, Flowers has no aesthetics or taste. To him, the most important thing is the power to get and do everything he wants.

Stone spends most of his time building miniature cities. When Flowers points out that Stone he worked on a project for five years, and that it takes four months for him make a single building, Stone replies: “It’s the way I’d like the world to look. Everything in it happens at once” (Auster, 1990; 72). By creating a utopian city in his own home, Stone resembles a dictator or a strict governor.

Nashe is impressed very deeply by Stone. He takes great interest in the Stone’s miniature prison: “But these funny bits only made the other elements seem more ominous, and after a while Nashe found himself concentrating almost exclusively on the prison” (Auster, 1990; 87). Though visiting the millionaires’ home to win money from them and realize his dreams, Jim concentrates on this prison. He dreams of a scene similar to the Holocaust and war: “For all the warmth and sentimentality depicted in the model, the overriding mood was one of terror, of dark dreams sauntering down the avenues in broad daylight. A threat of punishment seemed to hang in the air—as if this were a city at war with itself, struggling to mend its ways before the prophets came to announce the arrival of a murderous, avenging God” (Auster, 1990; 87-8).

Auster recreates the battlefield, a reminder of Jewish experiences in World War II:

After that, his head seemed curiously emptied out, and for the first time in many years, he fell into one of those trances that had sometimes afflicted him as a boy: an abrupt and radical shift of his inner bearings, as if the world around him had suddenly lost its reality. It made him feel like a shadow, *like someone who had fallen asleep with his eyes open*. (my emphasis, Auster, 1990; 59-60)

The italicized phrase indicates his ambivalence and astonishment about death. The city contains sulky people and the prison, the most striking building in the center of field he works. Stone’s utopian city is a reminder of the Holocaust – which cannot be expunged from Jewish minds.

The message of Stone’s “City of World” is a significant part of *The Music of Chance*. Stone’s city, a utopic/dystopic perspective on monolithic authority, has a sharp display whose people are not allowed to do without the permission of jurisdiction. Stone acts as a kind of dictatorial authority in the novel. Woods, when considering activities with “no cause and effect” states: “An eternal present operates, as various stages of Stone's life occur in a fusion of past and future as a denial of history. Stone's City of the World, in other words, becomes symbolic of a certain ideological world order, a pattern of social life based upon the absolute ideological control of its subjects” (1995; 151). The ghettos and camps Jews and other internees were forced inhabit are similar to Stone’s “City of World”.

Many critics address Flowers and Stone. The aura they create is catastrophic and disastrous. For instance, the meal eaten in their mansion indicates the banality and mundaneness of their existence. Varvogli compares this to starvation and states; “They may underscore the protagonists’ moral or psychological degradation, or they may be used for social critique, while they also function as metaphorical or metafictional elements...” (2001; 88). Pozzi and Nash live in circumstances similar to those experienced by historical Jews.

Stone plays a much more important role in *The Music of Chance* than Flowers. First of all, Auster compares Stone’s previous profession as an optometrist to Nashe and Pozzi’s inability to “see” the severity of their situation. Critics (including the author himself) purport that Auster uses Stone’s job sarcastically: “Nashe's metaphorical blindness is underscored by the fact that Stone, his host in the castle, is an optometrist by profession” (Shiloh and Auster, 2002; 497).

Stone’s city attracts many critics to *The Music of Chance*. Shiloh and Auster examine this symbol: “If his own collection of historical trivia mainly evokes commodification, a central feature of capitalism, Stone's City of the World incorporates Puritan and *totalitarian motifs* as well” (my emphasis, 2002; 508). This Hitlerian and dictatorial demonstration invokes the first half of the twentieth century. In undemocratic and oppressive situations, many peoples (especially Jews) were exposed to genocide, deracination, and involuntary servitude. On the other hand, Flowers’ picking up trivial but expensive things reminds the capitalist system. Nashe and Pozzi are obliged to work to pay off their gambling debts. In capitalism,

people must work and earn money to get the things they need (I will discuss this in greater detail later in this paper.)

Nashe and Pozzi's enslavement is a central event in *The Music of Chance*. Although their life in the mansion is not literally enslavement, the course of events leans this way. Woods asks why these characters are imprisoned by Flowers and Stone: "Nashe and Pozzi have not actually broken the law, and so they are only 'culprits' in the eyes of the two millionaires. But in what sense are they culpable?" (1995; 150). This exposes Jim Nashe's attempts to transform himself through strife, just as his ancestors were subjected to many hardships. Varvogli states;

Nashe himself is subsequently 'wrenched out of context', condemned to an activity that is 'devoid of purpose', thus becoming part of his captor's meaningless, *dehistoricised* collection, but at the same time he is also sucked into Stone's project, as 'the ideologies that are theorized and conceptualized in the model are reproduced practically in the meadow' where his work is seen by the two millionaires, and Pozzi, more as punishment than as the paying off of a debt. (my emphasis, 2001; 115)

According to Auster, a totalitarian perspective on Jewish history gives Jews a chance to experience victimization; they can become 1940s Jews even if they live in the twenty-first century.

Nashe and Pozzi are forced to build a wall of stones imported from an Irish castle. Flowers and Stone want them to build this wall to pay off their gamble debts. Varvogli depicts this incidence as "a metaphysical burlesque in which two characters build a wall on the stage but fail to discover the meaning of their appointed task" (2001; 7). Varvogli is absolutely right about Nashe and Pozzi's inability to understand why they are building this wall.

According to some critics, the symbols and events in *The Music of Chance* are very difficult to comprehend. For example, one critic says, "It is difficult to divine an order that guides the number seven, or to detect any reason behind the simile 'wall.' Auster's poetics of chance abounds in coincidence, transparent analogies, and symbolism, all of which constantly multiply, rendering significance difficult to decipher" (Dotan, 2000). The wall resembles the Wailing Wall, a very important Jewish symbol; it is also similar to Stone's "City of World". Stone creates a miniature city in which no one will live; Pozzi and Nashe build a Wailing Wall at which no one will cry or pray. Auster and Little say this about the wall:

While the wall's monumental blankness disfigures the castle's Old World structure and context, the work of construction, overseen by an increasingly sinister foreman with the puritanical name of Calvin Murks, walls off Nashe and Pozzi from the outside world. Equally ominous is "the city of the World" being created by Stone in his mansion, an elaborate, miniaturized depiction of a utopian future. (1997; 148).

While creating a utopian future, Stone becomes a godlike patron.

In addition to symbolizing Jewish history and religion, this novel examines modern life. Who could claim that today's working class people have the option to live as they please? In our postmodern era, some people can be regarded as a "modern slaves"; Auster endeavors to emphasize this perspective. Capitalism makes people debtors who cycle endlessly from home to work. Varvogli fabulously asserts that Auster transforms his wall into a modern problem:

Nashe's analogy, however, is not very apt. The Wailing Wall is what remains of an existing monument, whereas this wall is the monument dismantled in order to be reconstructed. It is "postmodern" in that the ruins of the old castle appear to become something new even if possessing a non-usable function. By rebuilding the castle as a wall, Flower and Stone effectively erase its meaning and negate its history, but to say that the wall has no function is to talk about the world within the novel, the fictional world of Stone, Flower, Nashe and Pozzi. Within the novel that Paul Auster has written, the wall is far from being a self-referential construct of no use. (2001; 109)

Nashe's decision to volunteer to build a wall is not surprising; his inner psychology is very complicated and the reason why he behaves like that rises from his Jewish subconsciousness. "This atonement ironically coincides with Stone's perception of the wall as a 'Wailing Wall'" (Woods, 1995; 155).

In other words, Auster also invokes the Cold War era. For example, one critic states, “I suggest that its thematization of chance and narrative control are vestiges of similar concerns discussed throughout this book, and as such, Auster’s metafictional interests are at least partly explained by the Cold War frame” (2012; 130). Considering that he has a Jewish ethnicity, it is not surprising for the reader that Auster uses the theme of war and warlike references. The author himself accepts this idea when he summarizes his book. He defines the novel as “a book about walls and slavery and freedom the Berlin Wall came down” (Belletto, 2012; 131). Auster’s Jewish heritage is an important theme in this context.

Auster compares World War II Jews with modern people in a Capitalist society. Jim Nashe is exhausted and wishes for a sedentary life. When the millionaires told him to build a wall, he says: “It was almost a relief to have the decision taken out of his hands, to know that he had finally stopped running. The wall would not be a punishment so much as a cure, a one-way journey back to earth” (Auster, 1990; 100). Jim considers his enslavement to be a medication and a new beginning for him. He finds a positive meaning for his experiences – an atypical psychological response.

Starting over from scratch is good for Jim Nashe and his family. Auster’s symbolism is number zero, which has favorable and unfavorable meanings in the novel. The dialogue below indicates a new beginning:

“Right now I’m sitting in this car with you, little man, hoping you’re going to come through for me tonight.”

“A regular soldier of fortune.”

“That’s it. I’m just following my nose and waiting to see what turns up.”

“Welcome to the club.”

“Club? What club is that?”

“The International Brotherhood of Lost Dogs. What else? We’re letting you in as a certified, card-carrying member. Serial number zero zero zero.”

“I thought that was your number.”

“It is. But it’s your number, too. That’s one of the beauties of the Brotherhood. Everyone who joins gets the same number.” (Auster, 1990; 57)

Wall-building also has negative connotations, like modern bankruptcy and Jew in prison camps. People in these circumstances have nothing to lose. In fact, people with nothing can do everything. Auster describes Jim Nashe’s situation: “He was back to zero again, and now those things were gone. For even the smallest zero was a great hole of nothingness, a circle large enough to contain the world” (1990; 141-2).

The millionaires’ desire to discipline with their butler affects Nashe and Pozzi separately. While Nashe thinks more clearly under this pressure, Pozzi cannot stand and wants to escape the mansion. One critic states, “The principal protagonist, Nashe, is constantly pondering whether he either is or is not in control of things any longer; and his conclusions frequently turn out to be merely illusions on his part, since things clearly slip from his grasp only too easily” (Woods, 1995; 145). This kind of discipline disabuses Nashe’s mind and he begins to examine his situation. Woods describes a milieu with social constraints. Woods details this society without giving an opinion of whether it is decent or not:

Discipline forces everyone into an authorized place within a functioning hierarchy -- that place is prison in the event of any serious expression of a desire for freedom from the world of discipline. The society functions as the Protestant God that keeps all under constant observation, and the individual members of the God- society absorb this surveillance unto themselves for their own and others' sakes, in acts of self-policing. (1995; 152)

Furthermore, this kind of discipline necessitates power and sovereignty. Flowers and Stone’s authority over Pozzi and Nashe is “pessimistically, the victory of power” (Merivale, 1997; 190). Workers and laborers Auster emphasizes the labor force in terms of capitalism become as unnecessary as the trivia Flowers collects. There is also pasquinade of American dream which forces people work like slaves. Auster also discusses this concept, using third person of point of view:

The idea of such extravagant smallness began to exert an almost unbearable fascination over Nashe. Sometimes, powerless to stop himself, he even went so far as to imagine that he was

already living inside the model. Flower and Stone would look down on him then, and he would suddenly be able to see himself through their eyes—as if he were no larger than a thumb, a little gray mouse darting back and forth in his cage (Auster, 1990; 163)

Patrons like Stone make people work to survive – not for a good living. One critic emphasizes the troubles of American capitalism: “The labor becomes the exercise of a morally corrective power by a wealthy hegemonic Puritan capitalism, and as such, the signs of this being 'punishment' rather than working off a debt become increasingly clear” (Woods, 1995; 153). Woods says this started at the very beginning of European settlement in America. In his opinion, labor is more castigation than work or function. Wood also says that Auster does not criticize but rather observes the American system.

There appears to be no point from which a critical perspective of the system in which Nashe lives may be developed. American capitalist society is represented as a latter-day version of the Weberian "iron cage," the metaphor in which modern, rationalized capitalism determines with irresistible force the lives of all the individuals who are born into this system (Woods, 1995; 160)

In *The Music of Chance*, Pozzi and Nashe have different points of view on Flowers and Stone – the patrons who run their world. Pozzi has a negative perspective: “Assholes,” he said to himself. “The whole world is run by assholes.” (Auster, 1990; 123). Pozzi tells Nashe, “all of a sudden he thinks he was *chosen by God*” (my emphasis, Auster, 1990; 126). This emphasized phrase may remind readers of Jewish culture, history, and religion.

2. Auster's Realism

The Music of Chance contains many autobiographical elements. Although it has allegorical conflicts in its title, it reflects reality, humanity, and absurdity. By contemplating the American capitalist system and Jewish cultural roots and history, this novel plays an important role in the American literary canon. A critic states, “*The Music of Chance* is marred by the "clash" of its foundational realism with the allegory which starts to emerge halfway through...” (Merivale, 1997; 196). In this respect, this novel manifests reality.

Critics say *The Music of Chance* is more “realistic” than “allegorical”. For example, Irwin asserts “Truth can also be a form of fate and oppression. The more obvious the fate, the more reckless and needful the desire to rebel, however minimal the chance” (1994a). According to Irwin, the novel can be named “fate” rather than “chance”. Who can claim that anything cannot happen to himself or herself? Auster asserts himself as a “realist writer”. In an article he co-wrote, he states, “In the strictest sense of the word, I consider myself a realist. What I am after, I suppose, is to write fiction as strange as the world I live in” (McCaffery, Gregory, and Auster, 1992; 3). Auster continues to interpret his novel by discussing the notion of phenomenon that everything can occur:

Not terribly. Writing, in some sense, is an activity that helps me to relieve some of the pressure caused by these buried secrets. Hidden memories, traumas, childhood scars—there's no question that novels emerge from those inaccessible parts of ourselves. Every once in a while, however, I'll have a glimmer or a sudden intuition about where something came from. But as I said before, it always happens after the fact, after the book is finished, at a moment when the book no longer belongs to me. Just recently, as I was going through the manuscript of *The Music of Chance* for typographical errors, I had a revelation about one of the scenes that takes place toward the end of the novel: the moment when Nashe opens the door of the trailer and discovers Pozzi lying on the ground. As I read that passage—which goes on to describe how Nashe bends over the body and examines Pozzi to see if he is alive or dead—I understood that I was writing about something that had happened to me many years before. It was one of the most terrible moments of my life, an episode that has stayed with me ever since, and yet I wasn't aware of it at the time I composed that scene. (McCaffery, Gregory, and Auster, 1992; 7-8)

The “reality” Auster mentions is the continuing existence of Jewish history and the American system. *The Music of Chance* can be considered a “realistic novel”, not just a work of fiction.

3. Conclusion

Auster projects his Jewish culture and ethnicity on his protagonist, Jim Nashe, an ex-fireman who lost everything in a game of chance and was forced to build a wall. Despite the fictitious characteristics of this novel (and some allegories), Auster is clearly writing about history and the Capitalist system. Bray asks: “Why are these things happening? What's going on? What kind of book is this? For as a piece of fiction it is shaped in ways that subvert just about every expectation a reader could have with respect to conflict, rising action, resolution, and so forth” (1994a).

Auster was successful in synchronizing reality with fiction. He states, “Chance? Destiny? Or simple mathematics, an example of probability theory at work? It doesn't matter what you call it. Life is full of such events. As a writer of novels, I feel my job is to keep myself open to these collisions...” (McCaffery, Gregory, and Auster, 1992; 4).

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