



The Journey of Chance and Choice in Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance*

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Abstract

Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance* portrays the characters with a series of unpredictable events. It explores with the themes of fate, freedom, redemption and existence. This study examines the key components of chance and choice in navigating the individual in action of control and decision making. The novel highlights one's life with a series of events entangled with destiny and self-determination. Jim Nashe embarks on an unplanned journey and explores the individual's choice of chance and situation in shaping the course of one's life. Nashe's choice leads to disastrous ending entangled with unexpected consequences. Nashe's journey towards freedom and an unexpected meet with Jack Pozzi drastically changes the course of life. This paper examines the themes of Chance and Choice in reflecting the human existence and limits the individual's control in facing the consequences of personal decisions.

Keywords: journey, chance, choice, transformation, consequences.

Introduction

In literature, Chance in life is inherently an unpredictable adventure to move forward or it can be skipped. It is an opportunity to grasp the possibility to create a new record. Chance usually explore how societies function and understand the unpredictable, chaotic or contingent realities. Most of the eighteenth century and nineteenth century novels begin with accidents and further move forward

towards chance in life such as the works of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urberilles* and so on. In Joseph Conrad's novel *Chance*, the author insights into the role of chance, fate, circumstances, and uncertainties in life. Most of Conrad's novels deals with the concept of chance.

Modernist fiction deals with chance psychologically. Mostly, in the postmodern

fiction, chance plays an important role and it is obsessed with the concept of chance. In some cases, chance in life grasps ignorance or opportunity that is taken for granted. Chance happens as an opportunity or it happens just by chance. This chance maybe the important turning point in life. When encountering chance, the plot begins. Chance helps in personal growth and transformation which alters one's path. It closely relates to choice where decision makes an important role whether to grasp or not. It is a cognitive effect to choose the choices to lead the life.

Overview of *The Music of Chance*

Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance* is one of the significant work published in the year 1990. The novel was shortlisted for 1991 finalist of PEN/Faulkner award for fiction. The novel was later adapted into a film in 1993. Jim Nashe, the main protagonist of the novel, was left by his wife leaving their daughter, Juliet. He sends his daughter to his sister knowing that he cannot manage work and child at the same time. Juliet slowly forgets Nashe, as he visits his daughter once in six months. Nashe's father died leaving a large amount of money. He confirms Juliet was happy with her aunt, spends his money in paying off all his debts and chooses to live a carefree life travelling across the country for nearly a year.

After spending all his fortune, Jim Nashe meets a young Gambler Jack Pozzi. Nashe and Pozzi join hands together in Poker games, plans to destroy wealthy bachelors, Flower and Stone. As, their plan backfires, Nashe plays cards, takes risks on everything he has including his car. After losing with no money left, both serves the two wealthy bachelors instead of paying back their debts. At last, Nashe lost his friend Pozzi, convinced that he is dead. Finally, he took his car and collides with a vehicle.

The journey of chance in *The Music of Chance*

In the novel, *The Music of Chance*, the main protagonist Thomas Nashe's life begins with the random events which shapes by the central theme of "chance". He decides to embark on a journey without any careful plan for future. This promptly made him to sell his house. His personal dissatisfaction and desire to escape from reality urges him to regain his control over life. Decision plays an important role in one's life and attempting it may change our life which cannot be reversed but understands it better than before.

The first encounter between Thomas Nashe and Jack Pozzi in the novel shows the clear manifestation of chance resulted in attempting a journey. Jack Pozzi is a mysterious and enigmatic person who introduces gambling to Nashe. Nashe who is new to the world of gambling tries Poker game and lost all possessions, then fall into debts, encounters two wealthy men who hold them captive. This entire meet happens by chance and acts as a catalyst behind the force of decision making at the heat of the moment. Nashe's life entangled with events beyond his control and his attempt to regain the loss moves him into the web of unpredictability. Through the life of Nashe, the author implies life itself is a game of chance and circumstances that drives towards existence, resolution and meaning.

Nashe after losing everything he has, he longs for a chance to do something for himself. But the missed chances are lost forever until one gets a second chance to achieve the goal.

But because he had already given up, because he figured there was nothing to lose anymore, he saw the stranger as a reprieve, as a last chance to do something for himself before it was too late (1)

Nashe has a daughter Juliette, left by her mother at the age of two, he manages to give her to his sister because he was working in fire

department. He plans her to give his daughter to live a normal life as other kids.

At least Juliette would have a chance to live with a real family, to be surrounded by other kids and to breathe some fresh air, and that was a lot better than anything he could offer her himself (2)

After leaving Juliet, Nashe planned to go back to Massachusetts, but he found himself travelled in opposite direction. He knows that was a common mistake but even though sets to go without turning back.

He had just committed himself to the wrong road. It was a sudden; unpremeditated decision...- to imagine all that freedom, to understand how little it mattered what choice he made (5)

Nashe started his journey without a definite plan. And, one that doesn't change is that he visited his daughter without fail. He started doing adventures like traveling in the car with full freedom and experienced the new life of irresponsibility. Later, it gets prolonged without any reasons to get stopped.

Nashe did not have any definite plan... little by little, he had fallen in love with his new life of freedom and irresponsibility, and once that happened, there were no longer any reasons to stop (10)

He feels that his life is in his own hands. After spending all the money on travelling and gambling, he left with nothing irreversible. It was no good giving in like that, he decided, it was the wrong approach (18). The truth is he lost more than he won.

The journey of choice and consequences in *The Music of Chance*

In Nashe's life, chance plays a significant role and the choices he decides leads towards a series of events entangled along with the circumstances. The choice of Nashe to accompany Pozzi in Poker game involves high

risks and traps them in dangerous situation. The author suggests that individuals should have their own limitations over personal desires because choices are often shaped by external circumstances. In this novel, Nashe's decision to participate in poker game is to escape from financial troubles and he believes chance as an offer to extricate himself from troubles. But, later he realizes that his choices allure him into the game which leads him into a dangerous trap.

Nashe caught between the desire, control and consequences faced due to decisions which embarks into the existential dilemmas. In this novel, choice depicted as both illusion and burden which resulted either psychologically, socially in addition to situational pressures. Nashe's true freedom of will and tension between fate resulted in realization of situational based own choice.

Meeting of Jack Pozzi was a chance encounter in Jim Nashe's life. They both join hands in playing poker games. They lost and have to work to repay the debt amount.

It was odd, but the fact was that he felt worse for the kid than he felt for himself. Everything was lost, and yet the only feeling inside him was one of pity. (94)

Nashe accepted the predicament and realized the choice he made with the dire of consequences.

His money was gone, his car was gone, his life was in a shambles. If nothing else, perhaps those fifty days would give him a chance to take stock, ... The wall would not be a punishment so much as a cure, a one way journey back to earth. (100)

At the end of the novel, the escape plan leads to Pozzi's dead and Nashe crashes his car to end his life. Pozzi's dead changed the entire life and mentality of Nashe. Nashe feels guilty when the luck fails in game resulted in facing the consequences of building a meaningless wall confined them to pay the debt. The physical and mental damages shows the consequences of

choice they made and their freedom to pursue in life turns upside down. The impact of the chance, choice and consequences shows the journey of life.

Conclusion

The novel *The Music of Chance* revolves around the poker game either represents the randomness of life or the consequences of individual's choices and the outcome of the game is determined by chance in this unpredictable world. Nashe mirrors his own journey hopes to win the game and solving his problems, but entangles in trap beyond their control over force and situation. In this novel, Paul Auster explores the theme of chance, choices and consequences. Through Nashe's journey one can understand the decisions and choices individuals feel influenced by external circumstances and psychological impulses.

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