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# **“I Never Knew My Father”: Father-Son Relationships in Paul Auster’s *Moon Palace* and *Mr. Vertigo*\***

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## Summary

Paul Auster’s *Moon Palace* and *Mr. Vertigo* have often been defined as “frontier novels” because they are both set in the American West. However, due to the overt attention paid to the milieu, critics of these works have not completely analyzed the shared theme of father-son relationships. A careful analysis of the two works reveals that *Moon Palace* depicts main characters who aspire to become father figures but ultimately fail to do so. In contrast, the protagonist’s act of levitation in *Mr. Vertigo*, one of its biggest motifs, is depicted as an indicator of his moral development and degradation, which is heavily influenced by the father-son relationship that he establishes as “master and apprentice.” Based on this inference, this study demonstrates that the protagonist’s eventual signs of re-levitation in *Mr. Vertigo* lead to the realization of an unsatisfied desire to become a father figure in *Moon Palace*.

Although Paul Auster’s *Moon Palace* (1989) and *Mr. Vertigo* (1994) have often been viewed as “frontier novels” because of their emphasis on the American West as the setting where the protagonists gain their identities, critics have overlooked the father-son relationships around which both novels are centered. However, as Bruce Bawer notes, “at the heart of *Moon Palace*, as well as of all three *New York Trilogy* novels, lies a complex and powerful obsession—an obsession, namely, with the theme of fathers and sons” (188). This is true for *Mr. Vertigo* because “the only crucial relationship in the novel is that of Yehudi and Walt, of father and (adopted) son” (Springer 178). Indeed, there are many “fathers” in these two works, not only in the genetic sense but also in the form of a surrogate relationship with the protagonist. The portrayal of each protagonist as an orphan seems to attest to Auster’s strategy of emphasizing the protagonists’ desire to find their actual or surrogate fathers, who can function as

protectors and facilitate their identity formation.

Marc Chénétier thoroughly investigated the genesis of *Moon Palace* and found that in the marginalia of the novel, Auster had played with the ideas of “Captain Vertigo” or “Dr. Vertigo” (38). Hence, it is presumable that the creation of *Moon Palace* is inextricably connected with *Mr. Vertigo*, and that both novels share a central theme. This study illuminates how the main characters’ irresistible desire to become father figures ends in complete dissatisfaction in *Moon Palace*, and how the protagonist’s moral improvement and depravity, affected by the father-son relationship, coincides with the motif of levitation in *Mr. Vertigo*. From this perspective, we see that the recognition of signs for the capacities of levitation, in the conclusion of *Mr. Vertigo*, leads to the eventual fulfillment of an otherwise unfulfilled wish in *Moon Palace*.

### MOON PALACE: THE OBSESSION WITH BECOMING A FATHER

*Moon Palace* depicts Marco Stanley Fogg as an orphan who lost his father and mother at an early age. Marco is taken in and raised by his maternal uncle, Victor Fogg. To illustrate their relationship, Auster often underscores Victor’s attempts to substitute himself for Marco’s dead father. For example, early in the novel, Marco describes his own father, whom he has never seen, as “a dark-haired version of Buck Rogers” (4). Marco’s association of his own father with the hero of a science-fiction film plays a crucial role in the scene where Victor goes with Marco to watch the film, *Around the World in 80 Days* (1956). After the film, Victor begins to refer to Marco as “Phileas” because Marco and the protagonist in the film share the same surname: “The hero of that story was named Fogg, of course, and from that day on Uncle Victor called me Phileas as a term of endearment—a secret reference to that strange moment, as he put it, ‘when we confronted ourselves on the screen’” (6). On the one hand, Victor’s use of “we” in this scene serves as an annotation for himself and Marco who share the surname. On the other hand, we see Victor’s desire to identify himself with the protagonist of *Around the World in 80 Days*. As noted, Marco associates his absent father with Buck Rogers. Considering this, it can be assumed that Victor’s use of “we” reveals his hidden desire to become a surrogate father, a figure similar to Buck Rogers, to Marco.

There is another scene that depicts Victor’s strong aspiration to become Marco’s surrogate father. When they are separated by Marco’s admission to Columbia University and Victor’s simultaneous departure for a musical tour of the West, Victor gives Marco several boxes of books. According to Victor, Marco is the only one who can “carry on the tradition” (13). Victor’s paternal desire to reinforce his own status as a father is evidenced in this bequeathal of books.

The motif of an inheritance that functions as a means to reinforce the status of the father comes from Auster’s own life experience. Auster’s father played no active part in his life, and was far from an ideal

father. In *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), in the part titled "Portrait of an Invisible Man," Auster recalls his father's blunt attitude toward Auster's newborn son and, implicitly perhaps, toward himself as well: "And if he could show affection for his grandson, then wouldn't it be an indirect way of showing affection for me? You do not stop hungering for your father's love, even after you are grown up" (19). This shows that, as the section title suggests, his father was "invisible."

It is ironic that only when Auster's father died, was he able to make a real commitment to his son's life in the form of an inheritance. In his thirties, Auster faced great difficulties making a living. However, the death of Auster's father, followed by the inheritance, gave Auster the opportunity to focus exclusively on writing a novel. Thereafter, he successfully published his first novella and enjoyed "a flowering of creativity" (Peacock 140). The inheritance, in Auster's literary world, where fathers often have no importance in the lives of their sons, demonstrates his father's power to improve his son's life. Auster sees inheritance, whether of money or books, as a means for someone who is not blessed with fatherly qualities to become a father figure.

Nonetheless, Victor's inability to settle down and build a stable foundation prevents him from becoming a father in the true sense of the word. Victor's realization that "fatherhood [is] beyond him" (6) indicates that his desire to replace Marco's absent father is an unfulfilled hope. In fact, Victor dies of a heart attack and loses the possibility of becoming a father figure.

After the death of his surrogate father, Marco heads on a path to ruin. He barely eats, lives as a homeless man in Central Park, and generally descends into a state of hopelessness. However, with the help of Kitty Wu, a young Chinese woman who becomes his girlfriend, and David Zimmer, one of her friends, Marco is finally able to change his catastrophic lifestyle. He lives in Zimmer's house and begins to make a living by working part-time as a translator before finding a job doing clerical work in the home of an elderly, wheelchair-bound, blind man named Thomas Effing.

Effing acts as the second father figure to Marco in this story. Auster characterizes Effing as a man of "selfishness and arrogance" (108). Effing forces Marco to take walks and describe the scenery in detail, as well as read aloud many books about travel to him. Thus, Effing functions as a paternal figure who gives Marco new insights into life and knowledge.

One day, Effing suddenly loses interest in travelogues and asks Marco to write his obituary. As Effing reflects on his life, his tone becomes even harsher, especially when he mentions his former wife, Elizabeth. According to Effing, Elizabeth's sexual immaturity and ignorance prevented him from having sexual relations with her, except on their wedding night. He decided to give up his family and his chance to become a father and chose to live freely in the West as he desired.

Marco finds that Effing's emotional distress is related to his past experiences: "I began to see him [Effing] as a tortured soul, as a man haunted by his past, struggling to hide some secret anguish that was

devouring him from within” (117). However, of all his afflictions, the presence of his son torments him the most. Returning to New York from the West after wandering for a long time, Effing finds out that he has a son born as a result of his one and only night with Elizabeth. Given that Effing becomes depressed after the move to New York, his anguish is “due to his regret of being [an] absent father” (Ferry 57). Effing tries to make up for this regret by taking his own life. Effing says, “I’m going to die on May twelfth, exactly two months from today” (198). These words demonstrate that his death is not accidental but intentional. For Effing, the only way to make up for his past as an absent father is through the inheritance that will be bequeathed after his death. In addition, Effing’s suicide allows his son, “a walking dirigible disaster” (197), to become a father. Effing’s son, Solomon Barber, who turns out to be Marco’s real father, has also spent his life as an absent father. Since Effing himself has suffered from being an absent father, it is not surprising that he feels the agony of his son. Given this, Effing’s death is an attempt to help Barber and Marco establish a new relationship as father and son, for he asks Marco, instead of his attorney, to send his obituary to Barber. This is why Effing voluntarily braves the rainy outdoors and puts his old body at risk, ending his life on the day he had planned to do so.

Due to Effing’s death, Marco also gains an inheritance from Effing. The money from his surrogate father figure enables him to live the life of his dreams. Shortly afterward, Marco meets Effing’s son, Barber, who is the third father figure in the story. Although Barber is now a university professor, he has lived a miserable life since childhood because of his “monstrous fat” (235) body. Therefore, he has viewed the world of books as a means of escaping that reality and has consequently enjoyed academic success. However, when it is revealed that he had an affair with one of his students, Emily Fogg, he is fired from the university and his life becomes even more difficult as he moves from one small university to another.

Auster portrays Barber’s marginalization not only as a result of his enormous body but also as a consequence of the anguish of being an absent father. As is the case with Marco, Barber too, though unconsciously, spent most of his youth searching for his absent father. According to Marco, *Kepler’s Blood*, a science-fiction novel that Barber wrote around the age of 17, and several of his scholarly books on American history reflect his irresistible desire to find his father. In describing the relationship between Barber and Marco, Auster overlaps their fates as both of them have been obsessed with their absent fathers throughout their lives.

When Barber meets Marco for the first time, he recognizes their blood relationship: “Ten months later, when Barber lay dying in a Chicago hospital with a broken back, he told me that he had begun to suspect the truth as early as that first conversation in the hotel lobby” (237). However, Barber does not tell him the truth because he thinks that Marco will be upset. Although Barber’s increasingly intimate relationship with Marco can be seen as an attempt to satisfy his paternal desires secretly, their father-son

relationship begins to deteriorate when Barber suddenly reveals that he is Marco's father at his mother Emily's graveside, during a trip to the western caves where Effing used to live. When Marco learns the truth, he is shocked and curses Barber bitterly. Marco reflects on his emotions at the sudden discovery of his absent father:

For twenty-four years, I had lived with an unanswerable question, and little by little I had come to embrace that enigma as the central fact about myself. My origins were a mystery, and I would never know where I had come from. This was what defined me, and by now I was used to my own darkness, clinging to it as a source of knowledge and self-respect, trusting in it as an ontological necessity. No matter how hard I might have dreamed of finding my father, I had never thought it would be possible. Now that I had found him, the inner disruption was so great that my first impulse was to deny it. (295)

This extract reinforces the fact that Marco, like Barber, defines his life by his father's absence. Facing this torrent of passion from Marco, Barber accidentally steps off the edge of the graveside and falls into the grave. At this moment, Barber realizes that he has caused his son to suffer to the same extent that he himself suffered due to his father's absence. Thus, it seems plausible to claim that Marco's inability to accept his father drove Barber to his grave.

This reading is supported by the description that "The sun was at the top of the sky by then, and the whole cemetery was shimmering with a strange, pulsing glare, as if the light had grown too strong to be real" (293). Auster pays special attention to how the sun is shining on the cemetery. Given the symbolic role attached to the sun in *Moon Palace*,<sup>1</sup> this is apt because Auster here uses the "past (sun)" to illuminate the cemetery into which Barber is soon to be placed. This scene symbolizes that Barber's past behavior led him to his death. Thus, we can conclude that he too became an absent father, tormenting his son in the same way that he was once tormented by the absence of his father, Effing.

After falling into the grave and being hospitalized—an event that eventually leads to his death—Barber gradually loses weight, and Marco sees a resemblance between himself and Barber's emaciated face. He cannot help but acknowledge that he is Barber's son. Marco admits, "I [am] looking at myself" (296). On one level, his words reveal a superficial approximation of their appearances. On another level, they function as a commentary on his and Barber's situation. Just as Barber is incapable of being a father in the true sense of the word, Marco too is a man whose possibility of becoming a father has been erased.

The final father figure in *Moon Palace* is Marco himself. Before going to the West with Barber, he finds out that Kitty is pregnant with his child. Although he desperately wants the child, Kitty does not intend to have a child and is determined to have an abortion. Marco agonizes over Kitty's choice: "I wanted to be a father, and now that the prospect was before me, I couldn't stand the thought of losing it"

(280). Becoming a father is so important to him that it dominates his whole life. “If you [Kitty] kill our baby,” Marco says, “you’ll be killing me along with it” (280). Being deprived of a child makes Marco feel as though “[his] whole life [were] taken away from [him]” (281).

Auster uses the description of the moon to connect Marco with the other three men who desperately wanted to be fathers. In the end, Marco decides to visit the cave in the West where his grandfather once lived. However, he is informed by one of the local townspeople that the entire area around the cave is submerged in water. He gives up the search and in the last scene, looks down at the ocean and stares up at the moon in the waning night sky: “Then the moon came up from behind the hills. It was a full moon, as round and yellow as a burning stone. I kept my eyes on it as it rose into the night sky, not turning away until it had found its place in the darkness” (307). Although this memorable last scene can be interpreted as a happy ending because the moon symbolizes the future in *Moon Palace*,<sup>2</sup> Auster attaches a greater significance to the moon that Marco is staring at. As the title strongly suggests, *Moon Palace* is filled with symbolism concerning the moon, which is “a central motif” (Hallet 61) and “the main source of metaphors in the novel” (González 68). Auster uses the moon to represent the Apollo moon landing, America as an unknown world, and the subject of Ralph Blakelock’s painting, *Moonlight* (1885), throughout the story. At the same time, Barber’s bald head, which is “hover[ing] in midair” (294) when he is hospitalized and kept suspended by a pulley, is also reminiscent of the moon floating in the sky. Thus, the parallel drawn between the moon and the human head indicates that the last scene associates another human head with the moon that Marco sees. In the last scene, Auster attributes Marco’s hope for the future to the moon, as his greatest desire was to father a child. In other words, if water is symbolic of the rebirth, we can clearly say that Marco, during the act of gazing at the moon as it rises above the ocean, is dreaming of having a baby he once thought lost with his future wife.

### MR. VERTIGO: THE OBSESSION WITH FINDING A FATHER

*Mr. Vertigo* also foregrounds the theme of the protagonist’s search for a father by presenting the protagonist Walter Rawley, called Walt, as an orphan. Throughout the story, Walt struggles to maintain a relationship with multiple father figures to compensate for his absent father. However, instead of the biological father-son relationship depicted in *Moon Palace*, *Mr. Vertigo* focuses on an alternative father-son relationship, in the form of an apprentice and a master, in which Walt learns the skill of levitation and grows up.

In scholarly analyses of *Mr. Vertigo*, Walt’s act of levitation plays an important and primary role. Shortly after its publication, an early reviewer maintained, “Walt rises with Lindbergh and crashes with the stock market” (Cantor). This view of Walt’s levitation as occurring concurrently with the boom and

the depression in the United States in the 1920s has been shared by various critics. Aliko Varvogli identifies that Walt's rise and fall is "related to the changes that his country also undergoes" (159), and Carsten Springer reinforces this view by saying that "Walt's loss of the flying role coincides with the crash of the New York Stock Exchange (October 1929)" (180). In addition, James Peacock observes that "the apparent levity fails to disguise the historical and political allegories at work, for this is a 'rise-and-fall' story set against a specific historical background of economic expansion and growth, Prohibition, and the 1920s stock market crash" (132). Critics agree that Walt's rise and fall constitute a metaphor for the America of that time.

However, despite much critical attention, reviewers have overlooked the fact that Auster draws a parallel between Walt's rise and fall, and his moral improvement and corruption. In *Mr. Vertigo*, Walt's moral integrity changes in response to the maturity of his levitation skills. To demonstrate this, Auster has Walt build a relationship with multiple father figures, such as Master Yehudi, Aesop, and Bingo, under whose guardianships his moral integrity fluctuates.

In November 1927, Walt, an orphaned street urchin, is approached by an oddly dressed man Master Yehudi, who offers him the opportunity to become his apprentice and learn the art of levitation. According to Yehudi, Walt is an unnecessary burden for his uncle, who has raised him instead of his real parents. Persuaded by this, Walt leaves home and decides to live with Yehudi, who becomes a surrogate father figure to him. However, when he arrives at Yehudi's residence in Kansas, he finds other people of color, such as Mother Sioux, an Indian woman with only a few teeth, and a hunchbacked Black man named Aesop. For Walt, who is "dreadfully biased" (*A Life in Words* 181), living under the same roof with them is unbearable. Walt says, "I ain't shaking hands with no nigger" (13). This shows his deep-rooted racism and hatred.

In illustrating the relationship between Walt and Aesop, Auster highlights the striking differences between them. Compared to the illiterate, ignorant, and highly prejudiced Walt, Aesop displays a wealth of education and "genuine kindness" (20). Besides, despite their slight age difference, their relationship is characterized by a definite asymmetry in terms of emotional maturity. Walt remarks about their relationship as follows:

The worst part of it was that Aesop didn't seem to care that I despised him so much. I perfected a whole repertoire of scowls and grimaces to use in his company, but whenever I shot one of those looks in his direction, he would just shake his head and smile to himself. It made me feel like an idiot. No matter how hard I tried to hurt him, he never let me get under his skin, never gave me the satisfaction of scoring a point against him. He wasn't simply winning the war between us, he was winning every damned battle of that war ... (21)

As the surrogate father-son relationship deepens, Walt gradually overcomes his deep-rooted

prejudices. This sign of Walt's moral improvement coincides with the beginning of his education in the art of levitation. At first, he is given no special training and is required to undertake the simple tasks set by Master Yehudi. However, one morning, when his master is away, Walt wakes up earlier than usual and manages to levitate successfully, albeit only briefly. Walt's first success as a levitator coincides with him learning "the letters and numbers with Aesop's help" (55). Walt, originally a highly prejudiced boy, gains knowledge of the world and learns about culture from a Black boy, Aesop. Walt's signs of improvement are interwoven with his relationship with a surrogate father. Subsequently, Walt starts training seriously with Yehudi to learn how to fly higher and faster. Yehudi rarely speaks to Walt during training, and eventually, Walt spends all his time practicing by himself, and steadily acquires the desired levitation skills.

However, when Aesop, who has been accepted at Yale University, and Mother Sioux are hanged by a group of KKK members one night, a dark shadow is cast over Yehudi's family. The loss of these two beloved group members pushes Yehudi into a deep and profound state of sorrow, from which he is not able to recover easily. Yehudi's tremendous grief over these deaths stands out in sharp contrast to Walt's indifference. Master Yehudi "scarcely stirred from his bed, he scarcely ate, he scarcely talked. Except for the tears that dropped from his eyes every three or four hours, there was no way to tell if you were looking at a man or a block of stone" (99).

Meanwhile, Walt only has "dreams about [his] new career" rather than of his former family members because "life is for the living" (100). This portrayal of Walt reveals that although he has become less racially prejudiced under the apprenticeship of his father figure, Aesop, his moral improvement is not enough for him to mourn the dead. By extension, it could be said that the immaturity of Walt's moral development is equally related to the fact that, although he has finally started to learn the art of levitation under Yehudi, he has not yet fully mastered it. In other words, just as Walt has not become a morally mature person, so too have his levitation skills not fully matured.

Immediately after Aesop's death, Walt begins to practice more intensely to master the art of levitation under the guardianship of Yehudi, his foremost father figure. His first step to success as a circus sideshow performer begins at a county fair in Kansas, but the show fails when a bottle thrown by one of the audience members hits him in the head just after he begins to levitate, breaking his concentration and causing him to crash. Subsequently, Walt becomes focused solely on performance, and his levitation skills become increasingly reliable.

The increasing improvement in Walt's levitation skills is consistent with the growth of his moral integrity. One morning during breakfast, Walt suggests to his master that he should plot revenge for the murders of Aesop and Mother Sioux. Their loss now seems unbearable to Walt, and he tries to convince Master Yehudi that unless he avenges their deaths, the act of mourning will not be complete, arguing that

"They're writhing in torment, master, and their souls won't never be at peace until we do what we've got to do" (133). Auster presents Walt's statement in this scene in stark contrast to his attitude toward death soon after Aesop and Mother Sioux were murdered earlier in the novel. To the former Walt, their death was less important than his career as a showman, but to the current Walt, who is more skilled at levitation, avenging the dead is far more important than the show at hand.

As his levitation skills and reputation as a levitator reach their peak, Walt's moral integrity seems to surpass his master's. When sharing a dressing room at a circus with various other performers, Master Yehudi makes a negative and disdainful remark about interacting with second-rate performers:

He was standoffish with most of them and urged me to follow his example. "You're the star," he'd whisper. "Act like it. You don't have to give those chumps the time of day." It was a small bone of contention between us, but I figured I'd be on the vaudeville circuit for years to come, and I saw no point in making enemies when I didn't have to. (190-191)

In this scene, the formerly prejudiced Walt is not present any more. Instead, Yehudi's attitude seems to promote prejudice against people with half-developed skills. Thus, Auster clearly contrasts Walt and Yehudi's moral maturities. Yehudi, whose moral integrity is harmed by the success of the sideshow business, is distinguished from Walt, who becomes more virtuous. However, Walt becomes afflicted by headaches during levitation. At the same time, Yehudi develops cancer and takes his own life. With the death of his father figure Yehudi, Walt's career as a levitator ends.

After a three-year search for Uncle Slim, who robbed Walt of his money in the heyday of his career, Walt finally finds him. Walt offers him poisoned milk to kill him. For Walt, who can no longer levitate due to serious headaches, killing someone seems trivial. Again, Auster parallels Walt's loss of the ability to levitate with his diminishing moral integrity.

In exchange for not being held responsible for killing Slim, Walt chooses the guardianship of a gangster, Bingo Walsh, Slim's former employer. For Walt, Bingo is the third father figure in the novel: "I was lucky to have him as my mentor. Bingo took me under his wing, I kept my eyes open and listened to what he said, and my whole life turned around" (236). Under Bingo's apprenticeship, Walt's former career as an acrobat becomes a thing of the past, and he starts building a steady career in the underground world of crime. Simultaneously, Auster depicts Walt's morality as the opposite of what it used to be: "I made a home for myself in the organization, and I never felt the smallest pang about throwing in my lot with the bad guys" (239). The further he moves away from the fame of his levitation performances, the more extreme his moral depravity is: "It hurt too much to look back, so I kept my eyes fixed in front of me, and every time I took another step forward, I drifted farther away from the person I'd been with Master Yehudi" (240).

We see that Walt feels the deepest disillusionment with himself in his relationship with his former

idol, Dizzy Dean. Dizzy is a pitcher for the Cardinals, the team Walt is deeply attached to, and “an established star, a big-time force on the American scene” (255). However, in the fourth game of the World Series, his career took a dark turn when a ball from an opposing hitter struck him in the head. Although tests revealed no abnormalities, Dean’s career is undone by a series of problems that occur during each game. However, what Walt finds truly unbearable is that Dizzy continues to hold on to his career, although the tide has long since turned against him.

One night, Dizzy Dean unexpectedly shows up at Mr. Vertigo, the club that Walt runs in Chicago. Walt urges Dizzy to retire, but Dizzy insists on staying active, despite pitching terribly and being hit all the time. Walt realizes that his mission is to kill Dizzy because, for Walt, Dizzy is an alter ego: “I’d latched onto Dizzy because he reminded me of myself, and as long as his career flourished, I could relive my past glory through him” (265).

To enhance their duality, Auster not only connects them with similar names—Walt’s nickname, Mr. Vertigo, and Dizzy—but also associates them in terms of the head-related problems that drove their respective careers downhill. Given this duality, Walt’s inability to tolerate Dizzy’s circumstances is an expression of his inability to tolerate his own life. Ultimately, Walt is diverted from killing Dizzy. He hands over the ownership of his club to Bingo in exchange for immunity and leaves Bingo’s custody.

In the final chapter of the novel, Auster describes signs of Walt rising once again. After a series of jobs, Walt eventually returns to his hometown and lives a long life married to Mrs. Witherspoon, Master Yehudi’s former girlfriend. After finishing his autobiography, *Mr. Vertigo*, Walt spends time gazing at Yusef, the only son of a Black cleaning woman. This boy leads Walt to contemplate what Master Yehudi once thought regarding Walt: “Watching Yusef, I now know what the master saw in me, and I know what he meant when he told me I had the gift. This boy has the gift, too. If I could ever pluck up my courage to speak to his mother, I’d take him under my wing in a second” (291-292). From the viewpoint of a master, Walt sees in Yusuf the image of his former self and “assumes the role of a ‘master’ himself” (Springer 181). Becoming a master enables Walt to understand levitation:

Deep down, I don’t believe it takes any special talent for a person to lift himself off the ground and hover in the air. We all have it in us—every man, woman, and child—and with enough hard work and concentration, every human being is capable of duplicating the feats I accomplished as Walt the Wonder Boy. (293)

The story ends with Walt’s realization that he can levitate once again. Considering that throughout this book Auster has consistently paralleled moral development and depravity with the rise and fall of Walt’s levitation career, Walt’s recognition of the possibility of levitation represents his desire to break free of his former immoral self and return to a moral life. This conclusion shows that if you are the “master” of your own mind, you can change it at any time. The final father figure in the novel is Walt himself.

## CONCLUSION

This study seeks to show that Auster’s two “frontier novels” not only tackle the common theme of the father-son relationship, but also develop it in the multiple works. Although the motif of the father-son relationship is recurrent in Auster’s oeuvre, the divergent conclusions of *Moon Palace* and *Mr. Vertigo* represent that this obsession is used to describe the protagonists’ different realizations about fulfilling their desire to become father figures. Unlike *Moon Palace*, where the desire to become a father figure can only be satisfied by the physical presence of a “son,” *Mr. Vertigo* exhibits a spiritual aspect. By extending the father-son relationship to include the more ambiguous relationship of “master and apprentice,” Auster shows in *Mr. Vertigo* that the desire to become a father (master) can be fulfilled through self-transformation within one’s mind.

(おおたわら ひろのり・人文学専攻)

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In *Moon Palace*, the sentence, “The sun is the past, the earth is the present, the moon is the future,” appears twice. When Marco, Kitty, and Zimmer go to a Chinese restaurant named Moon Palace, this is the fortune foretold in Marco’s fortune cookie; later in the novel, Marco encounters the sentence again while reading Nikola Tesla’s autobiography.

<sup>2</sup> Here again, we are reminded of the recurring phrase, “The sun is the past, the earth is the present, the moon is the future.”

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