
Memory and Hypnagogia: A Study on Paul Auster's Baumgartner

¹Mrs. K. Bagyalakshmi, ²Dr. M. Prasath

¹Research Scholar (Part Time)

PG and Research Department of English

Vivekanandha College of Arts and Science for Women (A)

Elayampalayam, Tiruchengode, Namakkal, Tamil Nadu

E-Mail Id: bagyalaxmi1983@gmail.com

²Research Supervisor

PG and Research Department of English

Vivekanandha College of Arts and Science for Women (A)

Elayampalayam, Tiruchengode, Namakkal, Tamil Nadu

E-Mail Id: prasaad2008@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article investigates memory and hypnagogia in Paul Auster's novella Baumgartner, analyzing how the main protagonist's memories are filtered through the lens of hypnagogia states- the brief interval between wakefulness and sleep. Employing Memory theory and Psychoanalytic insights into subconscious states, the paper examines how Auster's portrayal of Baumgartner's experiences emphasizes memory as fluid, fragmented, and deeply influenced by the subconscious. Baumgartner's hypnagogic episodes reveal buried memories, illustrating Auster's perspective on altered consciousness as a potent gateway to understanding self and trauma. This study illuminates Auster's portrayal of memory as multi-dimensional and proposes that hypnagogia deepens our grasp of memory as multi-dimensional and that hypnagogia deepens our grasp of memory's impact on identity.

KEY WORDS

Memory, Hypnagogia, Psychoanalysis, Self, and Identity

Introduction:

Memory and its role in personal identity is an enduring subject in both literary and psychological studies. Authors like Proust (1913) and theorists like Freud (1900) emphasize memory's association with altered consciousness, especially in the transition between wakefulness and sleep, where the conscious and subconscious often intersect. In Baumgartner, Paul Auster explores the protagonist's fragmented memories within hypnagogic states, where the boundaries of the self-blur and latent memories arise spontaneously. Hypnagogic, a state marked by vivid, often bizarre imagery, is both a fertile space for memory retrieval and a threshold into suppressed parts of consciousness (Mavromatis 5). For Baumgartner, these states serve as

emotional mirrors, reflecting his unresolved grief and trauma and urging him to confront aspects of himself long hidden from conscious view.

Auster's decision to emphasize hypnagogia as a link between memory and identity corresponds with psychoanalytic theories. Freud's idea of the "return of the repressed" suggests that memories or experiences pushed into the unconscious can emerge under different conditions; something Baumgartner often encounters (Freud 576). By placing these memories in hypnagogic states, Auster highlights their psychological significance and encourages readers to ponder memories' malleable, reconstructive essence. This research, through a detailed analysis of Baumgartner, argues that Auster's incorporation of hypnagogia illustrates memory as a dynamic, changing force, consistently influenced by the subconscious.

Memory and Hypnagogia in Baumgartner:

Auster's novella delves deeply into how hypnagogic states bring Baumgartner's past to the forefront in fragmented yet vivid flashes. Throughout *Baumgartner*, Auster presents memory as nonlinear and associative, allowing hypnagogic to serve as a stage for memories that Baumgartner would otherwise repress. Baumgartner's memories often appear suddenly, prompted by emotional or sensory cues, embodying what Proust describes as "Involuntary memory", where sensory triggers can evoke intense, unbidden recollections (Proust 68). Auster's use of the hypnagogic state mirrors this phenomenon, where Baumgartner finds himself revisiting emotionally charged scenes from the past. For instance, as Baumgartner drifts into a half-sleep, images of his deceased wife surface unexpectedly, conveying his profound grief and inner turmoil: "His mind wandered to her face, clear and smiling, only to dissolve again into darkness" (Auster 15). This fleeting moment illustrates how memory, through hypnagogia, becomes a space where unresolved emotions reassert themselves.

In the hypnagogic state, Baumgartner functions as an intermediary, bridging Baumgartner's present life with unresolved aspects of his past. Auster's portrayal aligns with theories of associative memory, suggesting that subconscious memories may be triggered by specific stimuli, even in the absence of conscious recall (Bergson 132). This dynamic can be observed when Baumgartner recalls fragment memories, such as the Cape Cod surf drive that took his wife. The narrator comments, "It was always in that half-walking state... that he could almost hear her voice, almost feel for touch, as if she were still beside him" (Auster 33). Here, the sensory detail and immediacy of the memory reveal how hypnagogia acts as a space where Baumgartner's unresolved feelings re-emerge, juxtaposing the past vividly against the present. Through Baumgartner's experience, Auster positions hypnagogia as a narrative device that reveals the complexities of memory as inherently fluid, existing between the conscious and subconscious. This is evident when Baumgartner's memories shift from clarity to confusion, mirroring the non-linear and associative qualities that Andreas Mavromatis attributes to hypnagogia (Mavromatis 36). Baumgartner's memories, especially those connected to personal loss; do not appear in sequential order but rather as fragmented images and impressions. This fragmentation, distinguished when "faces and voices emerged briefly, then faded," underscores the notion that memory in altered states can be non-linear and multi-faceted (Auster 41).

In his poignant memoir "*Baumgartner*," the late Paul Auster examines the intricate and often elusive nature of human memory, exploring how the past influences the present and the author's imagination. At the core of this work lies Auster's profound anguish and yearning for his deceased wife, Anna, whose recollections become a driving force in his self-exploration. The story is driven by Baumgartner's continual struggle to recover memories from his past, a journey that is simultaneously healing and deeply disturbing. Auster's remarkable mastery of language and sharp perception of the human psyche is evident as he navigates the intricate realms of memory. It influences the author's creativity and the core of his existence. It provides contemplation on identity,

the delicacy of human bonds, and the inescapable sorrow of loss. The author's own encounters with sorrow and acceptance of a dear one's absence are intricately integrated into the story, leading to a profoundly personal and resonant examination of memory's ability to both comfort and afflict.

Auster's part of a set character Baumgartner investigates "Hypnagogia", examining the psychological and thematic aspects of the transitional phase between being awake and sleep. The story's main character, Sy Baumgartner, an author and philosophy lecturer, struggles with the deep effects of his wife Anna's death, initiating a tale that intertwines the mortal and paranormal worlds. The transitional quality of hypnagogia, the threshold between wakefulness and sleep, reflects the existential motifs in Auster's writing, where characters frequently grapple with questions about their existence and purpose. The blending of reality and imagination in the characters' dream-like traversal of their memories mirrors Auster's investigation of the connection between memory and imagination.

As Austerlit's memory loss and the subsequent search for his autobiographical identities demonstrate the meaning of lost memory remains open-ended, for there is no moment in the time in which one can claim to have fully recalled and exhaustively interpreted an experience from the past. The story's exploration of themes such as the enduring power of love, philosophical reflections on mortality, and the human need for love and connection in the face of loss and misery aligns with the broader scholarly interest and examinations of the nuanced interpersonal interactions and emotions that characterize Auster's works (Brockmeier 347). Similarly, Baumgartner's philosophical and emotional reflections offer a contemplative prism through which to examine the complicated human emotions related to love, loss, and the potential for finding love again amid depression, despite his uncertainty about the repeated trips back to the past.

The search for identity in modern literature often takes the form of a curious pursuit, as characters are impelled by a sense of inner void to pursue their identity as whole and self-conscious beings. Auster's work, Baumgartner, is a testament to his pursuit, as it explores the fluidity of identity, the complexities of human emotion, and the liminal spaces of conscious and unconsciousness. In a similar vein, the narrative's exploration of the symbolic and psychological depth of the protagonist's experiences, as discussed in the "El viaje del alma hacia la muerte: 'Las minas de fallen,' de E.T.A Hoffmann" ("The journey of the soul towards death" 'The Mines of Falun,' by E.T.A. Hoffmann") source, insists the ability to manipulate the visual and dramatize metaphysical concepts (Montiel 162). The fluid and unstable nature of identity is reflected in Baumgartner's transformations and shifts his sense of self as he navigates his relationships with two women with a distinct emotional construct and the other as a Princeton colleague (Hill 16). The narrative's exploration of the complexities of the human condition, the profound effects of bereavement, and the enduring spirit of hope in the face of sorrow echoes Auster's earlier works, such as "The Invention of Solitude," where the narrator struggles to encapsulate the present through narration, revealing his own struggles.

Theoretical Implications of Hypnagogic Memory:

Hypnagogia provides an ideal framework for exploring memory's fluidity and its susceptibility to the subconscious. Memory theory suggests that altered states such as Hypnagogia can lead to "unconscious recall," where memories suppressed in conscious thought become accessible (Freud 576). Auster's use of hypnagogia reflects Freud's view of memory as something that the conscious mind cannot fully control. For Baumgartner, hypnagogic visions bring forth memories of loss and regret that he could not confront in his waking life. This concept is further supported by Henry Bergson's argument that memory involves a process of reconstruction rather than mere retrieval. Bergson suggests that memories are re-experienced and reinterpreted each time they are recalled, influenced by the emotional and psychological context of the present (Bergson 205). The



hypnagogic episodes allow for this kind of reinterpretation, as Baumgartner's memories appear fragmented and emotionally charged. For instance, when he recalls the image of his father's disappointed expression, it resurfaces in a dreamlike sequence that blurs past and present, illustrating memory's capacity to shift and adapt according to the present emotional state (Auster 56). Auster's treatment of memory challenges the traditional view of memory as a repository of factual recall, suggesting instead that memory is an ongoing, transformative process shaped by emotional currents. Baumgartner's hypnagogic recollections reveal that memory is not confined to passive storage. But it is continually reshaped by subconscious and conscious states. The liminal nature of hypnagogia, as described by Mavromatis, serves as an ideal medium for exploring this theme, portraying memory as both fragmented and richly associative, intimately tied to Baumgartner's unresolved inner life (Mavromatis45)

Exploring the Enduring Power of Love and the Human Condition:

It is a poignant examination of the lasting strength of love, contemplations on mortality, under the inherent human desire for love and connection amid significant loss and sorrow. The story explores intricate personal relationships and multifaceted feelings encountered by the main character Sy Baumgartner, as he deals with the consequences of his wife's death. The tale not only conveys a narrative but also examines the complexities of human psychology, mythical connections, and the relentless pursuit of love and understanding in the presence of death. Auster's deeply emotional and reflective writings delve into the intricacies of human life, providing a thoughtful and introspective analysis of the enduring effects of love and grief on the human soul. The story's contemplative essence and Baumgartner's introspective reflections on his past experiences can occasionally hinder the narrative pace, potentially diminishing enjoyment for readers desiring a faster-paced tale. Nonetheless, the intensity of Auster's investigation into the human psyche and the emotionally impactful nature of the narrative greatly compensates for this, as the audience is immersed in a thorough analysis of human experience and the lasting effects of love and grief (Page 273). The themes and narrative components examined resonate with the ideas presented in several scholarly works. The story emphasizes the transformative effects of grief and its influence on the protagonist's life and self-perception, paralleling the exploration of how mourning can alter a person's life and writing. The story's inquiry into the meaning of lost memory and the open-ended nature of the search for one's identity resonates with the exploration of the complexities of human memory and temporality in Austerlitz. The aesthetic and philosophical reflections on the concept of "Stimmung" or mood, and its central role in modern literature (Breidenbach 9)

The Emotional Tapestry of Memory in "Blonde Crazy"

Paul Auster's "Blonde Crazy" explores the intricate realm of human memory, examining the complex interaction between semantic and episodic memory events through the perspective of the protagonists' life experiences. The main character of the novel, Baumgartner, grapples with the lasting impact of his wife Anna's tragic death while navigating a flood of memories that intertwine the conscious and unconscious realms. The story weaves personal and poetic elements from Anna's life, contrasting them with her aimless daily routine. The protagonist's struggle to come to terms with wife's death is emphasized through the exploration of his own memory as he attempts to comprehend the "ghastly annihilation" and the "permanent gash" left in Anna's mind by the tragic loss of her companion, Frankie Boyle. The novel's examination of episodic memory events, particularly through the protagonists' recollection of his wife's childhood memories, underscores the significance of Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory in shaping the individuals narrative (Auster 58). In addition to the suppressed memories and childhood thoughts, Freud insists the concept of past life experiences is

a potential origin for the inner turmoil. Freudian openness to the idea of past life experiences, despite being contentious, highlights his willingness to delve into the complexities of the human mind and how memory- both conscious and unconscious- influences our lived realities (Hoffman 455)

The protagonist's inability to sleep despite being prepared for rest underscores the importance of understanding and addressing the unconscious reality that manifests through pain and memory. The main character's difficulty in reconciling his memory with his wife's highlights the significant impact that personal tragedies can exert on a person's identity and their capacity to navigate the intricacies of human life. As the main character becomes enveloped in an unusual, hallucinatory sound environment, he confronts a perplexing dilemma: is this merely a creation of his mind, or a sign of a deeper, more profound connection between the realms of memory and the subconscious? The protagonist's experience reflects the dream-like quality of hypnotic states showcasing inner conflict and the quest for meaning amidst existential challenges. Freud's investigation of the subconscious and its connection to memory is a crucial element of the psychoanalytical theory. Freud viewed symptoms stratified in an almost geological manner, with the outermost layers being easily remembered and accepted while "the deeper one goes, the more difficulties in recognizing the recollection that is surfacing" (Breuer et al. 195). This notion of repressed past memories being concealed in the unconscious mind and exerting a powerful influence over the individual's thoughts and behaviours was a key focus of reinterpretation in Auster's work as depicted by Freud.

The protagonist's journey through this liminal space is reminiscent of the "Threshold unconsciousness phase" described by Auster, wherein the boundaries between wakefulness and sleep become blurred as the individual confronts a multitude of involuntary and imagined experiences. As the protagonist moves through his house, seeking to unravel the mystery of the faint buzzing sounds, he faces the unsettling realization that these sounds may not have a tangible source. But rather exist in the realm of the imagined and the hallucinatory. The complexity of the sounds, which the main character considers unlikely to have been imagined, suggests a stronger connection to the subconscious and the domain of memory. Sigmund Freud's pioneering research on repression theory and the unconscious mind has significantly influenced our understanding of human psychology and memory. Freud's (1909) concept of repression, where distressing and traumatic recollections are consciously expelled in the possibility of recovering these repressed memories (Freud 21). This interplay between memory and hypnagogic states is further explored in the works of scholars such as Shirley Jackson, whose novel "The Haunting of Hill House" examines the fluidity of identity and the trans-subjective experiences of protagonist, Nell (Vinci 53). Similarly, the uncanny themes explored the classic tales like "William Wilson" and contemporary works like Jose Saramago's "The Double" highlight the blurring boundaries between the real and imagined, conscious and the subconscious (Windsor 51).

In the same way, the novel transports the reader into an alternate realm where Baumgartner inhabits a liminal space that is both prospective and retrospective, a zone between wakefulness and sleep where he vividly experiences Anna's presence. Within the in-between state, Baumgartner can hear Anna's voice, sense her beauty and intellectuality, and relive the deep bond of love they shared. The book prompts the reader to accompany the narrator on his past reminiscence, where the lines separating past and present fade and memory emerges as both conscious and unconscious minds have deeply influenced and shaped the field of psychology and literature.

The process of "return of the repressed," referred to as "the act of recalling and reliving previous traumatic experiences," is crucial to the story's plot, as the narrator explores the complexities of memory, encompassing both conscious and subconscious remembering aspects. This interaction of memory, functioning both as a conscious and unconscious mechanism, is a vital aspect that propels the story forward, enabling the reader to explore the protagonist's emotional and mental journey. Fanny Armstrong contends that the present frequently transforms into a future recollection, and conditions affecting the ageing brain, such as dementia and

Alzheimer's, raise "harrowing inquiries regarding identity and selfhood." Baumgartner's navigation of these realms of memory and loss is reminiscent of the work of writers such as J. Bernlef and Michael Haneke, who have explored similar themes of identity and fragility of the self. This exploration of memory, identity, and the complexities of the human condition is a central focus of Baumgartner, mirroring the insights and perspectives offered by these influential authors. It also resembles the works of authors like Christopher Nolan, Michal Gondry, Peter Carey, and Kazuo Ishiguro, who have examined the themes of amnesia and search for lost memories (Groesl). In the novel, the protagonist's central focus is on uncovering the significance of his forgotten recollections and reclaiming his sense of autobiographical identity, reflecting Baumgartner's deep engagement with the intricacies of human memory and human experiences.

Baumgartner's story weaves in and out of time, reflecting the cyclical essence of memory and its significant influence on character development and plot progression. Baumgartner's profoundly personal exploration of these memories, filled with both happiness and sorrow, illustrates the complex, layered fabric of human experience, where past and present gracefully intertwine in a fragile dance. The rise and fall of the storyline, while effortlessly moving through different temporal dimensions, successfully embodies the dynamic and non-sequential nature of memory itself. This complex interwoven of past and present not only drives the plot forward but also offers essential insights into the protagonist's developing sense of self and the significant ways in which memory influences our perception of ourselves and our surroundings (Bernstein 347).

Hallucinatory Nature of Hypnagogia:

Baumgartner is entering a liminal space where he is reduced to a "minute fraction of cosmic energy, void, formless, and voiceless." He may see things in his "mind's eye" in this condition, but he is unable to express them verbally, the fragmented nature of his awareness. Surreal experiences are portrayed in a way that experiences the hallucinogenic character of Hypnagogia. These dreams are actual events, obscuring the distinction between imagination and reality despite their apparently fantastical nature. This emphasizes how crucial the memory, as Auster describes it, is in forming conscious recollections throughout his dreamlike experiences (Bidney 114).

The emotional truths that Baumgartner grapples with, such as his continued connection with his deceased wife Anna, are not verifiable scientific facts but rather deeply personal experiences shaped by memory and emotion (Auster 64). These evident facts suggest that memory and identity are not fixed but rather fluid and reconfigured through the creative process of writing, as "fiction transforms his imagination." The protagonist's newfound ability to "step back into the past without the fear of getting trapped" and his "newfound connection with Anna's ghost" suggests a profound exploration of the relationship between the living and the dead, the conscious and the unconscious, and the blurred boundaries between reality and fantasy. These themes of double consciousness, the hallucinatory nature of hypnagogia, and the interplay between memory, emotion, and imagination are further explored in Auster's work "Mysteries of the Wheel," which the author is currently developing. This quasi-fictional discourse delves into the protagonist relationship with others, as he navigates a state of fantasy and attraction following the death of his wife (Menouer 4). These resemble the concept of research into the mind that reveals the relationship between conscious and unconscious states during hypnagogia. He keenly noted that the hypnagogic states are marked by a diminished influence of the *ego* over the *id*, which facilitates the rise of vivid, dream-like imagery and blending of perception with the imaginary.

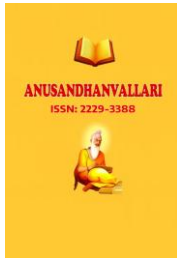
Interplay of Delusions, Hallucinations, and False Memories:

The complex connection among delusions, hallucinations, and false memories has fascinated writers in literature as they explore the intricacies of the human mind. In the examined novel, the main character, Baumgartner, wrestles with the interaction of these mental processes, illuminating the difficulties people encounter as they navigate their perceived realities. A key theme in the novel is the “Memory” and “return of the repressed,” signifying the clear remembrance of emotionally significant events. Memory of John F. Kennedy’s assassination (Auster 75). This form of hyper-detailed memory, typically linked to traumatic or remarkable events, explores the complex functions of the human brain and its tendency for both precise and skewed memories. The book further investigates the concept of unexpected love, examining the connection between the narrator and his wife, Anna. The writer highlights the significance of love and dedication in overcoming the difficulties and hurdles they encounter, such as the distress of being unable to conceive a child together. The writer’s investigation of this facet of human existence, along with its interaction with the characters’ thought processes, explains the intricate fabric of life with memories (Auster 83). The diverse fabric of literature is full of instances where characters struggle with deceptive hallucinations and inaccurate memories, frequently occurring in the transitional phase of hypnagogia. A motif contends that the “transition into otherworld as described in near-death and out-of-body experiences” closely resembles the “imaginary linked to the journey into otherworld found in classic modern fantasies and fairy tales.” These similarities imply a shared human experience, highlighting how the mind’s ability to innovate and reinterpret reality is heightened in a hypnagogic state (Dieguez and Annoni 137).

Hypnagogia and the Blurring of Reality:

The profound confusion experienced by the narrator, Baumgartner, in the aftermath of his wife Anna’s passing, is intricately linked to the concept of repressed memory thoughts and fluidity of memory. His vivid recollections of his wife’s daily routine, from waking up to the sound of her typewriter, are preserved in acute detail; yet, his consciousness fluctuates between these memories and the present reality of her absence. This interplay between narrative experiences and the external events that shape his life narrative is a hallmark of memory, where the internal and external realms are crucial. The temporal horizon of his consciousness extends beyond the immediate moment as he delves into the past to make sense of his present. The findings of research on memory suggest that individual individuals manipulate multiple, sometimes inconsistent, aspects of their subjective experience over an extended period (Nelson and Fivush 71). The narrator’s own childhood memories, such as his passion for baseball and dreams of becoming an Olympic trainer, also contribute to the tapestry of his memory. Freud contended that repressed memories, frequently arising from traumatic childhood experiences, could appear in multiple forms, including dreams. The novel also shared Freud’s view of hypnagogic states, marked by diminished conscious control and enhanced access to the subconscious, which offered a distinct opportunity for repressed memories and experiences to resurface. He proposed that the loosening of the *ego* barriers in this transitional state permitted the rise of the content from the unconscious that would typically be suppressed while awake.

The narrator’s journey is influenced by past memories as he wants to reprocess his wife Anna’s work, “Mysteries of the Wheel,” which serves as an emotional connection and honours the memory of loved ones. Freudian theory offers the hypnagogic state a rich area for examining the depths of the human mind, offering insight into the mechanism of the unconscious. Examining the content and visuals that emerged during this state uncovers a profound understanding of the fundamental conflicts and suppressed wishes that influenced Auster’s depiction of psychological well-being.



The Multifaceted Nature of Memory: Connecting the Past, Present and Future:

Auster's novel begins in the third act, with the promise of an ultimate chapter that has only just begun. Emeritus philosophy professor Sy Baumgartner of Princeton University, who lives alone and navigates the complexity of memory, stands at the cusp of a new chapter in his life. His voyage, defined by memories and contemplations, envisages the importance of recollection and the healing journey in addressing trauma linked to memory. The main character of the novel traverses this dual space, where he exists in a transitional state, balancing between consciousness and slumber, while coping with the death of his cherished wife, Anna. The process of remembering the repressed is fundamental to the character's development and the progression of the story's plot. The memory fluctuates between the happy moments shared with Anna and the stark reminders of her absence. Freud's readiness to entertain the idea of past life experiences, despite being contentious, undergoes his willingness to delve into the complexities of the human mind and how memory, both conscious and subconscious, can influence our lived realities (Solms 82).

Memory is crucial in molding our experiences, affecting our current views, and directing our future intentions. This mental process enables us to create a cohesive story of our lives, connecting our past experiences to our present situations and future goals. It allows us to draw lessons from history, adjust to the current situation, and foresee upcoming events, nurturing a sense of continuity and identity throughout our lives. Freud suggested that the hypnagogic state, characterized by diminished conscious regulation and heightened access to the subconscious, offered a distinctive opportunity for repressed memories and experiences to resurface. He proposed the easing of the *ego's* protections in this transitional state permitted the rise of the thoughts from the unconscious that would typically be suppressed during waking life. One such character, Baumgartner, serves as a prime model of his exploration. Baumgartner's memories, as described by Auster, recollection of his history, including his feelings for the "beautiful" Anna and the "caring, clever," Judith, showcase the strength of memory to take people back in time and allow them to mitigate significant event in their lives. The multifaceted narratives and insights into Baumgartner's background, revealing aspects of his childhood, family life, and the origins of his characters, emphasize the importance of personal memories in forming an individual and a sense of community. It also addresses the notion of "post-memory," as described in Baroni's work on the impact of losing one's mother tongue and previous mother tongue and previous homeland on the identity and sense of belonging of the "second generation." How Baumgartner's experiences interweave with the history of the Workmen's Circle, a "sublime and munificent" mutual aid organization for Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants, suggests the profound influence that one's cultural and familial heritage can have on an individual's memories and identity. The convolution of Baumgartner's memories, as portrayed in Auster's novels, echoed with insights offered by scholars such as Eakin, who posits that the memory act is a mode of self-invention that recapitulates the fundamental processes of identity formation (Davis 139).

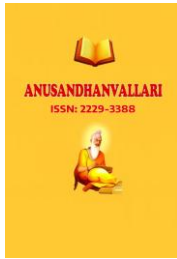
Conclusion:

In Baumgartner, Paul Auster employs hypnagogia as a vital narrative device that depicts memory as fluid, fragmented, and formed by subconscious processes. The narrator's hypnagogic episodes revealed that memory is a dynamic force, more than a mere retrieval of the past but rather an active reconstruction influenced by emotional and psychological context. These hypnagogic moments act as a mirror and as a bridge, allowing Baumgartner to confront past traumas and repressed emotions. In doing so, Auster's narrative invites readers to question the nature of memory as something elusive yet integral to identity. This study offers Auster's literary explorations of memory, highlighting hypnagogia as a profound tool for character development and thematic depth. By positioning memory as a fluid and active forces Auster challenges conventional perceptions of

memory as a static archive, suggesting instead a complex interplay between the conscious and subconscious that shapes and redefines the self.

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