

Navigating Moral Choices and Archaic Identity in Paul Auster's 4321

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Abstract

This study examines ancient identity motifs within the frame work of Paul Auster's book 4321. The narratives three-stranded structure allows for a thorough lens researchers investigate how identities are formed, developed, and intermingle with ethical dilemmas. Through careful analysis, this study aims to uncover the complex connections between characters' evolving identities and the ethical dilemmas they face, showcasing the complexities of moral choices in human existence.

Introduction

Paul Auster's novel 4321 published in 2017. The book presents four parallel narratives that trace the life of Archibald Isaac Ferguson, commonly known as Archie. Although the four narratives begin at the same point, they demonstrate how various measures and decisions changed archie's life. The book tells a coming-of-age tale that examines how opportunities and external factors can impact an individual's life. In one of the four narratives about archie's life, in the early 2000s, he was born to rose and Stanley Ferguson in Newark, New Jersey. The

remaining three stories in the book narrate archie's early years every individual takes a unique route as an adult. The book opens with Arthur Siri Hustvedt reflecting on her grandfather, Issac Reznikoff, who immigrated to America from Minsk. Upon his arrival, your new name for a fresh start was advised to be adopted by him eventually becoming Isaac bald Ferguson. Ferguson encounters a life in America filled with the challenges. He chased a different practical career but was unable to achieve financial stability before his untimely death attack happened in 42 years old. The story intertwines the experience of Ferguson's wife, Fanny, and their three sons- Lew, Aaron (who is later called by the name Arnold), and Stanley- each facing personal challenges such as family conflicts and social process during the Great Depression. Ferguson's children attempt to break free from the brutality of their upbringing. Stanley eventually weds Rose Adler, a child of assimilated Jewish immigrant adding further complexity to their family's fabric. The narrative explores themes of immigration, identity and perseverance within the Jewish American experience, highlighting the differences between the diverse family dynamics and historical context shaping the Ferguson's and Adlers. The book thoughtfully examines the immigrant experience, familial roots and how personal stories intersect with the broader societal changes, all within the lives of Ferguson and his family. Ferguson struggles with intricate feelings after observing Francie's anguish recording the Rosenbergs' execution and his family issues, resulting in profound contemplation of fairness and purity (pp. 1-71).

Driven by a command to conquer ignorance, Ferguson begins to learn reading and writing from his grandmother, marking a significant moment in his journey of self-improvement. The narrative reveals Ferguson's interactions with his family members and the strains of managing a struggling business, illustrating how these factors influence relationships and personal identities within the family during times of crisis. As Ferguson nears adolescence, he reflects on his father's principles in relation to other paternal figures and recognizes the sacrifices made for ambition and the emotional detachment stemming from work-focused lives. The story depicts a change characterized by the heartbreaking loss of family and the impact of betrayal, leading to the eventual reconstruction of Ferguson's concept of family and belonging amidst a changing socio-economic landscape. Ferguson's bond with his cousin Noah, a source of affection amidst his chaotic home life, is abruptly ended by the departure of his uncle, highlighting the impulsive landscape of relationships and the childhood longing for connection. This abstract summarizes the document's exploration of Ferguson's intellectual and emotional growth, framed by the complexities of family dynamics, grief, and the quest for identity in a harsh environment. Ferguson's deep passion for music and literature flourished under his Aunt

Mildred, who introduced him to various genres and artists over a few years, even though he lacked any musical abilities (p. 259).

A crucial conversation about music and psyche showcased the impact Aunt Mildred had on Ferguson's life and trials. As he moved into his teenage years, his talent for sports, especially baseball, which turned out to remain an important exhaust for his competitive nature and creativity. Ferguson's respect for President Kennedy deepened in his youth, aligning with his growing political consciousness during major historical tribunals of the 1960s. The narrative describes Ferguson's inner emotional journey through friendships, his first romantic temperaments for Anne-Marie, and their subsequent separation, illustrating the intensity of youthful passions and the complexity associations. Ferguson's passion for writing upon his return, sparked by inspiration, stemmed from developing the "Cobble Road Crusader," which confirmed his initial engagement with journalism, as he faced resistance from peers regarding his ideas and efforts, even while dealing with personal challenge (p. 599). Throughout these experiences, Ferguson copes with themes of identity, societal norms, and the pursuit of self-expression, reflecting the encounters of maturing within the social backdrop of the 1960s, Ferguson's time at school was perceptible by bullying and social isolation in sixth grade, involving physical assaults from several peers and a pervasive sense of despair. A crucial moment occurred when he became friends with two boys, Howard small and Anthony Delucca, joined him to confront the bullies and create a small support group amid the chaos. Romantic pursuits started to pose difficulties as Ferguson navigated the intricacies of pre-teen connections, ultimately smooching two girls, Gloria Dolan and Susie Krauss, signifying notable personal milestones (p. 211). Ferguson's school experience transformed significantly when he entered junior high, leading to greater independence, new friendships, and the gradual diminishing of earlier bullying incidents. Tragically, Ferguson passed away in an accident before the end of summer 1960, prompting reflection on the fleeting nature of childhood innocence and the influences that shaped him. The narrative follows Ferguson, a young boy navigating his complex family dynamics after his mother weds Gil, and his interactions with his new relatives particularly the Schneiderman's, unfold. Ferguson, maintains a contentious relationship with numerous family members but establishes a unique bond with his step-cousin Jim, who remains a reliable supporter throughout his youth. The book explores Ferguson's developing interests in basketball, writing who remains a reliable supporter throughout his youth. The book explores Ferguson's developing interests in basketball, writing, and

camaraderie in the backdrop of evolving American social challenges and personal struggles (p. 266).

The unforeseen passing triggers the crisis of Ferguson's friend, Artie Federman, which deeply impacts him and serves as a catalyst for his reflection on life, death, and legacy. Ferguson's writing turns as an essential outlet for his emotions, resulting in a manuscript titled "Sole Mates," which reflects both cheerful and poignant aspects of life by employing shoes as a metaphor (p. 298). The manuscript is received in varied ways, provoking deep discussions about art, ethics, and the fallibility of storytelling, ultimately important Ferguson to realize the complexities involved in both criticism and artistic creation. When Ferguson obtains an invitation from his cousin Francie to ski in Vermont for a weekend, he brings his girlfriend, Amy, with him. The weekend serves as the setting for family conflicts rooted in past betrayals and individual trauma, particularly concerning Francie's father. During the journey, a conflict between Ferguson and Francie leads to a deadly car crash, rendering both of them critically hurt (p. 252). Ferguson loses a couple of fingers in the incident, greatly influencing his self-image and relationships, especially with Amy. Battling feelings of inadequacy and the fear of losing Amy's affection, Ferguson must face the repercussions. Nevertheless, she supports him throughout his recovery, helping him confront his trauma as they explore their intimate relationship.

As Ferguson attempts to rewrite with Francie and heal emotionally, he begins to experience growing feelings through new connections, particularly with college student Andy Cohen. Ferguson's interactions trigger a change in his view of closeness and sexual relationships. As he struggles to come to terms with his new sense of self after his injuries and new sexual experiences, he thinks about how society sees masculinity and sexuality. His journey intersects with universal themes of longing, suffering, and the pursuit of connection amidst personal chaos. The articles describe the intricate emotional and social dynamics of a teenage boy, Ferguson, navigating adolescence, romantic relationships, and friendships against the setting of 1960s America.

Ferguson and Andy form a deep, lively friendship that evolves from casual sexual encounters into more profound emotional ties. Nonetheless, Ferguson finds himself perplexed by love and loyalty, particularly when Andy expresses his feelings for him, in which he hesitantly cannot return. The book explores themes of race relations and identity by focusing on Ferguson's time on a diverse basketball team and his experiences as a Jewish boy in a predominantly black

sports environment shaped him. As he shifted from wanting to be a doctor to finding a passion for scriptwriting, Ferguson's aspirations underwent a significant change, revealing growth in his character. His role at the Montclair Times exemplifies a renewed sense of purpose (p.451).

Ferguson manoeuvres through situations like his parents' looming separation and the passing of a dear friend's mom while wrestling with his feelings for Amy, who ultimately craves autonomy in their relationship. The narrative concludes with Ferguson recognizing the importance of friendship amid adolescent chaos while also looking forward to the broader societal changes occurring around him during this pivotal period in his life. This summary conveys the document's emotional richness, character subtleties, and social background, providing executives with valuable perspectives on human and relational interactions. Ferguson confronts emotional upheaval resulting from personal family predicaments, including his father's ailing retail business, his mother's fruitless photography project, and his own romantic troubles with Amy (p.464). Ferguson's relationship with his parents is intricate, as he feels burdened by their expectations while simultaneously requiring independence and emotional support. His growing connection to film, sexual development, and the emotional weight of family ties terminates in a struggle between youthful ideals and the realities of adulthood.

During pivotal moments, such as perceiving family tragedy and experiencing court as a youth, Ferguson evolves, ultimately challenging expectations in the quest for self-identity and love. Ferguson looks back on his past, seeking redemption by returning to his old workplace to apologize for stealing books. Shortly after, he receives a draft notice, but is deemed unfit for service due to his criminal record and homosexuality. In high school, Ferguson wrote constantly, churning out stories and exercises to improve his writing skills, despite his own uncertainty about his abilities. His work often explores the boundaries between reality and fantasy, inspired by the likes of Thoreau, Kafka, and Babel, as he grapples with personal struggles, including his parents' divorce and the weight of societal norms. After his mother's remarriage, Ferguson must navigate the complexities of his new family dynamic, including his step-siblings, while remaining close to his sister Amy. The narrative explores Ferguson's aspirations and romantic relationships, including his affair with Amy and encounters with Dana Rosenbloom, as well as his budding political involvement against the backdrop of the Vietnam War era. His acceptance into Princeton on a prestigious scholarship marks a turning point in his life, characterized by achievements and ongoing struggles, both metaphorical and real, including his father's neglect and the pain of friendships affected by loss, leading to a lasting

transformation. The overarching theme conveys Ferguson's quest for self-discovery as a writer while juggling personal ambitions, family conflicts, and the pressing challenges of an unstable socio-political environment (p.627).

The protagonist, Ferguson, finds solace in making Gauloises, which evokes a transformative trip to France that deepened his love for Amy and enhanced their bond. Ambition is a struggle for him, both in poetry and translation, but he finally settles on translating French texts as a set of boundaries to work within. The narrative addresses contemporary problem like student politics and the anti-war movement, offering a background of activism influenced by Ferguson's personal life experiences. Ferguson delves into reflective emotional territory with Amy, highlighting themes of love, longing, and personal growth through their developing bond. Ultimately, Ferguson finishes a manuscript that looks back on his childhood and relationships, struggling with self-identity as he searches for validation and purpose in his writing. The narrative centres on Ferguson and his internal conflicts regarding sexual and ethical choices as he interacts with various characters, especially Andrew Fleming and Evie Monroe (p.659).

Ferguson is torn between fear, shame, and thrill as he navigates relationships and sexual experiences that challenge his morale code. He thinks back to past romances, including those with women like Celia, and his memories of Artie, who has passed away. The narrative illustrates Ferguson's development through critical experiences contending with his father's demands, the tumultuous environment of activism, and the formation of his own identity during social unrest. A central theme is the contrast between individual desires and larger social movements, exemplified by occurrences such as the Newark riots and the protests against the Vietnam War (pp. 707-728). Ferguson's challenges culminate in a harsh realization of his struggle to accept traditional masculine roles, especially that of a father, intensifying his character evolution. In July 1967, significant civil unrest occurred in Newark due to racial tensions, prompting a request for military intervention. Mayor Addonizio's solicitations for police and National Guard aid prompted a deeply militarized answer, with the city's state compared to Vietnam amid anti-racist protests (p.750).

Over three days of intense urban combat, violence and looting escalated, resulting in the deaths of twenty-six people, primarily African Americans, as perceptions threat from the gunmen were suggested and anticipated. The violence significantly affected individuals and family dynamics, especially the Ferguson family relationships, as well as the connection between

Ferguson and his parents, highlighting contradictions in their views on community and race amid social turmoil. Additional movements, such as the anti-war and civil rights movements, emerged concurrently at Columbia University. The narrative illustrates the conflict in student politics, highlighting the division between radical and moderate responses to issues like the Vietnam war (p.753). Ferguson's romantic relationship with Amy deteriorates due to differing political beliefs and priorities. Their familiarity fades the backdrop of external societal disruption and internal ideological conflicts, opening the door for personal advancement and transformation. Ferguson's experiences with literature and family history reveal profound emotional landscapes during societal shifts, highlighting art's an ability to influence personal and collective awareness. The narrative concludes with Ferguson grappling with grief and growth, particularly his evolving connection with his mother, culminating in a bittersweet farewell that suggests the inevitability of change and the relentless flow of time.

Ferguson's negative emotions while bidding farewell to his mother signal impending tragedy; he never sees her again after May 6, 1996. Ten months later, he dies in a car crash, oblivious to his limited time. In his relationships, Ferguson navigates complex emotions, especially from a teenage writer anticipating his book's release to crafting essays and projects on more significant subjects. After Albert's mother passes away, Ferguson faces lingering grief and discovers how to continue his work alone. Ferguson struggles to define his identity through friendships, relationship, and societal expectations while juggling personal goals and societal pressures. Ferguson's writing evolves through peer influence, all while navigating his complex feelings about familial expectations, love, and grief in his pursuit of artistic satisfaction. Ferguson contemplates his history with Celia, influenced by the memory of her late brother, Artie, and aims to redefine their bond. In the spring of 1967, he concludes the chapter by engaging in a simple movement playing catch with Celia signifying a departure from his previous obsessions (pp.801-807).

Summer ushers in bold ambitions and progress for Ferguson's companions, as Noah ventures into filmmaking, Amy toils in a factory, and Jim readies for matrimony. Struggles in the bar heighten tensions during and arrest and court trial, complicating his relationship even more and reflecting tensions during an arrest and court trial, complicating his relationships even more and reflecting societal turmoil. Among the shifting political climate marked by violence and demonstrations, Ferguson faces ideological disillusionment and the vulnerability of friendships in a wartime setting. He experiences personal setbacks and fading attachments but discovers significance in writing and journalism, despite deep existential anxieties regarding identity and

societal roles. The circular framework links personal growth the societal change amid a decade of upheaval, as Ferguson finds his resolve, ready to confront the evolving world directly. Ferguson receives mixed responses from the public about his recent works, with some valuing his political opinions. He encounters heightens hostility from younger journalists, indicating competitive tensions in the newsroom. Following the Kent State shootings, Ferguson reports at universities in light of increasing anti-war views, documenting the charged environment and confrontations. Ferguson transition from reporting to discussing the translation of poetry, leading to instances of professional disappointment and contemplation regarding his own career (p.935).

He meets personal hurdles and fading relationships but discovers purpose in writing and journalism, despite serious existential apprehensions regarding self-identity and cultural roles. Ultimately shifts in personal life, such as dealing with the aftermath of his father's passing and the evolving political landscape, impact his writing process, resulting in a novel that reflects both personal and societal turmoil. Ferguson feels the urge to leave America and see the world, but after thinking about it, he picks Paris. A joke from his mother is what gives him the push he needs an immigrant changing their name, leading to a deeper investigation of identity. The joke prompts Ferguson to contemplate the impact of an individual's name and how it shapes their journey in life and sense of self. Through his introspection, Ferguson envisions writing a novel, "4321," depicting multiple iterations of himself, exploring the different shaped by various circumstances and choices. He begins this adventure following a brief visit to Montreal with your friend before moving to Paris, dedicating years to writing the book. Archie is depicted as thoughtful and introspective in the first storyline is a writer and intellectual who struggled with personal issues and lived through the social upheaval of the 1960s and 70s. This story dwells into his writing pursuits, passions and romantic entanglements (p.379). In the second story, Archie is a skilled and driven athlete who tries in sports such as baseball, facing the challenges of rivalry, aspiration, and physical anxieties

Everyone on Bloomfield is shouting, *Throw the ball! Throw the ball!* So, he throws the ball home, but the throw is late, a hard throw writing to the catcher's glove, but it's a couple of seconds to late, and Caleb slides in with the winning run (pp.921-922).

In the third story, Archie is a reserved individual involved in politics and involved in leftist activism. This reflects his origins and the turbulent political climate that happened during that period.

On March eighth, an unknown group of invisible activists calling themselves the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the F.B.I. broke into small, two-man government office in the oddly named town of Media, Pennsylvania, and swiped more than a thousand secret documents (p.935).

In fourth story, is as similar to Berlatsky's (2008) *Everything in the world has its own color*, Archie's life becomes more business-oriented, and he achieves success. This version discovers the intricacies of earnings, accomplishments, and the moral dilemmas associated with financial success. In "4321," Paul Auster examines the interrelation of four narratives that intersect and deviate, emphasizing how individual choices and external influences shape Archie's life and development. He similarly contemplates the role of fate in life and the extent to which individual choices can impact one's destiny. The book is a thoughtful and introspective exploration of identity, fortune, and the complexities of human existence. This narrative style is unconventional, as it reflects multiple twists in Archie's life, prompting the reader to consider how different events in life lead to diverse outcomes. The features a variety of characters and four interwoven narratives, each showcasing a unique aspect of Archie's experiences and the various influences that shape them. It provides a frame work for the complex connection between identity and ethical decision making, approached a nuanced manner as individuals navigate the evolution of their identities (p.134). The novel's innovative structure, consisting of four parallel narratives featuring Archibald Issac Ferguson (or Archie), presents an ideal medium for exploring the interplay of fate, choice, and self as depicted in Sebald (2008) view as vertigo Archie's four lives as distinct case studies, demonstrating how desperate life experiences and decisions transform Archie's understanding of world and his place within it. By examining these diverging paths, a deeper understanding of external factors and personal agency intersect to shape individual identity and subsequently, moral reasoning can be attained. Auster presents multiple iterations of the same individual to encourage readers to consider how seemingly minor yet significant variations in life events significant variations in life events can alter a person's development and the accompanying moral considerations. It is based on the premise that experiences during one's teenage years can influence the future (p.354).

The following is an analysis of key characters in the novel the character is Archie, and each of the four narratives depicts him uniquely. The various versions of Archie symbolize potential outcomes based on decisions, occurrences, and coincidences. This narrative allows readers to delve into the depth of identity and examine how outside factors can influence an individual's path in life. In each of the four versions, Rose and Stanley serve as Archie's parents. Across the different variations, their traits and life circumstances persist largely unchanged. Regardless of whether Archie rejects or visits with his fiancé, Rose, a dedicated and resolute mother significantly influences in life. The diligent man Stanely likewise affects Archie's expansion. The challenges they endure, along with their advice and support, hollow people (p.33).

Aunt Mildred is a reliable figure who mentors and advises Archie throughout diverse narratives. She nurtures Archie's passion for reading and writing while also stimulating his intellectual growth. Amy is portrayed as a romantic interest in various stories about Archie's life. Though their interactions, she displays different personalities, highlighting the complexities of relationship. By doing so, she demonstrates the significant influence that personal relationships have on Archie's life and decisions (p.948). Siegumfeldt I.B. (2020) Ira and Nathan Bloom are friends and acquaintances of Archie who look in various plotlines. Drawing from Archie's individual goals and interests, their characters vary in every version. They emphasize the importance of companionship and friendship in Archie's development as a person. In few of his story lines, Archie falls in love with Alice Black. Through her, the tale exemplifies the unpredictable character of human relationships, illustrating how Archie's life has been shaped by a mix of random occurrences, love affairs, and the parental mentoring (p. 5).

It persuades like Marie-Louise (1999), *Archetypical dimensions of the psyche* in many tales, different relatives, such as Archie's uncles and cousins, take on various roles based on Archie's objectives. Depending on the storyline, Archie interacts with a series of thinkers, political advocates, and mentors who introduce him to diverse viewpoints and projects. They show how exterior concepts and societal shifts affect Archie's thoughts and actions. Perhaps the best way to characterize it is as a timeless connection in infinity that appears mysterious in our world and space-time, yet is what enables any genuine and meaningful interaction between two individuals. This mystery also comes into play when we feel that we have always "known" an individual we are interviewing for the record, and it is accurate rather than mistaken, as can occasionally occur with a typical antiquated identity (p.54). Archie's relationships with coaches, teammates, and rivals play an important role in narratives where he primarily focuses

on sports. These characters highlight the consequences of sports in his life and the lessons he has gained competition and commitment. It seems to be grounded in a participatory mystique, empirically concept of civil disobedience was adopted by Gandhi envisages that Jung (2014) referred as an “archaic identity” (p.34). This represents an implicit consensus regarding societal values and emotional standards confesses Marie-Lousie (1999). The widespread notion that what benefits me also benefits everyone else, granting me the authority to dictate how others should live their lives, stem from an outdated identity because other individuals resemble significantly (p.55).

Throughout his life, he is haunted by the idea that there existed an essential Archie and a contingent Archie: the former was the real one while the latter is merely a replica, and thus the latter can be dismissed, deemed unworthy of retention. He came to understand that human beings are not one dimensional but can experience two emotions simultaneously- at the same time, for example, experiencing both joy and grief. Further, they have the ability to accommodate a set of other emotions in. it is important to remember that each individual does the best they can with what they have when dealing with others. Unless he is tuned to his own feelings, it might be simpler to find happiness. It serves as an excellent literary device for deconstructing the intricacies involved in the formation of identity and moral choices that Archiebald Isaac Ferguson explores. By acknowledging the challenges people faces when trying to understand their pasts particularly how their identity has transformed over time opines like Fishkin (2013) (p.32). Siegumfeldt (2020) apprises the novel provokes our own inquiries. The four narratives each present different familial arrangements, social interactions, and personal choices that lead Archie down distinct trajectories. Such divergent paths indicate that identity is not a static entity but a continually evolving construct shaped by internal and external stimuli. Through the intricate process of how people ascribe meaning to their own identities by interpreting experiences from their pasts to their present selves, Auster delves into this exploration. It examines Archie’s early life and how formative experiences such as family dynamics, friendships, and educational opportunities shape the development of his sense of self (pp.1-4).

There was no such thing as a single fixed identity. Every person contains multitudes expressed. “Time traveled in two directions because each step forward into the future was accompanied by a memory of the past, and even though Ferguson was still only fourteen years old, he had already formed so many memories that he knew the world outside him was constantly being shaped by the world inside him, just as the world outside everyone else was designed by his

memories.” (p.408). He knew he was made up of an array of different segments and that the different segments did not always fit together perfectly, but they didn’t have to because that was made him special.

Ferguson’s fascination with Thoreau, who personified the individual, the lone man of conscience acting on moral principles words were sarcastic, he would have been without a theoretical basis for challenging the system, for remarking society both from the bottom up and the top down, a great writer, yes, but what a prudish and pinched man he was, and so afraid of women that he likely died a virgin (Celia, fourteen at the time, giggled when Ferguson uttered those words), and even if his concept of civil disobedience had been adopted by Gandhi, King, and others in the civil rights movement, Passive resistance wasn’t enough; eventually, it would boil down to armed struggle, and that was why Mike liked Malcom X better than M. L. King and had taped a poster of Mao to his bedroom wall (p.565). These lines encapsulate the characters’ dilemmas regarding moral choices, the complexity of moral decisions, and the internal struggles that rise when navigating difficult situations. The novel explores the moral niceties of human actions and the effects of decisions on people and their relationships.

He grasped that life mirrored a novel, one that you read page by page, with each page as a section, and every section adding to the narrative. Occasionally, chapters are enjoyable, while at the other times, they are unpleasant. There were instances when chapters were so unappealing that you wished to skip them entirely; yet needed to continue, for that was the essence of the book, and simply had to persist in reading. The theme of solitude serves as a powerful undercurrent that influences the characters’ journey of solitude serves as a powerful undercurrent that influences the characters’ journeys of self-discovery and moral reckoning. Chen (2018), The novel explores solitude not only as a state of physical isolation but also as a pathway to introspection and self- evaluation. The characters confront moments of solitude that compel them to examine their inner selves, rising questions about identity, purpose, and the moral implications of their actions. Archie’s experiences with solitude, whether circumstantial or chosen, provide significant lessons on the human condition and the quest for meaning in a complex world as influenced in *The Country of Last Things* (p.6). The meticulous depiction of urban spaces and architectural details in the novel also evokes a sense of solitude in the characters as they transition from physical surroundings to confront their internal struggles. The book delves into the ethical complications of human behaviours and the impact of choices on individuals and their connections.

Conclusion

“4321” provides a compelling chronicle that weaves together identity exploration and moral questions, showcasing a vibrant depiction of the relationship between personal identity and the examination of moral choices. Scrutinizing how the characters’ evolving identities respond to ethical dilemmas will deepen the comprehension of Auster’s literature. In unscrambling the complex connection between identity and moral magnitudes, this study offers a comprehensive assessment of the philosophical and ethical fundamentals of the novel.

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