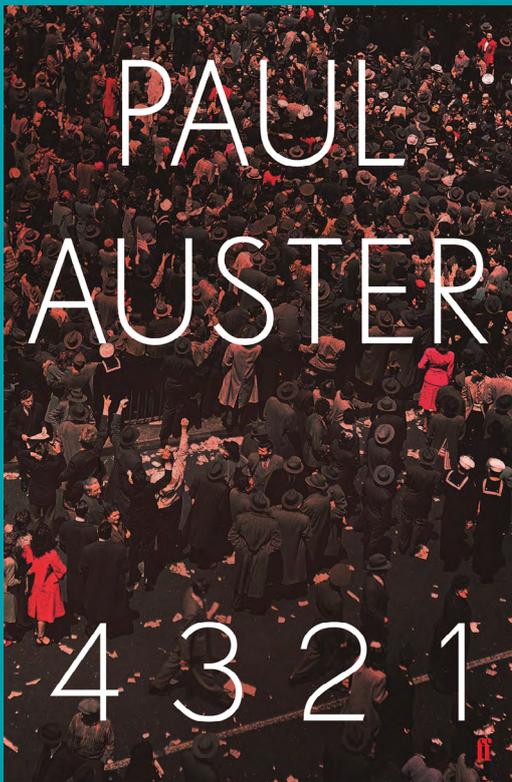


Reader's Guide



Other novels by Paul Auster
The New York Trilogy (1987)
The Music of Chance (1990)
Leviathan (1992)
The Book of Illusions (2002)
Man in the Dark (2008)

4 3 2 1 Paul Auster

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About the author

Paul Auster is the best-selling author of *Winter Journal*, *Sunset Park*, *Man in the Dark*, *The Brooklyn Follies*, *The Book of Illusions*, and *The New York Trilogy*, among many other works. In 2006 he was awarded the Prince of Asturias Prize for Literature and inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Among his other honours are the Independent Spirit Award for the screenplay of *Smoke* and the Prix Medicis Etranger for *Leviathan*. He has also been shortlisted for both the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, and his work has been translated into more than 30 languages. He was born in 1947 and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

About the book

On March 3, 1947, in the maternity ward of Beth Israel Hospital in Newark, New Jersey, Archibald Isaac Ferguson, the one and only child of Rose and Stanley Ferguson, is born. From that single beginning, Ferguson's life will take four simultaneous and independent fictional paths. Four Fergusons made of the same genetic material, four boys who are the same boy, will go on to lead four parallel and entirely different lives. Family fortunes diverge. Loves and friendships and intellectual passions contrast. Chapter by chapter, the rotating narratives evolve into an elaborate dance of inner worlds enfolded within the outer forces of history as, one by one, the intimate plot of each Ferguson's story rushes on across the tumultuous and fractured terrain of mid twentieth-century America. A boy grows up – again and again and again.

What the judges thought

The judges praised this 'magisterial' investigation of multiple lives. They considered Auster's novel to be 'large-hearted and subtle', and to contain 'hundreds of thousands of calibrations against different backgrounds of history – an endlessly spinning wheel'.

Discussion points

What did you think of the format of the novel – did you find the four different timelines easy to follow?

Although all genetically the same person, did you feel differently about the four Archies? If so, who did you like best, or with whom did you feel most engaged?

What role does choice play in the lives of the Archies, and to what extent do you think luck or fate has control?

Archie isn't the only recurring character – how do you feel about the varying roles that Amy plays in the narrative?

The descriptions of Columbia have been called particularly vivid – did you get a strong sense of place in the novel?

Useful links

www.paul-auster.com

www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2017/01/paul-austers-4-3-2-1-rich-rewarding-and-occasionally-maddening-just-life

www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/20/paul-auster-4321-interview