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THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF: an existentialist reading of John Fante's The Bandini Quartet

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Prof. Dr. Julio César Jeha - FALE/UFMG - indicou a aprovação da candidata.

Prof. Dr. Stephen Cooper - California State University - indicou a aprovação da candidata.

Pelas indicações, a candidata foi considerada APROVADA.

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Per Vittorio Campazzi,
Senza di te, questo progetto
non sarebbe mai reso possibile.
Tu hai e avrai per sempre
tutta la mia gratitudine.

To Felipe Torres, who would be very
proud of his mom for this
achievement. Whose sweet and
painful remembrance makes me
grateful for the privilege of living
with him for 28 years.

To Stefano Campazzi Guizzardi, my
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much and who I believe loved me until
the moment his heart stopped.

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the friends and family members whose positive words motivated me.

Abstract

This thesis represents a contribution to the academic corpus of studies on John Fante, a writer long neglected and most often studied within the limits of his ethnicity. Believing that his works have the potential for different approaches, this analysis concentrates on the existentialist aspects embodied by Arturo Bandini, the protagonist of Fante's *The Bandini Quartet*. Before entering into the existentialist analysis, Fante is contextualized and his lifetime achievements reviewed, confirming that his recognition and positive appraisal mostly arrived after his death. Then, a theoretical path adopts the lens of existentialism, taking into account the assumptions of the most representative philosophers of the movement to produce an existentialist literary reading of some of Bandini's life experiences. These instances bear witness to the construction of his own self, illustrating the principal assumptions of existentialism: From Kierkegaardian despair to Sisyphean stubborn defiance (in his confrontation with the absurd), Fante presents the figure of an individual whose narrative existence and self-reflection captures the essence of the existential philosophical movement and justifies the lines of this research.

Keywords: John Fante; Arturo Bandini; existentialism.

Resumo

Essa dissertação foi escrita como uma contribuição para o corpo de trabalhos acadêmicos sobre John Fante, um escritor longamente negligenciado e na maioria das vezes estudado dentro dos limites de sua etnicidade. Acreditando que suas obras oferecem um potencial para diferentes abordagens, essa analise se concentra nos aspectos existenciais vividos por Arturo Bandini, o protagonista da tetralogia Fantiana, *The Bandini Quartet*. Antes de entrar na análise existencial propriamente dita, contextualizamos Fante no seu tempo e estabelecemos suas realizações literárias. Apresentamos, também, o reconhecimento e a apreciação de suas obras que, infelizmente, na sua maioria, vieram após sua morte. Então, partimos para delinear um percurso teórico-crítico do existencialismo, levando em conta as premissas dos principais filósofos do movimento. O próximo passo consistiu em uma análise literária de algumas instancias da vida de Bandini e na construção de sua identidade que pudessem ilustrar as principais ideias do existencialismo. Do desespero Kierkegardiano ao obstinado desafio de Sisyphus contra o absurdo, Fante apresenta a figura de um indivíduo cuja narrativa de vida e autorreflexão expressam a essência do movimento filosófico existencialista e justificam as linhas dessa análise.

Palavras Chaves: John Fante; Arturo Bandini; existencialismo.

List of Abbreviations

List of Books

AC	*The Anti-Christ*
BW	*Being in the World*
BN	*Being and Nothingness*
BT	*Being and Time*
EDS	*Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*
EH	*Ecce Homo*
EHE	*Existentialism and Human Emotions*
MS	*The Myth of Sisyphus*
NPPA	*Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*
NFU	*Notes from the Underground*
TBQ	*The Bandini Quartet*
TSD	*The Sickness unto Death*
TSZ	*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
W	*Words*

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1. Introduction

I have always imagined that paradise will be a kind of library.

Jorge Luis Borges in "Poems of the Gifts"

Each line had its own energy and was followed by another like it. The very substance of each line gave the page a form, a feeling of something carved into it. And here, at last, was a man who was not afraid of emotion. The humor and the pain were intermixed with superb simplicity.

Charles Bukowski in the preface to *Ask the Dust*

John Fante was an Italian American author for whom a series of personal and editorial problems led to one of history's most clamorous cases of publishing neglect. After nearly forty years out of print, the author, in a state of complete oblivion, suffered enormously from severe diabetes, which led to blindness and the amputation of both legs. However, those who knew him testified that his greatest source of sorrow was not achieving his literary ambitions. Born in Denver, Colorado, to Italian immigrant parents, Fante's biggest dream was to become a recognized American writer with his own books on the shelves of the libraries where he spent so many hours as a passionate reader.

Libraries are meaningful and iconic places for writers and readers. Fond of books since his teenage years, Fante read eclectically and extensively. As Stephen Cooper informs us in *Full of Life: A Biography of John Fante*, Fante moved to Los Angeles at age 17 and adopted the city as his own, living there for the rest of his life (324). The Los Angeles Public Library held great significance for the author and is strongly linked to him for multiple reasons. In his novel *Ask the Dust*, Fante positions his protagonist and alter ego, Arturo Bandini, in the library as an aspiring writer in reveries of grandeur:

> A day and another day and the day before, and the library with the big boys on the shelves, old Dreiser, old Mencken, all the boys down there, and I went to see them, Hya Dreiser, Hya Mencken, Hya, hya: there is a place for me too, and it begins with B, in the B shelf, Arturo Bandini, make way for Arturo Bandini, his slot for his book, and I sat on the table and just looked to the place where my book would be, right there close to Arnold Bennet; not much that Arnold Bennet, but I'd be there to bolster up the Bs, old Arturo Bandini, one of the boys. (TBQ 414)

This instance alone already hints at Arturo Bandini's megalomania: He does not accept his "facticity," his "given situation," which in accordance with existentialism thinking may be, somehow, positive if Bandini has the "will to power" to transcend it.

Libraries are mentioned in several instances of Bandini's life. An avid reader who was also very poor, public libraries were the only place he could access books. In the preface to a new publication of *Ask the Dust*, the American novelist and poet Charles Bukowski wrote, "A library was a good place to be when you had nothing to drink or to eat, and the landlady was looking for you and for the back rent money. In the library at least you have the use of the toilet facilities" (TBQ vii), reflecting Bandini's use of this expedient to escape his landlady and distract himself from hunger.

In *Ask the Dust*, a young Fante uses Bandini's voice to make a plea to the city in which he lived and died: "Los Angeles, give me some of you! Los Angeles come to me the way I came to you, my feet over your streets, you pretty town I loved you so much, you sad flower in the sand" (413–414). Although Fante made this poetic plea in 1938, only in 2010 did the City of Los Angeles decide to give some of itself back to him, naming a square in front of the Los Angeles Public Library after him, a late tribute to a writer who, for Robert Towne, wrote about Los Angeles better than any other did. Towne considers *Ask the Dust* the novel that best

represents the Los Angeles of the thirties, so much so that he decided to use the novel as a reference for the period's language and way of life when he wrote the screenplay for his 1974 film, *Chinatown*, a noir set in post-depression Los Angeles. The screenplay won Towne an Oscar, and in 2006, he wrote and directed the film version of *Ask the Dus*t.[1] Further affirming his legacy for the city, the Philosophical Research Society, a non-profit, on-campus, online organization based in Los Angeles, featured Fante in a series of lectures on writers from the city. One of these lectures, "Los Angeles Stories: John Fante's Downtown Los Angeles," confirmed Fante's position as one of the city's preeminent authors and highlighted *Ask the Dust* as "the essential Los Angeles novel."[2] Meanwhile, the Dutch filmmaker Jan Louter long describes his big dream of "mak[ing] a documentary film about John Fante and *Ask the Dust*" and, in 2006, "after years of work, his docufilm, *A Sad Flower in the Sand* aired nationally on the PBS program Independent Lens" (Cooper 2021). Elsewhere, a chapter of the book *John Fante's Ask the Dust: A Joining of Voices and Views* (Cooper 2021) documents an exchange of letters between Jan Lauter and his friend Jasper Henderson, editor of the literary journal *Bunker Hill*. The letters show how Lauter was interested in contributing to make Fante known.

It was also in the Los Angeles Public Library that, as Martin Brown tells us, "Legendary American lowlife writer Charles Bukowski… discovered a dog-eared copy of [*Ask the Dust*], likening the experience as being 'like a man who had found gold in a city dump'" (Brown, *Angelfire*). Inspired by Bandini, Bukowski created his most famous character, Henry Chinasky. This discovery later led to public recognition from Bukowski and his editors, catapulting Fante, by then a long-forgotten, blind, and legless writer, onto the world's literary scene, seeing all his books reprinted only two years prior to his death. As the young Bandini dreamed that day

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[1] This information and further appreciation of *Ask the Dust* as a novel on Los Angeles par excellence is found in a documentary, available on *YouTube*, entitled "John Fante—A Sad Flower in the Sand"[1] (Fante, 3:05–6:07).
[2] "John Fante's Downtown Los Angeles." *YouTube*, uploaded by *The Philosophical Research Society.* Available at
https://www.youtube.com7c7ThePhilosophicalReseachSociety. (0:18–1:26, 56:4–1:04:55)

staring at the shelves of the library, his books found their way onto the shelves of not only the Los Angeles Public Library but most libraries around the world.

Although some scholars of Italian American Studies consider Fante the progenitor of Italian American literature, an attentive reading of *The Bandini Quartet* shows that he writes beyond the notion of "Italian-Americanness." Nonetheless, in her book *Un'etinicità complessa: negoziazione identitarie nelle opere di John Fante*, Elisa Bordin traces how Fante came to be known on the literary scene and says that "Olga Peragallo in the forties and Rose Basile Green in the seventies had already included John Fante in their first catalogues of *Italian American Tradition*" (15). It was in the sixties, under pressure from minority ethnic groups, that academia began placing a greater emphasis on Italian American Studies. At this time, Fante was first hailed as the father of Italian American literature. However, Bordin also discusses how Fante's Italian heritage worked both for and against him:

> The ethnic approach, undeniably fundamental to confront[ing] Fante's writings... emphasizes the specificity and originality of his oeuvre, but [on the other hand] the label of "Italian American writer" has in many cases blocked a broader reading of his works ... The emphasis on the identity differences—be it for culture, language, or other– in some cases led to a monotonous interpretation of [Fante's] texts... limiting [other] possibilities, bringing to the surface only certain textual aspects to the detriment of other possible readings. (164)[3]

Therefore, this research offers one more possible reading of John Fante's texts, proposing a deviation from the equally important ethnic studies. Because my primary subject of interest is the protagonist Arturo Bandini and his complex "being," I have chosen an existentialist reading

[3] The translation of this passage from the original Italian has been made by the author of this thesis, as is the case for other Italian references that are unavailable in English.

of the character, with my project initially focused on *Ask the Dust*, the best-known novel by the author, which is part of a tetralogy, *The Bandini Quartet*, that recounts the saga of Arturo Bandini from his preteen years to his life as a young man. Further consideration led me to extend my research to the entire tetralogy. My consequent close reading of *The Bandini Quartet* left no doubt that Arturo Bandini's constant and mostly contradictory self-reflectiveness offers profuse material for an existentialist analysis. By adopting a lens developed by consideration of the ideas of the most representative philosophers of the existentialist movement, this research contends that three major factors hindered Bandini from becoming his authentic self: his hyper self-consciousness, his lack of resoluteness, and a split personality.

Arturo Bandini is a contradictory character. At times, he is immensely proud of his origins; at others, he hates being a "dago," an immigrant, an outsider. Bandini is sure that his ethnic origins are responsible for his misfortunes. His acute self-consciousness makes him an incredibly sensitive person who feels everything intensely. His dreams are vivid, and when he perceives that his artistic ambitions may be beyond his reach, his frustrations are similarly extreme. An eternally unsatisfied person, Bandini envies authors such as William Falkner and Nathanael West, his colleagues at the Hollywood studios, who write for the Industry but are still recognized as novelists by literary critics and the public. Bandini is sure that being a poor Italian American who faces all kinds of prejudices has disfavored him from achieving success in his literary career. Still, he never gives up on his dreams. This feature of the character—alongside others that this research presents—further justifies the existentialist investigation into the protagonist of *The Bandini Quartet*.

In *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, the first novel in the tetralogy, Bandini is just a boy and shares the role of protagonist with his father, Svevo Bandini. The first depictions of Arturo Bandini explain much of the behavior that he displays in the subsequent three novels. That is, the first impressions we have of this still-young boy are the seeds from which the character will

grow. In his master's thesis, *John Fante's Arturo Bandini*, Rasmus Sorheim Eriksen, describes Bandini as a "multifaceted... interesting, and thoroughly developed character... in a struggle to find [his own] identity... providing a complex exploration of the self." *The Bandini Quartet* is a peculiar version of a Bildungsroman: it is a sort-of coming-of-age narrative of a juvenile character who does not really reach full maturity. His inability to confront uncertainties and take responsibility for his own choices, an existentialist premise, makes Arturo Bandini a Peter Pan figure who refuses to age. In doing so, he tries, in "bad faith," to elude reality, deceiving not only himself but also others around him and, arguably, incautious readers.

Not even in his last novel, *Dreams of Bunker Hill*, did the ailing 72-year-old author allow Bandini to age. Again, Bandini is a young man who returned to Los Angeles, where he works as a waiter and dreams of becoming an accomplished novelist. The narrative discloses the contradictory and complex subjectivity of Bandini: his emotions, insecurities, feelings of inadequacy, cowardice, and megalomaniac dreams, all "the underground" of his consciousness. Few writers have had the courage to expose their protagonist to the reader the way that Fante does. In just one paragraph, Bandini goes from exaggerated narcissism to humble self-depreciation. Discussing Bandini's unstable and edgy behavior in an article comparing various pessimistic authors, Professor Martin Brown makes an interesting comment in favor of Fante as a writer:

> However, whereas Hamsun and Bukowski are remembered as two writers who trawl the desperate parts of town, who experienced the seedy, the downtrodden, the alienated, the shunned, Fante's human, humorous, and often touching treatment of Bandini stops the novel from completely carrying this ethos. As John King remarks, "Fante is clever. He gives Bandini humor, and this pulls him from the brink. You start to like him again, at least until the next outburst." (Brown in *Angelfire*)

This “cleverness” demonstrated by Fante’s use of literary tools to cunningly depict his protagonist. Bandini alternates between megalomaniac dreams, sheer narcissism, and the most “apparently” sincere demonstrations of repentance and candid confession, often leading the reader not only to identify with Bandini but also to sympathize with him. In some instances, this confessional tone, used as a literary device, may even subtly guide the reader to take pity on Bandini and justify his erratic behavior as a natural outcome of his uniquely unfortunate background and unlucky circumstances. Whether sincerely or in bad faith, sometimes, Fante gives his protagonist no excuses, no discounts, taking the reader on a dizzying loop from hating to loving Bandini and back again. Nonetheless, despite the character’s constant extreme behavior, the wit and irony of Fante’s narrative make readers generally eager to follow Bandini in his self-reflective existentialist quest.

2. John Fante in Context

Although John Fante's body of work is highly autobiographical, I do not intend to analyze that aspect of his narrative in this study. Nonetheless, I do not altogether dismiss the contribution that knowledge of an author's life, times, and literary trajectory may make to better understanding that author's work. Thereby, a brief account of Fante's personal and literary life and critical fortune follows.

John Fante was born in Denver, Colorado, on April 8, 1909, the son of an Italian bricklayer, Nichola "Nick" Fante, and his wife, Maria. Fante's father immigrated to the USA in 1901, escaping a harsh life in the Abruzzian mountains to pursue the so-called American dream. Moving to the freezing mountains of Colorado did not help him in the least: there was no work for bricklayers in the long winter, no matter that there was a family to be fed. To make matters worse, Nick Fante was very fond of wine and a gambler with an affinity for bar fights. Meanwhile, Maria Fante was a shy and reserved second-generation Italian woman, a devoted mother and wife, and a feverish Catholic.

Due to the long winters and Nick Fante's heavy drinking and gambling, money was always tight for a family with four children, and the lives of the Fantes were miserable. Furthermore, those difficult times occurred alongside the years after World War I and during prohibition, the Great Depression, and the significant westward migration of Americans escaping drought across the country's grain belt (i.e., the Dust Bowl).

John studied until the end of high school at strict Catholic schools, a benefit granted to him by his father exchanging manual labor for a place for his son at a Jesuit institution. Many incidents from this period of his life are recalled in the novel, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini.* When John was 17, his father left his wife and children for another woman. This situation would

increase the financial difficulties of the family. Being the oldest of four siblings, John was forced to become the family-s provider. Thus, with few possibilities of getting a decent job in Colorado, John Fante departed to California, swearing to never be a bricklayer in his life. In his mind, there was only one aspiration: to become a writer, and a great writer at that. In the interim, he worked several low-paid jobs, ate from charity kitchens, and became homeless for a period—according to some biographical accounts, he was even arrested for vagrancy in Los Angeles. A reminiscence of this period can be read in *The Road to Los Angeles,* the second novel of the tetralogy that this research analyzes.

When Fante arrived in California, he started to submit short stories to various magazines. Eventually, H.L. Mencken, among the most important literary figures of the time, published Fante's short story, "Altar Boy" in *The American Mercury*, a very prestigious literary magazine. It was his first work ever to be published and Fante was immensely grateful to Mencken. As a result they began a frequent letter exchange. Fante would send Mencken long letters opening his heart and asking for all sorts of advice; Mencken would respond in a courteous, encouraging, and helpful way. Curiously, one of Fante's letters to Mencken was later published as a short story in the aforementioned literary magazine. Their dialogue started around 1930 and continued until Mencken's death in 1952. This big man of letters seemingly became a father figure to Fante, and their correspondence was published in 1989 under the title, *John Fante & Mencken: A Personal Correspondence.*

The critical response to John Fante was highly idiosyncratic. *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* (his first published novel) received positive and enthusiastic critical reviews upon publication in 1937. The following year, motivated by this success, Fante offered *Ask the Dust* to several publishing houses. Most of them, however, rejected the manuscript. Finally, a small editorial company called Stackpole Sons published it. Unfortunately, by the time of the novel's publication, Stackpole Sons was engaged in a major legal battle. Having published an

unauthorized edition of *Mein Kampf*, they had been sued by Adolf Hitler. After the case was settled, the publisher was in financial trouble and could not afford to promote Fante's new novel. Although *Ask the Dust* was well received by critics and even drew comparisons with F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway, it did not achieve substantial sales, and the novel was forgotten by most of the public and even by John Fante himself. Nonetheless, the book documents the first years of the author's struggle to be published, his financial problems, his love for Los Angeles, and his admiration and devotion to Mencken, even including his exchanges of letters with the literary figure.

Meanwhile, Fante found a job as a screenwriter in the flourishing Hollywood industry. For some years, the author continued to write regularly while considering his screenwriting role the second job that would afford him the means to pursue his writing career and support his family. Nonetheless, the author made no secret that he detested having sold himself to Hollywood, where he accepted huge sums of easy money for what he regarded as "the mediocre tasks of the film industry." Regarding his discontentment and scorn for Hollywood and the Catholic Church, he wrote to Mencken,

> With a whole nation plunging toward destruction because of crooked politicians, the clergy suddenly comes to the fore and howls for purity in motion pictures. Every day the papers publish the speeches of well-fed cardinals and archbishops, giving them fifty times more column space than they deserve. Meanwhile the fact that honest men are dying of hunger is no longer printed... Here I sit laughing and laughing. I have a secretary and a great big office, and a lot of people bow low when I pass, all of them hating my Dago guts... Hollywood is not so difficult for the writer as it is for his nervous s system. (qtd.in Moreau 79-86;109)

Fante always considered the job something to pay the bills and permit him various personal extravagancies. The last novel of *The Bandini Quartet*, *Dreams from Bunker Hill*—also the author's last ever novel—depicts Fante's contempt for Hollywood and for himself as part of the industry.

However, in his 1952, John Fante, by that time, an established screenwriter for the Hollywood studios, wrote the novel, *Full of Life*. This short novel was a specific request from his editor for a happy and uplifting story. The editor also asked that Fante used the his and the other family members real names. Fante wrote a novel telling the story of a typical happy and accomplished middle-class American couple, John and his pregnant wife, Joyce Fante. In the book, John's heavy-drinking bricklayer father appears to visit the couple and was named Nick, the same as in real life, an example that is indicative of the fact that most of what was narrated was "real", including the house John lived in and where it was located. However, according to Fante, that happy family portrayed in the novel could not be further from the reality of the relational difficulties the family was facing at the time. The novel was a critical success and was made into a film version, starring Judy Holliday and Richard Conte. For the screenwriting Fante was nominated for Best Written American Comedy at the 1957 WGA Awards, and his paycheck allowed him to buy a beautiful Malibu ranch overlooking the Pacific coast. The success of the film added for the selling figures of the book.

Then came Fante's crash: after several further unsuccessful attempts at novel writing, John Fante went through long periods of bitter silence, and his Hollywood job became his primary activity for over forty years. In the film industry, he earned a lot of money and got to live a luxurious lifestyle. Still, friends and family members frequently commented that he was an unhappy person most of the time. His acquaintances believed that this was due to his frustration at not being able to fulfill his dream of becoming an accomplished novelist. In an

interview, his oldest son, Dan Fante, said that his father had two moods: he was either terribly angry or just angry.

Among the conjectured causes for Fante's failure as a novelist in his lifetime are his brash language, his typically angry tone, and his choice to make caustic arguments in his work. *The Road to Los Angeles*, the second of the Bandini's saga was published only posthumously. That is the book where Fante makes more references to Nietzsche, his frequent misplaced citation of the philosopher shows that the young man had not really understood Nietzsche's ideas. This fact alone would provoke some rejections from publishers. Even if Fante tried to conceal his anger and frustration under witty humor, most publishers found his arguments somehow polemical. Nowadays, Fante's trademark ironic and sarcastic style is considered a positive trait that enables his narratives to flow easily in spite of the darkness of the stories.

The difficulty to get his works published contributed to Fante's ever-doubting his own talent. As clearly expressed through his writing, these feelings of insecurity haunted the author for his whole life. It is ironic then that Fante's work was brought to light again via an anti-hero similar to himself and his autobiographical protagonists. As stated, Bukowski is considered "the author whose references to Fante saved his idol's work from almost total obscurity. Indeed, Bukowski went so far as to write the introduction to a 1979 edition of *Ask the Dust*, crediting it as the first novel [to] have really inspired him" (Brown, *Angelfire*).

After Bukowski rediscovered Fante and offered his fervent admiration, Black Sparrow Press republished *Ask the Dust* with a lengthy and fawning preface by Bukowski. This time around, the novel was an enormous critical and commercial success, renewing interest in the forgotten writer. The growing acceptance and passion of fans and critics certainly influenced the decision by Black Sparrow Press to reprint all of Fante's works, including some that had never been published before. In, "The End of Arturo Bandini", a bitter appreciation of his

father's life and writing carrier published as an introduction to *The Bandini Quartet*, Dan Fante says, "by all rights [,] the story should have ended there: Forgotten writer sells his soul to the Hollywood movie machine then dies, embittered and alone" (TBQ xi). However, John Fante never gave up. His strong temperament and proclivity to battle kept him alive: "On his own, this stubborn, angry artist, whose roots came from the cold mountains of Abruzzi in Italy, had come to a decision: He would not die. Not yet. Instead he would write one more book" (xii). Blind and without his legs, this decision kept him alive long enough to dictate to his wife one last novel. That book, *Dreams from Bunker Hill*, was posthumously published and closes *The Bandini Quartet*.

Furthermore, Fante was able to enjoy, if only late in his life, the beginning of his recognition as one of the great novelists of his generation. That continued after his passing, and his books have since been published or republished in 27 languages, ultimately vindicating the author's devotees.

In a *YouTube* interview, Francesco Durante, the Italian translator of Fante's last novel, says that Fante still sparks interest in young Italian readers because of his "forever young" approach to life and his atemporal and universal themes (*John Fante* 0:45- 4:25).[4] Resonating with these universal existential questions, not only is Fante's readership increasing, but his work is also attracting interest within academia, resulting in critical essays, articles, theses, and dissertations being produced at universities in the USA and Europe. Interestingly, out of USA, France is where Fante found his most enthusiastic readership and scholarly attention. This is followed by Italy and Germany and the continents of South America and Asia. His books have not been out of print since 1980.

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[4] "John Fante, lo scrittore dell'inquietudine. Intervista a Francesco Durante" *Viaggio nello Scriptorium* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fQ-KCvU84Q

Building on this revival, several scholars have begun studying Fante's work in greater depth. A volume containing an assortment of short stories, personal letters, and excerpts from his novels—titled *The John Fante Reader* and edited by Professor Stephen Cooper—was published by Harper Collins in 2003. Cooper is an English and Film Studies professor at California State University who was given access to all the author's files by Fante's wife, Joyce, when writing his first biography, *Full of Life: A Biography of John Fante.* Joyce Fante, one of the first women to graduate from Stanford University and a true lover of literature, carefully organized and safeguarded her husband's work and everything around it. Still, obtaining permission to see and disclose Fante's private writings was not an easy task for the researcher, with Cooper indicating that he had to be very persuasive. Notably, after the passing of Joyce Fante in 2005, Cooper, then an affirmed Fante's scholar, mediated the acquisition of all Fante's files by UCLA's Library of Special Collections, which in 2009 hosted an exhibition of that material to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Fante's birth.

Meanwhile, the year 2000 was especially significant for Fante studies. Besides being the year that Cooper's biography was published, it also saw the publication of Richard Collins' *John Fante: A Literary Portrait* and a master's thesis by Catherine Kordish of the University of California, Santa Cruz, entitled *John Fante: His Novels and Novellas*. These texts confirmed the growing interest in Fante's work. Other publications that followed and contributed to the author's redemption include the aforementioned *John Fante & H.L. Mencken: A Personal Correspondence* and *John Fante's Selected Letters*, comprising letters the writer exchanged with editors, publishers, friends, relatives, and especially with his mother. Meanwhile, various studies have been published in other languages, especially French and Italian. In the English language, the most recent publication on Fante's work is *John Fante's Ask the Dust: A Joining of Voices and Views,* published in 2021 by Fordham University Press. That text comprises numerous essays by different scholars. A final affirmation of Fante's ultimate recognition as

an American writer is the annual three-day festival held in his honor in Abruzzo, his father's homeland. Now in its 17th edition, the festival attracts countless scholars, writers, and the lay public with an interest in literature.

3. Existentialism

> The refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of any body of beliefs whatever, especially of systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life __that is the heart of existentialism.
>
> Walter Kaufmann in *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*

What is existentialism? It is difficult to answer that question without encountering disparate positions among ever the leading thinkers of the movement. First, existentialism is not a branch of philosophy and does not feature a set of established doctrines. Instead, we might suggest that it started as a philosophical and literary movement, with the term existentialism itself coined by the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973): “In reaction to the dominant idealist philosophy of his day, he wished to be a philosopher of the concrete” (*Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* 56). However, even if Marcel sought “to define the existentialist doctrine which [he] personally held” (Marcel 1), he (eventually) entirely rejected the label because he refused to subordinate “essence to existence,” something largely known as a Sartrean premise. This is just one episode exemplifying the conflicted nature of the movement. However, in the late 1930s, when Jean-Paul Sartre became extremely popular and received worldwide media attention, existentialism became not only a philosophical and cultural movement but a fashionable way of life. Expressions in almost any aesthetic field could be called existentialist—from street art and fashion to music and cuisine—and the term has been closely associated with Sartre ever since. His own description of the term is given in his text *Existentialism and Human Emotions*:

> What is meant by the term *existentialism*? Most people who use the word would be rather embarrassed if they had to explain it, since, now the word is all the rage, even the work of a musician or painter is being called existentialist. A gossip columnist in

> *Clartés* signs himself *The existentialist*, so that by this time the word has been so stretched and has taken so broad a meaning, that it no longer means anything at all. It seems that for want of an advance-guard doctrine analogous to surrealism, the kind of people who are eager for scandal and flurry turn to this philosophy which in other respects does not at all serve their purposes in this sphere. (EHE 12)

Paraphrasing Thomas R. Flynn, after the liberation of Paris, freedom and self-consciousness were watchwords for the hot discussions of the left-bank Parisian intelligentsia. Gathered in the city's smoky cafes, listening to jazz, between lighting their minds and cigarettes, young people were celebrating their new-found liberty and developing a new way of making philosophy.

As charming and avant-garde as this Parisian scene may seem, existential concerns are not new: humans have been inquiring about the meaning of life since the pre-Socratic era, a notion that captures the immediate meaning of the term existentialism: a concern about and an inquiry into human existence. In *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*, Flynn affirms that linking existentialism and "packing it as a cultural phenomenon of a certain historical period [is a] misreading… existentialism as a manner of doing philosophy and a way of addressing the issues that matter in people's lives is at least as old as philosophy itself" (x). There are even certain well-known passages of the Old Testament that allude to existentialism. The Book of Job tackles the meaning of existence in the face of suffering and concerns itself with the probation of a righteous man. For Job, all that happens to him is absurd and senseless. Early in the text, Job exposes his existential wonders to God and even curses the day of his birth. Later, bewildered with the meaninglessness of his extreme suffering existence, Job argues directly with God, asking, "Why have you made me your target?" (Job 7:20). Job cannot comprehend God's perspective in his distress and must simply accept it. Ultimately, God rewards Job's resilience, and although The Book of Job is amply studied and discussed, it remains a puzzle,

as does human life. Meanwhile, the meditations in the Book of Ecclesiastes, after digressions on labor, leisure, and wealth, argues that even if life has a meaning, its comprehension is out of human reach. In fact, the unnamed author of the book—referred to as "The Speaker" or "The Preacher" (*Qoheleth* in Hebrew)—says, " I applied my mind to investigate and to explore by wisdom all that happens under heaven. It is an unhappy obsession that God has given to human beings. When I observed all that happens under the sun, it's all pointless, a chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:13–14). From time immemorial this longing for comprehension concerning what it means to exist continues to plague the minds of humans.

To perform the proposed analysis, I first adopted Walter Arnold Kaufmann's *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* as a guiding text. A Princeton professor of philosophy for over 30 years, Kaufmann is a renowned scholar and translator of Friedrich Nietzsche and has published extensively on an array of subjects. Hence, I trusted his book on existentialism to introduce me to the movement and its most authoritative thinkers. Kauffmann's book is a useful representation of the existentialist movement, describing different existentialist thinkers and providing an anthology of selected texts by those philosophers. However, as my research progressed, the book became insufficient for the scope of my analysis. Although the texts presented by Kauffman provide an overview of the authors' views and their position in the existentialist movement, not all the material related directly to the concepts and assumptions that permeated my subject of analysis. This demanded the inclusion of other sources to develop a more consistent theoretical path. Accordingly, I turned to other texts on existentialism alongside the original texts pertaining to the movement to better understand the nebulous and sometimes contradictory theories, concepts, and assumptions that would connect directly to the existentialist aspects I intend to analyze in *The Bandini Quartet*.

The aforementioned *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* is written in a very didactic manner, adding to my apprehension of the existentialist issue and improving my

understanding of the individual ideas regarding the movement's philosophers, including some of their similar and contradictory thoughts. A US philosopher who has lectured across three continents, Flynn was a professor of philosophy at Emory University for 40 years. Notably, he is also a Roman Catholic Priest. On his retirement in 2020, as an existentialist himself, Flynn advised his students to find gratification within the self, to have a certain sense of fairness for people, and to become worldly model citizens. He has published many academic articles, mostly on existentialism, writing seven books that have been translated into several languages and that make arguments that are curious for a Catholic priest, given his major interest has been Sartre's philosophy, renowned for its atheism.

One such text, *Sartre: A Philosophical Biography* provides some insight into Sartre's monumental *Being and Nothingness* and especially the concept of bad faith, a prominent aspect of Bandini's life that this study analyzes. Beyond these studies, I should note that various lectures by authoritative scholars proved extremely illuminating. However, the original texts of the philosophers themselves that treat the specific issues of interest here prove to be of the most fundamental importance.

There is no consensus definition of existentialism, with the list of existentialist philosophers capturing thinkers whose backgrounds and approaches could hardly be more divergent. For instance, Soren Kierkegaard, considered by many to be the father of existentialism, was a fervent Christian who considered the path of faith to be the only way a person can achieve a meaningful life. Meanwhile, the atheist Sartre, considered by many to be the most influential existentialist, related the movement to humanism, suggesting that people are responsible for giving meaning and essence to their lives. Nonetheless, Kierkegaard attacked Christianity as fiercely as Frederick Nietzsche did. Elsewhere, Heidegger, whose philosophy had a major influence on Sartre and Camus, did not want to be called an existentialist for his rejection of humanism. Notably, Sartre himself regretted the publication

of one of his lectures as a book entitled *Existentialism is a Humanism (?)*,[5] which became his most read and quoted-from book. In her essay "Ambiguity and Freedom" (1947), Simone de Beauvoir wrote about the incongruence of existentialism in the following terms:

> From the very beginning, existentialism defined itself as a philosophy of ambiguity. It was by affirming the irreducible character of ambiguity that Kierkegaard opposed himself to Hegel, and it is by ambiguity that, in our own generation, Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, fundamentally defined man, that being whose being is not to be. (qtd. in Mac Donald 279)

Ambiguous though this philosophical movement appears, with important principles and assumptions among leading philosophers clearly divergent, whether theists or atheists, each of these thinkers shared the belief that philosophy should be based on the concrete, subjective experience of the individual human being living in the world. This was established by Heidegger as his concept of *Dasein.*

Nonetheless, trying to clarify this often confusing philosophical movement, Kaufmann, who wrote extensively on existentialism, argues in the introduction of *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* that,

> Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy. Most of the "existentialists" have repudiated this label… To add to the confusion, many writers of the past have frequently been hailed as members of the movement, and it is extremely doubtful whether they would have appreciated the company to which they have been consigned… it becomes plain that one essential feature shared by all these men is their perfervid individualism. (11)

[5] The title of the lecture presupposed an interrogation mark (?) that did not appear in the printed version. It is known that Sartre bitterly regretted the publication of his lecture in book form.

Kauffman went as far as to say that "in view of this [incongruency], it might be argued that the label 'existentialism' ought to be abandoned altogether" (11). Nonetheless, despite Kauffman's 1956 proposition, the movement has maintained its label to this day.

Existentialist questions, as an individual human concern, gained prominence and were first systematized in the works of Kierkegaard, the so-called father of existentialism. His writings arguably exerted a deep influence on all the philosophers that followed him, making it impossible to talk of existentialism without recognizing the enormous debt the movement has to Kierkegaard.

At this point, I should clarify that this study does not claim to represent an all-encompassing survey. Instead, it advances certain possibilities that may be deepened and extended in subsequent existentialist studies of Fante's novels. Nonetheless, existentialism is substantially prone to controversial and paradoxical interpretations. For this reason, I have circumscribed my analysis solely to the protagonist's life as narrated in *The Bandini Quartet.* In so doing, I hope to evince both convergent and divergent postulations among the existentialist thinkers, achieving this by selecting passages from the novels that clearly confront and illustrate certain assumptions and concepts of the existentialist philosophers that I consider here.

3.1 Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

> It is the duty of human understanding to understand that there are things which it cannot understand, and what those things are.
>
> Soren Kierkegaard in *Journal and Papers* 1847

The existential movement, as we came to know it, began with Soren Kierkegaard during the second half of the 19th century. Although Kaufmann presents Dostoyevsky before

Kierkegaard, I intend to work in chronological order. Kierkegaard was born in 1813, during Denmark's golden age. A university student and the son of a strict religious father, Kierkegaard devoted himself to the study of theology, intending to become a Lutheran pastor. Soon after concluding his theology course, deluded with the hypocritical and lukewarm established church of his time, which he considered herd-like, he turned to the study of literature and philosophy. Gifted with great intelligence and a hyper-inquisitive mind, he dismissed and criticized the abstract philosophical system of Hegel and Hegel's Danish followers. Kierkegaard considered himself a modern-day Socrates, titling his master's thesis *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrate*s. Similar to the Ancient Greek philosopher, Kierkegaard prioritizes the inquiry into subjective individual truth that leads to decision and action, choosing passion over reason and considering faith the core of his philosophy. Accordingly, a passionate faith in God pervades his writing, a faith that Kierkegaard considers the only means through which human beings can find significance and reassurance. Nonetheless, the philosopher himself lived the human struggle between the finite and earthly nature of man and his longing for infinitude. For Kierkegaard, this struggle leads to a universal mood of despair, as captured by one of his most famed passages, from *Repetition*, in which one can clearly perceive the hallmark inquiry of existentialism and the Heideggerian concept of 'thrownness':

> I stick my finger into existence—it smells of nothing. Where am I? what is this thing called the world? What does this word mean? Who is that who has lured me into the thing, and now leaves me there? Who am I? How did I come into the world? Why was I not consulted, why not made acquainted with its manners and customs but was thrust into the ranks as thou I had been bought of a "soul-seller"? How did I obtain an interest in this big enterprise they call reality? Why should I have an interest in it? Is it not a voluntary concern? And if I am to be compelled to take part on it, where is the director?

> I should like to make a remark to him. Is there no director? Whither shall I turn with my complaint? Existence is surely a debate—may I beg that my view is taken in consideration?[6] (Repetition 200)

For Kierkegaard, this questioning and the possible answers may produce dread and anxiety in the face of the myriad possibilities at the crossroads of life. However, at those crossroads, the individual alone must discover and decide—based on their innermost individual subjectivity—the best path for them and take action accordingly. Kierkegaard argues that a single path is not the true path for all. Instead, these are merely choices. In *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, we read that "the thing is to find a truth that is truth for me… one must first learn to know oneself before knowing anything else… only when the person has inwardly understood himself, and then sees the way forward on his path, does life acquires repose and meaning" (22). This represents Bandini's life struggle too: to find his own truth, his own path, and to follow it.

Although he lived only to 42, Kierkegaard was a prolific, versatile, ambiguous, and often paradoxical theologian, philosopher, writer, and poet. Nonetheless, "At a time when there is a widespread tendency to level the difference of philosophy and literature, argumentation and rhetoric, an author such as Kierkegaard, who was inseparable thinker and poet, must attract a new interest" (Theunissen vi). In fact, Kierkegaard's works, written over a century ago in a minor language, have been rediscovered throughout the world because they speak to the human condition, especially in a period of exacerbated continuation of what Kierkegaard called "an age of disintegration, an esthetic, enervating disintegration… An age of moral disintegration… now in this present time of growing despair" (qtd. in Hong x), making his original and

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[6] It is interesting to note that In John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Book X, line 720–844), after the fall, Adam expresses his existential concerns in the same spirit, as does Frankenstein's creature in Chapter 15. When it is "thrown" into existence, a conscious mind begins the process of inquiry.

penetrating treatment of anxiety and despair decidedly pertinent. Kierkegaard had a deeply felt desire to make the leap of faith that he considered to be the ultimate and most important stage in a human's life. However, he was perpetually torn between his longing for absolute faith in God and the preoccupations, aspirations, and doubts that assail the common person. The philosopher himself experienced anxiety and despair for all his life, His book, *The Concept of Anxiety* treats the condition of anxiety as "the dizziness of freedom" and "the possibility of possibility." His discussion on the subject leads us to infer that Kierkegaard does not see anxiety as precisely negative. Instead, given so many possibilities in life, experiences of anxiety may induce a person negatively to despair or positively to be more aware when choosing among different possibilities.

Kierkegaard lived his possibilities in constant paradoxical tension, with his acute sensibility and hyper-inquisitive mind generating a vast number of divergent ideas that led him, both temporarily and intermittently, to seemingly ambiguous and dualistic conclusions. To channel his conflicting inwardness, he wrote different books under at least 13 different pseudonyms, creating some difficulty for his readers. He called this method indirect communication, claiming that in so doing he could ignite people to think for themselves. He wanted to awaken people who were simply following the shallow way of the crowd to become true individuals of faith, allowing each of his pseudonyms to have its own voice, whether or not these voices differed or contradicted each other. In some sense, these pseudonyms might have acted as the philosopher's "alter egos," outlets for Kierkegaard's conflicting concerns. This expedient gave him the possibility of systematically registering different possible viewpoints, permitting the philosopher to study and compare his various positions, responding to Socrates' call for an individual to "know thyself."[7] Reflecting on this matter, the philosopher

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[7] "Know thyself" is one of the three aphorisms chiseled into the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. The other two are: "nothing to excess" and "certainty brings insanity." Once asked to sum up the importance of

describes his "joint role of being the secretary and, quite ironically, the dialectically reduplicated author of the author or the authors… The reader is thereby in the position of entering, if he so pleases, into the complex dialogue and putting it altogether" (qtd. in Hong x). This method permitted Kierkegaard to soothe his anxiety, his dizziness of freedom. After all, he has chosen, or at least considered, many paths, as William Hubben indicates,

> It was both the burden and pride of Kierkegaard to be a writer, and the many facets of his strange personality expressed themselves brilliantly in his work. [under his various pseudonyms] He spoke as a poet and scholar, seducer, and moralist; he was joyful and witty but also desperately sad; a passionate fighter and a detached observer of others and himself. (19)

Similarly to Kierkegaard, as this research will make apparent, inner conflicts between religious beliefs and disbelief and between high aspirations and mundane instincts are plainly displayed by Bandini's 'many facets'. Although without the depth and elaboration of Kierkegaard, Bandini is always questioning himself. This research shall later consider the intensity of Bandini's feelings and his propensity to despair.

Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death* is the book I have chosen as a reference for the analysis of this despair. In that book, the philosopher approaches the theme of the individual versus society from a different angle, adopting despair as its central theme. Having to choose between different possibilities, anxiety is intensified, producing despair. Humans are always torn between individual faith, the authentic self, and consideration of the perspective of others, the accommodation of which is often an easier choice. Heidegger returns to this idea in his elaboration of authenticity, and the same idea appears in Sartre's concept of bad faith: One who is living an inauthentic life and, as Kierkegaard says, who is living unauthentically has lost

philosophy Socrates has answered, "Know thyself," and famously declared that an unexamined life is not worth living.

their soul. To combat this, the philosopher chose a solitary attitude, positioning himself against the herd, which made life very difficult for him, leading to ridicule and scorn from the society of his time. Ultimately, he was convinced that only through extreme spiritual anguish can faith be won.

When Kierkegaard turned 34, he wrote in his journal that he could hardly believe that he was still alive. The long night hours of his feverish and urgent writing were ultimately detrimental to his already-frail health: Less than a decade later, Kierkegaard collapsed in the street and died in hospital from tuberculosis a month later, on November 11, 1855. The legacy of the Danish philosopher is astonishing and represents a mission that he had to accomplish before he died. Accordingly, he wrote in a peak of fever, always believing that his death was imminent. This feeling of impending death might explain his prolific writing. In 1843, two years after his first publication (his master's thesis), he published his magnum opus *Either/Or* alongside five other books (*Two Upbuilding Discourses*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Three Upbuilding Discourses, Repetition*, and *Four Upbuilding Discourses*). The next year, the philosopher published five volumes (*Two Upbuilding Discourses, Three Upbuilding Discourses*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, and *Four Upbuilding Discourses*). 1845 saw the publication of *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasion*s and *The Stages on Life's Way*, in which Kierkegaard elaborates on how a person must take life in a way that permits them to make the ultimate leap of faith to God's arms for salvation. Two books appeared in each of 1846 and 1847: *Concluding Unscientific Proscript to Philosophical Fragments* and *Two Ages: A Literary Review* in 1847 and *Edifying Discourses in Diverse Spirits* and *Works of Love* in 1847. In 1849, he wrote *Christian Discourses*. In the same year, *The Sickness unto Death* was published, representing a deep and powerful cry of universal despair and a call for Faith in God as the only remedy to human suffering. That same year, he published *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, with his last publication while he

was alive appearing in 1850: *Practice in Christianity*. Meanwhile, written in 1848, *The Point of View of My Work as an Author*, was published posthumously in 1859. Although his contradictory positions and paradoxical assumptions which make reading Kierkegaard a challenging task, despite the demands of reading, rereading, and analyzing to hazard to put together the pieces of the puzzle that constitutes Kierkegaard's work, every effort enriches a researcher's understanding of existentialism.

3.2 Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821–1881)

> But it is just in that cold, abominable half despair, half belief… in that acutely recognized and yet partly doubtful hopelessness of one's position, in the hell of unsatisfied desires turned inward, in that fervor of oscillations, of resolutions determined forever and repented of again a minute later -- that the savor of that strange enjoyment of which I have spoken lies.
>
> Dostoevsky in *Notes from Underground*

This section's epigraph establishes Fyodor Dostoevsky's vision of the human being as positioned in the world, describing a self that is in perennial oscillation, whose thoughts and feelings are always ambiguous and paradoxical, illustrating much about Dostoevsky as a man and an author, as well as about his complex characters. Specifically, what Kierkegaard achieved using different pseudonyms, Dostoevsky achieves via polyphonic narrative. Thus, instead of elaborating only on ideas, the Russian novelist creates characters that perform all the possible conflicting feelings that humans experience within the texture of their relationships and everyday lives. In this manner, Dostoevsky moves from the abstraction of ideas to deliver the concreteness of "real people" in the "real struggles" of their "real lives." The revealed and hidden feelings and contorted ways of human beings are displayed, discussed, balanced, refuted, judged, condemned, and forgiven through the author's characters, who mostly exist at

society's fringes. According to Dostoevsky's biographer, Joseph Frank, in addition to being a translator and a novelist, Dostoevsky and his brother owned a newspaper called *Epoch*, for which Dostoevsky was both a contributing writer and an editor. The human capacity for malevolence that Dostoevsky saw in some of these chronicles was always a source of intrigue.

Dostoevsky was born in Moscow in 1821 and educated in Saint Petersburg, where he lived for most of life. Although his name appears on most lists of existentialists, he was not a philosopher but a novelist and journalist who wrote extensively on the perplexities of life and the complexities of the human mind. His writings are more psychologically than philosophically oriented. However, existentialist questions permeate his work. When the 17-year-old Dostoevsky learned that his father had been murdered, most probably by his serfs, he wrote a remarkably mature letter to his older brother Mikhail. Other than lamenting the death of his father, he wrote,

> My one goal is to be free. I am sacrificing everything for that. But often I think, what will freedom bring to me... what will I be, alone in the crowd of the unknowns… the heart of a man conceals a profound enigma. this enigma must be solved, and if you spend all your life at it, don't say you have wasted your time; I occupy myself with this enigma because I wish to be a man. (qtd. in Frank 46)

In these words, one can clearly perceive Dostoevsky's precocious existentialist line of thinking, which he would pursue for the rest of his life. Throughout his journalistic and novelistic career he would challenge himself to go deeper and deeper into the human mind and explore it to solve the enigma that "the heart of a man conceals." Although he was unable to resolve this dilemma, the profound inquiries of Dostoevsky's writings represent starting points for reflection on a plethora of subjects, not only literature but also philosophy, politics, sociology, and psychoanalysis.

Indeed, the writings of Dostoevsky were analyzed by the famed psychoanalyst Sigmond Freud, who "could not bear to read Dostoevsky's novels in his later years because the divided minds of their characters were so much like those of his own patients with whom he had been laboring during the day" (Hubben 65–66). Out of context, the complexity of his characters may seem exaggerated, but understanding the sociological and ideological transformations that were taking place in Russia during Dostoevsky's lifetime provides some perspective. In the turmoil of Russia's political, religious, and ideological complexities, an authentic, sensible, and gifted writer could not have given us a better representation of man's situation.

The divided mind that Freud referred to was not only that of Dostoevsky's characters but also that of the writer himself. Like Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky was born in a very religious family, and he was educated to be a pious believer in Christ and in Christ's second coming according to the Russian Orthodox Church. Also like Kierkegaard, his was not a serene and constant faith, with Dostoevsky himself stating, "It is not as child that I believe and confess Jesus Christ. My hosanna is born of a furnace of doubt" (qtd. in Martin). Despite this own dualistic self, Dostoevsky always maintained that the only salvation for the human soul resided in faith in Christ and Christ's love alone.

Nonetheless, in his search for true meaning, the author confronted moments where his faith wavered, with the orthodox principles of his childhood clashing with the Western enlightenment ideals that Russia had imported from Europe and especially from France. The love for "Mother Russia" that he had learned at home from his pious and observant parents was reevaluated by Dostoevsky during a moment in which Russia's Westernization was so strong among intellectuals and the gentry that they momentarily abandoned even their language in favor of French which was for a time considered the 'cultured language.' Indeed, Russia was losing its identity. Meanwhile, as in Kierkegaard's Copenhagen, religion had become rather superficial and imported atheistic ideologies were spreading rapidly among the Russian

intelligentsia, leaving the peasants to become the guardians of Russian traditions. This heavily impacted the inquiring mind of the young Dostoevsky, who carefully considered the different popular ideologies: German romanticism, rational egoism, utilitarianism, and utopian socialism. Lost among all these conflicting ideas, Dostoevsky started to join revolutionary circles, even if he did not completely agree with their position. The only cause he really embraced was the abolition of serfdom, which remained rife in those days. However, one terrifying event would completely change the course of Dostoevsky life:

> Among the twenty-one condemned men to be shot for revolutionary activities at seven o'clock on the morning of December 22, 1949, was Fyodor Dostoevsky. They were led out into prison yard to stand on the scaffold, and the officer in charge read to each the fatal words of the verdict, "Sentenced to be shot!" The prisoners' clothes had been taken off, and for twenty minutes they waited in the ice-cold temperatures for the final moment to come….
>
> Suddenly an officer came galloping across the square signaling with a handkerchief to announce that Tsar Nicholas I, "in his infinite mercy," has commuted the death sentence to prison terms in Siberia. This cruel stage of the execution had been intended, as "lesson never to be forgotten." It had indeed a lasting effect and not only on Dostoevsky. Grigoriev, one of the condemned men[,] became insane; others suffered of nervous breakdowns, contracted incurable diseases of the lungs, or had their ears and toes frozen. Dostoevsky did not remember having felt cold at all. (Hubben, 53)

Dostoevsky would write about the horror he felt in the "last moments" of his life, of how this mock execution had terrified him. For him, the idea that his life was about to finish there in those circumstances, for a cause he was not even aligned with, did not make any sense. Nonetheless, his search for answers led to four years in a Siberian forced labor prison and six

years of compulsory military service. Drawing on these ten years, Dostoevsky wrote the semi-autobiographical novel *The House of the Dead,* the first novel to depict the subhuman conditions of the Siberian Prison Camps.

Writing to N.D. Fonvizana, a woman who gave him the copy of the gospels, the only permitted reading in prison, he confessed,

> I will tell you regarding myself that I am a child of the age, a child of nonbelief and doubt up till now and even (I know it), until my coffin closes. What terrible torments this thirst to believe cost me and does still cost me. Becoming stronger in my soul, the more there is in me of contrary reasoning… I have constructed to myself a symbol of faith… The symbol is very simple; here it is: to believe that there is nothing more beautiful, profounder… more perfect than Christ and not only that there is nothing, but I tell myself with jealous love that never could be there. Moreover, if someone were to prove me that Christ is outside the truth, then I would prefer to remain with Christ than with the truth. (qtd. in Welsh)

As powerful as this last statement may be, there is no way to ignore the ambiguity of the declaration, for Dostoevsky starts by asserting that inside himself he will doubt as long as he lives. As such, his faith—like that of Kierkegaard—was a passionate choice, a leap, because he could not conceive or accept any other valid possibility.

Nonetheless, in his years of rebellion, Dostoevsky "plumbed the depths of modern nihilism at least as profoundly as Nietzsche, but where Nietzsche sought to overcome it through the resources of his own will [to power], Dostoevsky discovered the infinite love of God" (Welsh). Furthermore, he chooses to accept it: Whereas Nietzsche preached the *übermensch*––the man beyond good and evil, the man that lives according to his own rules as dictated by his Dionysian passions, the man that becomes his own God, a man-God—Dostoevsky exalted

the love of Christ and asserts that our Christ-like love for all man is the only way out of humanity's dilemma. In the figure of Christ, that God made himself a man for the salvation of the entire human race. Accordingly, for Dostoevsky, the answer does not reside in an *übermensch* but in the humbleness of the God-man and his love.

Further revelations regarding Dostoevsky's early concerns appear in a letter that he wrote to his brother when he felt like an outcast in the Military Academy of Engineering: "the atmosphere of [man's] soul is composed of the union of heaven and earth; what an unnatural child man is; the law of spiritual nature is broken… It seems to me that the world has taken on a negative meaning and that from a high, refined spirituality there has emerged a satire" (qtd. in Frank 43). This statement resembles Kierkegaard's exposition of two aspects of human nature: the infinite and the finite, what the young Dostoevsky called a broken spirit and a "satire." This captures what Kierkegaard understood as an unbalanced synthesis between multiple aspects of human nature, the disequilibrium that led humanity to despair.

Although Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard were contemporaries, according to Kaufmann there was no way that either author could have known the work of the other. Kierkegaard wrote in a minor language and was already dead when Dostoevsky's books achieved a certain prominence and began being translated. Nonetheless, although Kierkegaard was raised as a Lutheran and Dostoevsky a Christian Orthodox, their religious backgrounds helped determine both of them becoming existentialist intellectuals. However, the religious beliefs of Dostoevsky did not prevent him from living a life that alternated between sin and repentance. Had not the author believed in the loving forgiveness of Christ, his life would have become the subject of perennial despair. According to the Dostoevsky biographer Joseph Frank, the writer was incommensurably narcissistic, highly competitive, anti-social, and easily offended, not bearing to feel in any way inferior to others. Furthermore, he would prodigally spend all the money in his hands, unconcerned about accumulating debt. He also developed a gambling

addiction, always in the hope of systematizing his finances, and maintained various extra-marital affairs. It was only in his final marriage, to Ana Grigor'evna, who brought him back to the religious practice of his childhood, that Dostoevsky seemed to find some stability. Nonetheless, all of these experiences allowed him to draw the highly complex personages that populate his novels. For Hubben, "none of [the] Russian storytellers has fused the contradiction of the Russian mind so inseparable together as Dostoevsky and… our ordinary psychological tools fail us when we attempt to analyze these characters," with Dostoevsky's prowess indicating that "one has to be more than an artist or a psychologist to portray such characters convincingly" (60–67). Despite his travailed personal and professional life, Dostoevsky achieved great recognition as an author and died a Russian hero in February 1881.

> However, it was only after World War I that the writer became a major influence in the Western world. According to Kaufmann, Nietzsche accidentally discovered Dostoevsky in a Parisian bookstore in 1887 and on a postcard, wrote to his friend Peter Gast that "I did not even know the name of Dostoevsky just a few weeks ago… *L'espirit souterrain*, a work just translated into French… The instinct of kinship (or what should I name it?) spoke immediately; my joy was extraordinary" (EDS 52). Later, in *Twilight of the Idols*, printed in the same volume of the Anti-Christ, Nietzsche acknowledged that Dostoevsky as "the only psychologist who had anything to teach me: he is one of the best strokes of my life" (AC *219*). Dostoevsky would ultimately substantially influence not only Nietzsche but arguably every philosopher and author to come into contact with his work.

3.3 Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900)

> Every true faith is infallible inasmuch as it accomplishes what the person who has faith hopes to find in it; but faith does not offer the least support for a proof of objective truth. Here the ways of men part: if you wish to strive for peace of soul and pleasure, then believe; if you wish to be a devotee of truth, then inquire.
>
> Nietzsche in a letter to his sister[8]

Existentialism as an exploration of human consciousness and the meaning of life is perhaps the only movement that may host such a varied assortment of philosophers. For Kaufmann, it may seem almost impossible to reconcile Kierkegaard, a fervent Lutheran, Dostoevsky, a Russian Orthodox imperialist, and Friedrich Nietzsche, a convicted atheist and self-declared anti-Christian. According to Kaufmann, to fit Nietzsche into this circle, we must stretch our definition of existentialism to include a preoccupation with "extreme states of mind." In the context of this research, "the extreme state of mind" captured by both Dostoevsky's underground man and the young Bandini is easily adaptable to incorporate Nietzsche's perspective. Notably, beyond being a Nietzsche scholar, Kaufmann has also translated many of Nietzsche's works, demonstrating his appreciation for the German philosopher in the context of the existentialist panorama in the following passage:

> Nietzsche's wit, his praise of laughter, and his sparkling prose, now limpid, now like granite, could scarcely be more unlike… the twilight style of Heidegger. Nor does Kierkegaard with his more epic and self-conscious humor… equal the devastating and incisive style of Nietzsche… In the history of existentialism, Nietzsche occupies a central place: Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre are unthinkable without him. (EDS 21)

This affirmation of Nietzsche's central role in the development of existentialism is difficult to contest. When reading subsequent philosophers, the existentialist echo of Nietzsche's profound

[8] This letter is reproduced in Kaufmann's book *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist,* on page 23.

inquiries is undeniable, even if "existentialism suggests only a single facet of Nietzsche's multifarious influence" (EDS 22), an influence that only grows as time passes.

In the second and third novels of *The Bandini Quartet,* Nietzsche is not merely explicitly mentioned but represents a quasi-god to Bandini who, at seventeen and influenced by his reading of the German philosopher, decides to desert the God of his Catholic upbringing and adopt an inconsistent approach to increasing his will to power to become Nietzsche's *übermensch.* Therefore, the fundamental books for this research are those concerning the *übermensch*: *The Anti-Christ, The Will to Power* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.*

Reading Nietzsche's work is an odd experience: There are passages of sheer brilliancy, passages that are truly dazzling for unexpert eyes, passages so opaque that one can hardly see anything through it, and passages of impenetrable darkness seemingly generated by a not-too-human mind. Helpfully, Kaufmann himself concedes that Nietzsche's writing invites contradictory interpretations, suggesting that "there is something shrill about much of Nietzsche's writings: he delights in antitheses to what is current; it is as if he were swimming against the stream for his own sake" (NPPA 412).

Nietzsche's prose in *The Anti-Christ* is, to use Kaufmann's term, devastating. The aggressive and defiant way that he addresses Christianity, the mocking of the iconic figure of Jesus, and the derision of faith as a ridiculous superstition disrespectfully disregard Christian sensibilities, echoing Kierkegaard's attacks on the established church of his own time, which saw him accuse its representatives of being shallow and corrupted. However, Kierkegaard offered the possibility of an individual choice for a leap of faith as a form of solace against despair. Nietzsche's alternatives to Christianity are the Eastern notion of eternal recurrence, his unattainable *übermensch*, and his invocation of a Dionysian cult. Because he does not present any scientific rationale for his propositions, believing them would equally require a dose of

faith, and faith is something that Nietzsche abhors. In *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Kaufmann explains what he calls "Nietzsche's repudiation of Christ" (337–390). The book is an attempting to explain, diminish and smoothen the impact of Nietzsche's assertions in *The Anti-Christ.* By using passages from *The Anti-Christ* in conjunction with his persuasive argumentation, it can be assumed that Kaufmann has fulfilled his intention. Furthermore his elaboration on the philosopher suggests that Nietzsche's ideas might require filtering and explication by Kaufmann a scholar to be better understood.

The book *The Will to Power* was published after Nietzsche's death and represents a miscellaneous compilation of various arguments that had been published elsewhere alongside many new notes that the philosopher left unpublished and which might have been edited, corrected, and rendered for publication by his sister. This research uses an edition translated and annotated by Kaufmann, who grouped the aphoristic notes into specific subjects to produce a form of providential guidance that proved useful to this research.

Meanwhile, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* represents a work of philosophical fiction that features various narrative-driven passages that are alternated with more obtuse passages. Because Bandini cited the book as a source of inspiration to him, its main subject, that of the *übermensch*, was chosen to be considered in this study. However, following the system adopted, it is worth providing some biographical information about Nietzsche that relates to his work as it is pertinent to the current research.

Nietzsche was born in Rocken, then a part of Prussia, on October 15, 1844. That day, people were celebrating the birthday of Friedrich Wilhelm, the Prussian king. Nietzsche's father, a Lutheran pastor, baptized his newborn son and, as a great admirer of the king, decided to christen the boy with the king's name. Coming from a long lineage of religious ministers, Nietzsche was brought up with the fear of God. In an environment in which one must blindly

believe in the Christian doctrine, to express any doubt was equivalent to blasphemy, and questioning was considered an act of rebellion, making this atmosphere the ideal training ground for freethinkers such as Nietzsche:

> So long as his mind feels itself puny beside the overwhelming pomp and circumstance of parental authority, he will remain docile and even pious. But so soon as he begins to see authority as something ever finite, variable and all-too-human when he begins to realize that his father and his mother, in the last analysis are human beings, and fallible like himself—then he will fly precipitately toward the intellectual wailing places, to think his own thoughts in his own way and to worship his own god. (Mencken 18)

This is what happened to Nietzsche the moment he was released from the familiar bond: When the boy was not yet five years old, he lost his father. The circumstances of his father's death are disputed. Sketching an early autobiography, Nietzsche wrote, "in September 1844, my beloved father suddenly became mentally ill" (qtd. in NPPA 22). However, in 1895, his sister Elisabeth Foster Nietzsche published a biography of the philosopher in which she wrote that their father "suddenly became seriously ill in consequence of a fall" (qtd. in NPPA 22). The young Nietzsche "was a model of behavior and a highly talented pupil whom his playmates called 'the little pastor' because of his precocious dignity" (Hubben 91). The boy had a sensitive nature: He liked flower and music and had a profound knowledge of the Bible. Elisabeth remembered him not relating well to the other boys of his age. He disliked that they robbed bird's nests and played rough games. In his youth, he thought of becoming a musician. However, according to biographical accounts, although he played the piano well, his compositions were terrible. Nonetheless, his condition as the orphaned son of a reputed Lutheran minister who had personally tutored the king's children won him a full scholarship to Pforta, a famous preparatory academy. At this very traditional school, debates on new ideas had no place and freethinkers were not welcomed, let alone encouraged. By this time, Nietzsche

was already rebelling and elaborating his original and polemical ideas, and the professors had a hard time controlling the teenager, who had begun to believe in his special mental superiority: "Nietzsche became a bit too sure of himself and a bit too arrogant for discipline… He neglected Mathematics and gave himself up to the hair-splitting of Eleatics and the Pythagoreans, the Sophists and the Skeptics" (Mencken 28). Nietzsche detested geography and was deficient at drawing. His results for his final examinations were generally poor, with his savior being his virtuosity in the German language and his vast and profound knowledge of Christian doctrine.

In 1861, while still at Pforta, Nietzsche wrote an essay on Friedrich Holderlin. Although at the time Holderlin was essentially unknown, Nietzsche hailed him as his "favorite poet." Unfortunately, Holderlin was diagnosed with schizophrenia before he was thirty years old and lived the last decades of his life in a state of complete insanity. Nonetheless, according to Kaufmann, sixty years after Nietzsche's essay was written, "Holderlin was widely recognized as Germany's greatest poet after Goethe. [On Nietzsche's essay,] the teacher wrote…, 'I must offer the author the kind advice to stick to a healthier, clearer, *more German* poet'" (qtd. in NPPA 22). It is fair to say that Nietzsche had a precocious judgment for good poetry.

From Pforta, Nietzsche entered the University of Bonn, where he enrolled in theology and classical philology. At Bonn, he became a student of the famous philologist Friedrich Ritschl. After one semester, Ritschl went to Leipzig, and Nietzsche gave up theology to follow his favorite teacher. There in Leipzig, Nietzsche came upon a second-hand copy of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*. After reading the book, he was feverishly converted to Schopenhauer's philosophy and preached it to all his peers. Soon enough, there was a Schopenhauer cult at Leipzig. Although Nietzsche later came to disagree with aspects of Schopenhauer's work, he never denied the philosopher's considerable influence on him. Above all, Nietzsche admired the radical independence of Schopenhauer from any philosophical trend and the fact that he boastfully dissented from any established authority.

When Nietzsche came to understand that the real offense to humanity was unreasonable belief, he diligently and almost obsessively scrutinized his ideas and notions according to the reason and instinct upon which he greatly relied. Nonetheless, the following passage illustrates his scission with Schopenhauer:

> At the same time I grasped that my instinct went into the opposite direction from Schopenhauer's toward a *justification of life*, even at its most terrible, ambiguous, and mendacious; for this I have the formula *"Dionysian"*…Schopenhauer was still so much subjected to the dominion of Christian Values that, as soon as the thing-in-itself was no longer "God" for him, he had to see it as bad, stupid, and absolutely reprehensible. He failed to grasp that there can be an infinite variety of ways of being different, even of being god. (WP 1,005)

One of Nietzsche's best-known theories is that of the will to power, which is based on Schopenhauer's theory of the will to live. Whereas Schopenhauer's theory was very pessimistic and invoked a lack of will or a sense of resignation as a way to cope with the pain, hopelessness, and wretchedness of the world, Nietzsche proposed a combatant man. He did agree with Schopenhauer's pessimistic view of life and the world. However, instead of quiet acceptance, Nietzsche's assumption of will was that of will in action, the will to fight fate wherever it was rendered in opposition to man. This will to power to overcome man's miserable circumstances resonates with Camus's image of Sisyphus rolling his boulder up the mountain rather than giving up on life. According to Nietzsche, man should do the best to improve his health, his intellect, and his body, with the ultimate goal of becoming a stronger warrior in the battlefields of life.

Another figure that powerfully influenced Nietzsche's life and work was Richard Wagner. They met in 1868, and one year later, Nietzsche wrote that his friendship with Wagner,

whose musical genius he deeply admired, was "the greatest achievement" of his life (Weller on the web). The kinship between the two men was extraordinary. On the one hand, Wagner represented an ideal father figure for Nietzsche, exposing him to the best of cultural life of the time. On the other hand, it was stimulating for Wagner, who was very interested in philosophy, to have a brilliant aspiring philosopher as an admirer and close friend. Furthermore, they shared a vast enthusiasm for Schopenhauer.

Nietzsche's idolization of Wagner led him to write his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, which Wagner highly praised because it was laudatory of the composer. The broader reception, however, was not so enthusiastic, and, at any rate, the relationship between the two men became very turbulent over the years, with Nietzsche's dissatisfaction with Wagner's social standardization and manipulative manner eroding their relationship. Wagner, for his part, felt that Nietzsche was very critical of his more recent operas, especially Parsifal, which was considered to be Christian in nature. Incapable of enduring any confrontation, Wagner started to avoid Nietzsche.

Although it could hardly be expected for two narcissistic and strongly self-centered personalities to get along without trouble for a long time, according to Nietzsche, he completely broke with Wagner after the latter's conversion to Christianity, which Nietzsche believed was not at all sincere, but rather a matter of convenience. His two books on the argument, *The Case of Wagner* and *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, were Nietzsche's last achievements, completed just a few months before his absolute breakdown and demonstrating his obsession with the composer, the profound psychological wound caused by their separation, and the overwhelming importance of their friendship . These two short books appear in a volume published by Cambridge University Press that also contains *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo*, and *Twilight of the Idols*, and they give the reader the opportunity to see a totally different Nietzsche. His prose mixes nostalgia with deep pain and paradoxical condemnation/admiration

spiced with wit and irony in well-proportioned doses, calling to mind the work of Fante, which uses the same interesting amalgam without the intellectual depth.

On the recommendation of Ritschl, Nietzsche was offered the position of full professor of philology at the University of Basel at the age of 24 and before he had even finished his doctoral examination. As a professor at Basel, Nietzsche's intellectual life was somewhat limited, especially considering his new philosophical interests. Nonetheless, it was there he made friends with the historian Franz Overbeck, with whom he maintained a close relationship until his death. It was Overbeck that went to Turin to rescue Nietzsche on the occasion of his mental breakdown. Another important intellectual bond was established with the historian Jacob Burkhart, whose lectures Nietzsche was glad to attend. After Nietzsche returned from a brief military service, he suffered a significant decline in health, experiencing constant migraines, vomiting, and eyesight problems. The deterioration of his physical condition led him to resign from his post at Basel. Nonetheless, the university agreed to pay him a sort of pension for the ten years he had worked at the institution. This financial support permitted Nietzsche to live as he had always wanted: a free wanderer. For the following ten years, he traveled almost annually between his mother's house and various cities in Switzerland, Italy, France, and Germany. Those years were his most productive and the period during which he developed his most important philosophical insights and theories.

The study and comprehension of his theories are challenging, especially for the general reader. One aspect that makes the study of Nietzsche very difficult is that he did not systematize his ideas: His writings are typically organized as scattered aphorisms, with some scholars explaining this approach as the result of Nietzsche's constant migraines, which permitted him only short periods of good disposition for writing. Others contending that the aphoristic method was a purposeful choice that permitted him to immediately pour ideas out from his restless mind. Others still advocate that it was a stylistic form used by the French philosophers that

Nietzsche admired, leading to his decision to adopt the same style. Notably, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was composed during a period in which Nietzsche himself, in a letter to his sister, wrote that he was feeling at his best, both physically and mentally. Furthermore, in spite of its biblical, prophetic, and preaching tone, the book features continuous and fluid prose sometimes interrupted with more obscure passages.

The year of 1888 was very fruitful for the philosopher, seeing the publication of *The Case of Wagner, Twilight of the Idols, The Anti-Christ* and *Nietzsche contra Wagner.* Furthermore, that year he wrote his autobiography *Ecce Homo*, which his sister decided to publish eight years after his death. In that booky, Nietzsche's grandiose narcissism is at its peak. The titles of its chapters include "Why I am so Clever," "Why I Write Such Good Books," and "Why I am a Destiny." For the sake of illustration, consider this excerpt from that latter chapter: "I know my lot. One day my name will be connected with the memory of something tremendous, a crise as the earth has never seen,… I am not a human being, I am dynamite… I have a real fear that someday people will consider me holy" (EH 144). Ironically, his name was later (if tenuously) connected with "something tremendous": the two World Wars. Nonetheless, these words make it easier to understand why Bandini's intoxication with Nietzsche produced his megalomaniac reveries.

Although there exists academic dispute regarding how much of his later work is the product of a deranged mind, reading the production of Nietzsche's last year of life makes it possible to hypothesize that his isolation, restless writing, and bad health brought him moments of lucidity alternating with insanity. On Christmas Day, 1888, Nietzsche wrote a foreword to the aforementioned essays on Wagner from Turin. In that foreword, Nietzsche explains that some of the notes concerning the essay dated back to 1877, and that he had cautiously selected and edited them to "leave no doubt about either Richard Wagner or [him], were antipodes… [and that was] an essay for psychologists but *not* for Germans" (AC 265). Little more than a

week later, on January 3, 1889, Nietzsche suffered a mental breakdown that left him physically invalid and hopelessly insane for the next eleven years, with the philosopher dying in Weimar on August 25, 1900.

Fante's mentor, H.L. Mencken wrote the first book about Nietzsche's philosophy in the English language. Published in 1909 *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* sold out so quickly that second and third editions were rapidly required to supply the Anglophone market. Shortly after this, Abraham Wolf's *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* was published in London in 1915. Abraham Wolf was an occasional fellow at St. John's College, Cambridge, and a philosophy examiner at the University of London. In the first chapter of Wolf's book, "Nietzsche and the War," the author writes,

> To those who really know Nietzsche few things can appear more unwarranted and absurd than the constant coupling of his name with those of Bernhardi and Treitschke as one of the principal inspirers of the present war… the charge that he wittingly incited Germany to a war of aggression is unfounded. So far from encouraging German megalomania, he was one of its most scathing critics. (6)

Here Wolf refers World War I. Notably, Nietzsche's sister, Elisabeth's had close relations with the Nazis which led to many of Nietzsche's ideas being used to justify war, domination, and aggression for the sake of a higher race comprising the *Aryan Übermensch.* Later, a copy of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and a volume of Adolf Hitler's *Main Kampf* were given to German soldiers in the early days of World War II. Those copies omitted many passages indicating that Nietzsche despised antisemites and passages properly explaining his will to power and *übermensch* theories.

Whether controversial, brilliant, mad, narcissistic, or megalomaniac, Nietzsche's had an undeniable impact on contemporary culture. Be it out of curiosity, admiration, or

academical interest, the philosopher of the *übermensch* is still read and discussed, and his thoughts remain the object of considerable criticism, both negative and positive, with his influence felt not only in the academic sphere but also across the fields of painting, music, cinema, poetry, and popular art. His prolific output and originality mean that Nietzsche is not a name that will fade easily into obscurity. As life becomes increasingly puzzling and difficult, interest in Nietzsche as a man and philosopher seemingly continues to grow.

3.4 Martin Heidegger (1889–1976)

> Why there are beings at all instead of nothing?… this is obviously the first of all questions… And yet, we are each touched once, maybe every now and then, by the concealed power of this question, without properly grasping what is happening to us. In great despair, for example, when all weight tends to dwindle away from things and the sense of things grow dark, the question looms.
>
> Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*

On September 26, 1889, Heidegger was born in the small village of Messkirch, Germany. His youth was shaped by his Catholic life, religious rituals, and theological studies. In the winter of 1909–10, Heidegger entered the University of Freiburg to study theology. According to the philosopher in his essay “My Way to Phenomenology,” “the chief work for the study in theology still left enough time for philosophy which belonged to the curriculum anyhow. Thus[,] both volumes of [Edmund] Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* lay on my desk in the theological seminary ever since my first semester there” (qtd. in EDS 234). In fact, after two years, he abandoned theology and dedicated himself exclusively to philosophy. Heidegger was a student of Husserl, the founder of phenomenology eventually succeeding him as a teacher at Freiburg University. The existential question of “being”— as proposed by Aristotle and rearticulated by Franz Brentano in his dissertation “On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle”— awakened Heidegger’s interest, especially when he learned that much of Husserl’s

thought had been determined by Brentano's dissertation. As such, he read *Logical Investigations* several times, even though he could not yet explain his attraction to the text. He started to discuss Husserl's book in seminars with advanced students, finding himself increasingly fascinated with the question of being and assumed, at first, that his new inquiries could be "illuminated by the phenomenological attitude" (EDS 239). However, no matter how much effort and diligence he put into his project, he was not able to get to the point he aimed at.

Indeed, at the end of the aforementioned essay, Heidegger concluded that "the age of phenomenological philosophy is over… phenomenology is not a school….It is the possibility of thinking, at times changing and only thus persisting, … If phenomenology is thus experienced and retained, it can disappear as a designation in favor of the matter of thinking whose manifestness remains a mystery" (EDS 241). In many critical texts on Heidegger, he is described as a phenomenological existentialist. For Hubert Dreyfuss, who taught Heidegger's philosophy at Berkeley University for 25 years, this is a recurrent misrepresentation of Heidegger. Notably, the philosopher himself refused to be labeled an existentialist, first because his thought was not constrained to that movement and second because Sartre was the first philosopher to accept the label and Heidegger was not wholly in accordance with Sartre, whose name had become synonymous with existentialism.

In 1925–26, Heidegger was lecturing at Marburg University when the faculty of philosophy proposed that he take the chief philosophical chair on one condition: he had to publish something quickly. Following Husserl's recommendation to the publishing house, the first fifteen pages of *Being and Time* were immediately printed, allowing Heidegger to apply for the chair. Because his work was considered insufficient and inadequate, he did not obtain the position. However, Heidegger worked intensely, and in the spring of the following year

(1927), the "completed"[9] *Being and Time* was published and was immediately recognized as an original and groundbreaking philosophical work. Reviewers compared it to an "electric shock" and a "lightning strike," and there was praise for the "philosophical brilliance" and "genius" of its young author (BT xv). Although across the subsequent fourteen editions, Heidegger never made any substantial changes in the original text of *Being and Time*, later works saw him reconsider many of the concepts and assumptions presented in that first book. Meanwhile, beyond inspiring new ways of thinking, Heidegger became the subject of controversial debates within the philosophy field.

The most prominent example is Heidegger's engagement with the Nazi party, which still casts a shadow on his legacy. Although it is difficult to accurately situate the philosopher regarding this matter, in *Heidegger and the Jews: The Black Notebooks*, Donatella Di Cesare affirms that

> Heidegger's anti-Semitism cannot in any way be minimized, much less denied…. And yet the Jewish question lies at the heart of Heidegger's thought…the Jews [were] seen as the rootless agents of modernity, accused of machination to seize power, of the desertification of the earth, of uprooting peoples, condemned to be *weltlos*—worldless, "without world"—Heidegger imputed the gravest guilt: the oblivion of Being. The Jew was a sign of the end of everything, impending the rise of a new beginning. (ix)

Di Cesare does not try to excuse Heidegger for his Nazi links, instead denouncing attempts to, on the one hand, assuage Heidegger's guilt and, on the other hand, dismiss the validity of his undeniably brilliant work. By 1933, Heidegger was already famous in the academic world for his original contributions to philosophical discourse and his reputation as an excellent lecturer.

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[9] When first published, *Being and Time* bore the designation "First Half." Nonetheless, the second half was never written. Because the book was already considered a classic, the author engaged himself in other projects, believing that the question of 'being' or 'Dasein' was sufficiently discussed in the published work.

Therefore, the Nazi government appointed him to the post of rector of the University of Freiburg, and one month later, he registered as a member of the National Socialist Party (i.e., the Nazi party). It is a matter of debate whether he joined the Nazis to assure his career or because of genuine ideological convictions. Di Cesare does not defend the man that committed the terrific error, what she calls "a shameful parenthesis in his life" (3) but recognizes that this same Heidegger resigned from the rectorate one year later due to disputes with the party, exiling himself in the Black Forest. After the end of the war, he left the party and was prohibited from teaching for six years. Heidegger suffered a nervous breakdown and was admitted to a sanatorium in Badenweiler.

Ultimately, according to Di Cesare, "The despicableness of the philosopher is not the despicableness of his philosophy" (5). Thus, for those interested in Heidegger's original thoughts, this terrible aspect of his biography might need to be not forgotten but instead set aside to enable the study of his works. At this point, we may never know the kind of man Heidegger really was: despite the high praise for his brilliant output, he is equally dismissed for his political entanglement. Nevertheless, Heidegger continues to be considered one of the 20th century's most striking, innovative, and controversial philosophers. According to the editors of the *Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, "Heidegger's groundbreaking works have had a notable impact on twentieth- and twenty-first-century thought" (BCH 1), confirming the importance and originality of the controversial figure.

Comprehending Heidegger's ideas, especially in *Being and Time*, represents a challenging endeavor. He makes substantial use of neologisms and stretches the meaning of various words, making his work difficult even for German speakers. Thus, scholars, researchers, and critics agree almost unanimously that although "every attempt was made to make the English version [of Heidegger's work] smooth and yet faithful… the reader should keep in mind that Heidegger's difficulty is almost legendary" (EDS 234). Another

characteristic that makes Heidegger particularly contentious is the fact that he had two distinct phases in his thinking, meaning that it is quite common to find his work referred to as early and late Heidegger or the first or the second Heidegger. Among his philosophical inquiries, he changed or developed concepts and presuppositions, subtracting from and adding to previous assertions. This major change in his philosophy occurred after the war, which Heidegger called "the turn." To make this matter still more complex, Thomas Sheehan, in his essay "The Turn: All Three of Them," identifies not only one "turn" in Heidegger's philosophical pathway but instead three of them. Identifying these turns likely required labyrinthine research. Furthermore, the array of subjects considered by the philosopher was so vast that Heidegger played a key role in markedly different schools and spheres of philosophy, including phenomenology, hermeneutics, structuralism and post-structuralism, deconstruction, post-modernism, and existentialism, with Hubert Dreyfus, one of Heidegger's most renowned scholars, affirming that

> Most of the leading thinkers in the humanities and social sciences also acknowledge a debt to Heidegger. Michael Foucault has said, "For me Heidegger has been always the essential philosopher… My entire Philosophical development was determined by my reading of Heidegger. Early in his career, Jacques Derrida doubted that he could write anything that had not already been thought by Heidegger. Pierre Bourdieu says that in philosophy Heidegger was his "first love." His own important concept of the social field is indirectly indebted to Heidegger by way of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who acknowledges the influence of *Being and Time* on his *Phenomenology of Perception*. (BW 9).

Beyond those mentioned by Dreyfus, the formative influence Heidegger's work exercised on the ethics of Levinas and the political thought of Hanna Arendt, Leo Struss, and Hebert Marcuse, can hardly be overstated.

Although *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* warns that Heidegger's "thinking should be identified as part of such a philosophical movement [existentialism] only with extreme care and qualification" (Wheeler), for this research the Heideggerian concept of *Dasein* and its constitutive aspects prove to substantially enrich the illustration of the construction of Bandini's self. As affirmed by Dreyfus, "There is the 'existentialist' side of Heidegger's thought, which focuses on anxiety, death, guilt, and resoluteness… and there is the laying out of the temporality of human being in the world" (BW vii). These aspects all related to the concept of *Dasein*—or "being-in-the-world"—which is constituted by the three components of "thrownness," "fallenness," and "transcendence." Ultimately, *Dasein* is "us," the human being, the only being that inquires about its own being, about its own existence. If this primordial inquiry is not sufficient to consider Heidegger an existentialist, Dreyfus's extensive essay elaborates on Heidegger's existentialist side. This essay appears in the appendix of *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time* and sees Dreyfus present a very illuminating account of the profound influence of Kierkegaard on Heidegger's thought. The essay also offers a detailed comparison that shows where the two philosophers converge and diverge. Notably, Dreyfus asserts that Heidegger secularized Kierkegaard's notion of the "self" based mostly on the book *Sickness unto Death* (as discussed in Section 4.1).

A lover of nature, Heidegger would exercise his thinking while walking in the forest away from the senselessness of civilization, which he called "idle talk." The earlier Heidegger and partially the late looked at societal progress and technology with much suspicion. For most of his life, Heidegger preferred to live in the mountains of southeast Germany. His view of modern civilization was that man was suffering from an alienated soul, lost in that "idle talk" of everyday life and tending to follow the crowd without "caring" to notice that we are alive for a finite time. For the philosopher, people contemplate the mystery of existence only in a

few odd moments of solitude or illness, suggesting that people live as though they do not have to die. Thus, the fact that death is certain for all obtained a prominent place in his philosophy. Consequently, "we" as *Dasein* should "care" more about not forgetting this paramount issue and not give in to the laziness that is responsible for our insensitivity, our inertia, and our capacity to go with the flow. This is because living an authentic life depends as on "caring" as it does about reflecting on being in the world.

That represents the primary aim of Heidegger's philosophy: He wants to lead human beings towards awareness of the importance of this questioning, especially the importance of not only reflecting on it but also on acting concretely to live the most authentic and satisfactory life possible. For Dreyfus, "Heidegger thinks that the tradition never succeeded in correctly formulating the being-question… Heidegger is explicit, however, that his account will differ radically from the traditional one" (BW 12). For that reason, he proposes a totally new way of addressing the being-question by way of *Dasein*.

Dreyfus asserts that Heidegger did not agree with the Cartesian sense of self, seeing Descartes' starting point, *cogito ergo sum*, "I think therefore I am," as totally mistaken, suggesting the alternative, "I am therefore I think." In other words, a being that does not exist cannot think. Building on this assumption, Sartre coined one of the most known premises of existentialism, "existence precedes essence." This raises questions about the manner in which Heidegger constructed his thought from this new notion of self. Recognizing how Kierkegaard elaborated the notion of the Self as a totality of body and soul, Heidegger developed the concept into *Dasein,* which embodies the essential aspects of being. His approach also incorporated ideas from many Eastern schools of thought that understood the thinking subject as something that exists within a space of intelligibility that could be considered the totality of the self. Another revolutionary Heideggerian presupposition has origins in Husserl's phenomenological approach and suggests that the world would not have a sense of existing if there were no being

to observe it. Conversely, there would be no entity without a world in which that entity could be and this presupposition nullifies the distinction between subject and object. In short, *Dasein* is not statically an object or a subject.

Because Heidegger's concepts are rooted in metaphysics, his thoughts were at times interpreted as having a note of mysticism. His concept of *Dasein* represented an attempt to reveal the distinct state of being that the human being occupies by not only inquiring about itself but also about the "what" and "why" of its existence. In *Being and Time*, he wrote, "*Dasein* always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of the possibility to be itself or not to be itself. *Dasein* has either chosen these possibilities itself, stumbled upon them, or in each instance already grown up on them. Existence is decided only by each *Dasein* itself in the manner of seizing upon or neglecting such possibilities" (BT 11).

These possibilities dictate each *Dasein's* outcome.

Heidegger explained the temporal nature of *Dasein* as having three fundamental aspects: "thrownness," "existentiality," and "fallenness." The component of "thrownness" represents the very beginning of being. A being is thrown into existence without prior knowledge into a certain time, place, and social and physical condition that it has not chosen and has not been consulted about. This condition is the being's "facticity." In Heidegger's own words, "Thrownness means that *Dasein* always find itself already having some given content and concerns" (BW 299). Not accepting his given situation at his throwness is one of Bandini's biggest problem, something that is felt throughout his entire life.

In "existentiality," Heidegger refers to the possibilities a being has at its disposal over the course of its life. These possibilities are directly related to the given situation encountered at the point of thrownness. The possibilities available are, with rare exceptions, constrained by certain limitations. A being may be born with a physical handicap, in a given historical

moment, in a particular social condition, or in a dysfunctional family. Each of these aspects of an individual's thrownness shape their possibilities. Notably, these constraints dictated by the facticity of *Dasein* at the point of thrownness are firmly refuted by Sartre, who sees in facticity an excuse that people use to justify their failures and elude responsibility. Sartre advocates absolute freedom of choice and total and individual responsibility for one's choices.

Lastly, "fallenness" represents another example of Heidegger's peculiar use of words, with the term itself representing the idea of a downfall, of dropping down from a higher state. One can clearly perceive a Kierkegaardian resonance here: the unbalanced self that has "fallen" into a worldless and finite life without concern about the infinite side. On this, Dreyfus writes, "Heidegger takes over from Kierkegaard much more than he acknowledges" (BW 299). It is possible to draw another literary parallel with the notion of "fallenness": namely, Milton's poetic account of the fall of Lucifer and the fall of humanity. It is this fall that Heidegger captures in the notion of fallenness as a component of *Dasein*. In this case, as noted by Dreyfus, Heidegger strips the religious connotations of Kierkegaard's work and secularizes that understanding, divesting "the fall" from its cosmic universal significance and rendering it an individualized and everyday occurrence. Heidegger's secularized fallenness refers to the susceptibility of *Dasein* to being influenced and lost in the environment into which it has been thrown. That is, *Dasein* is in the world among others within the plurality of *Das Men*:

> In this way, the they *disburdens Dasein* in its everydayness. Not only that; but disburdening it of its being, the they accommodates *Dasei*n in its tendency to take things easily…The self of everyday *Dasein* is the *they-self*, which we distinguish from the *authentic self*…Dasein is *dispersed* in the day and must first find itself. (BT 124–125)

Thus, if *Dasein* does not concern itself with its authentic being-in-the-world, it risks becoming what it is not: It risks being an inauthentic self and living a groundless inauthentic life, and it risks falling, distracted by the everyday flow of unreflective lives, customs, and traditions. This can lead *Dasein* to close off the possibilities life presents it with, condemning it to inertia and ignorance about its own authentic self. *Dasein* will be just playing a role, living inauthentically, an idea that resonates with Sartre's arguably most famous concept, that of "bad faith." For Heidegger, "The temporality of *Dasein* is at the same time the condition of the possibility of historicity as a temporal mode of *Dasein* itself, regardless of whether and how it is a being in time" (BT 19). For this reason, Heidegger devoted considerable thought to the temporality of *Dasein*, remembering that being is a being towards death, a notion that he hoped would lead human beings to live more authentic and meaningful lives.

3.5 Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980)

> Man is nothing other than his own project. He exists only to the extent that he realizes himself, therefore he is nothing more than the sum of his actions…Man makes himself; he does not come into the world fully made… a certain project [does not] defines man forever, but it can be reinvented again and again.
>
> Jean-Paul Sartre in Existentialism is a Humanism

In a review of a book on Sartre by Massimo Recalcati, the founding "rockstar" of modern existentialism has been eclipsed in recent years: Sartre "in the actual philosophical and cultural panorama is seen as a 'dead dog.' Even if his intellectual figure and his literary oeuvre had been a cultural hegemony in the years that follow the Second World War, today his

philosophy seems fallen into oblivion"[10] (La Repubblica Mercoledì, 24 febbraio 2021). That review also discusses how structuralism and the neurocognitive paradigm's consideration of the self and the process of subjectification—central to Sartre's work—have become outdated and conceptually fragile. Nonetheless, in the light of actual human crises of contemporary times, many scholars have called for a renewed analysis of existentialism and the assumptions of its philosophers.

The freedom with which Sartre conducted his life with Simone di Beauvoir and his famous friends was considered so bold that it lent him a celebrity status. Important figures such as Albert Camus, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Raymond Aron (who introduced him to phenomenology) were part of Sartre's circle, with "the family," as this exclusive circle of intellectuals was called, was often seen in the Parisian cafes during the difficult years of the German occupation during World War II. Sartre's most important philosophical treatise, *Being and Nothingness*, much influenced by and considered almost a Sartrean version of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, is a monumental eight-hundred-page long hermetic composition. However, the book divided critics: although some philosophers considered it to be original and worthy of study, the lay public and much of the intelligentsia of the time considered it unreadable.

However, Sartre already had an established literary reputation due to his successful short stories and novels, and his celebrity meant that he could obtain nearly any position. However, this also meant that anything he wrote or said in his numerous appearances on TV and radio, in print media, and at guest lectures came under constant scrutiny, with his personal life not left alone. His *The Roads to Freedom* trilogy scandalized and shocked the conformists of the time:

[10] My translation from the Italian original.

> The controversies surrounding Sartre's assertions were intensified and muddled by what today we could call a media circus—hype and misunderstanding met by open or latent hostility… The result of it all was a quasi-mutual invasion: of the writer by a notoriety that dumb-founded him, and of the public by existentialism. (EH viii)

Sartre was criticized by atheist and theists alike, and "communists reproached him for not being one" (EH ix).[11] He was also accused of subjectivism, materialism, and preaching quietism and resignation when post-war France was demoralized and desperately needed messages of hope. One of his critics, Pierre Emmanuel, called existentialism a mental disease and said that Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* was an almost unreadable book. Perhaps worst of all, many people thought of him an anti-humanist. Hence, to defend his position and convince people that his thought was humanistic, Sartre gave a lecture to an overcrowded Parisian audience on October 29, 1945. That lecture was reproduced and published under the title *Existentialism is a Humanism*, which later became Sartre's most-read and most-cited book. Ultimately, the more hostility the movement received, the more popular it became.

Sean Kelly, the heir of Hubert Dreyfus's academic pursuits and co-author with Dreyfus of *All Things Are Illuminated,* specializes in existentialism and the philosophy of the mind. Although a Heideggerian, in a recent podcast interview,[12] Kelly discussed Sartre's catchphrase, "existence precedes essence" and talked about how existentialism came to be a German and French movement.[13] He also commented on how Heidegger and several others who were considered distinguished figures of the existentialist movement denied the existentialist label. Like Kaufmann before him, Kelly also stressed the difficulty of describing the core idea of existentialism, because one finds it expressed differently by its various exponents. According

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[11] Later, Sartre became an engaged communist and strongly advocated Marxist ideas.
[12] Lex Fridman Podcast #227 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cC1HszE5Hcw)
[13] Although Kierkegaard was Danish, Denmark was part of the German Empire at that time he was alive.

to Kelly, Sartre would say "that existentialism is the view that there is no God and at least his form of existentialism he calls it atheistic existentialism… since there is no God there must be some other being around who does something like what God does. Otherwise, wouldn't be any possibility for significance in life… and according to Sartre that 'other being' is us" (*Lex Fridman Podcast*).

The feature that permits the human being to play that role is exactly the most well-known of Sartre's assertions: "existence precedes essence." In other words, before coming to "existence" a human being is constituted by nothingness. As a person recognizes their existence in the world, "essence" arrives in the form of consciousness. From the moment human beings become aware of their consciousness, they start to exercise their "freedom of choice." For Sartre, our freedom is absolute, and it is not grounded on God's will or any philosophical doctrine. Our choices are what make us who we are, and we are completely responsible for all the consequences that might result from our choices. This attribute of absolute freedom enables us to be our own gods, our own creators, and totally responsible for the formation of our being. This radical Sartrean assumption has been much criticized, by not only theist but also atheist philosophers, who consider that many other aspects contribute to the formation of an individual's self. An example is given in the preceding section in the discussion of Heidegger's concept of facticity, which demonstrates how the particular situation of a person may limit or amplify their possibility of transcending their facticity.

However, Sartre, until a certain point in his life, would not enable anything to be interposed between humans and their absolute and unconditional freedom. In *Being and Nothingness*, he affirms, "absolute freedom is the person's very being. This particular project, of [man's desire to be God] which has freedom for its foundation and its aim… differs from all others… the project to-be-God we have taken to be the deep structure of human reality" (BN 754). Later, he adds, "Man makes himself man in order to be God… [it] might be considered

a kind of egoism; but precisely because there is not common measure between human reality and the cause of itself that it wants to be, we might just as well say that man loses himself in order to be self-caused to exist" (BN 809). For Sartre, as their own creator and definer of the formation of their own "essence," humans are trying to play the role of God. It is not true that Sartre made those statements with joy and pride: "the existentialist, on the contrary, thinks it to be very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with Him" (EHE 22). According to Sartre, absolute freedom may seem liberating at first, but assuming this freedom is mostly terrifying. Accordingly, he says, "Man is condemned to be free":

> Because the fact is, we are on a plane where there are only men. Dostoevsky said, 'If God did not exist, everything would be possible'… Indeed, everything is permissible if God does not exist, and as a result man is forlorn, because neither within him nor without does he find anything to cling to. He can't start making excuses for himself. (EHE 22)

That impossibility of making excuses calls for a humanistic ethical morality and authenticity. For Sartre, if one negates the freedom with which they have been endowed or tries to find excuses to limit it, they are undoubtedly acting in bad faith.

"Bad faith" is another Sartre concept that has been largely discussed, studied, and written about, even if the notion itself is very elusive and has received different interpretations. Many scholars find impossible the assertion that bad faith is lying to oneself and consciously believing that lie. The fact that Sartre adamantly denied Freud's unconsciousness makes the discourse all the more complex. Nonetheless, Sartre tried to resolve this question by indicating that bad faith occurs in a precarious mode he called pre-reflexiveness. In *Being and Nothingness*, faithful to his phenomenological orientation, he gives some practical examples

of bad faith. But these examples do not apply to all situations. As such, it is worth considering Cristine Daigle's representation more coherent that is : "Given that the human being is fundamentally anguished, and that anguish is a state that any individual would rather escape, it is natural that any individual will 'attempt' to flee anguish. This is what bad faith is, to Sartre: the attempt by consciousness to lie to itself" (61). The use of word "attempt" makes a great difference here, indicating that the pre-reflexive conscious attempt to negate our freedom escapes the ultimate human project of being God.

Embodying his assumption of the human "desire to be God," Sartre also tried to be omniscient. His interests were diversified: Beyond a philosopher and a professor, Sartre was also a novelist, a playwriter, a screenwriter, and a cultural critic. Strongly interested in psychology and psychoanalysis, Sartre wrote psychoanalytical biographies of Gustave Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire, and Jean Genet. Furthermore, he held extreme political positions as a Marxist. In *Words*,[14] Sartre admits that writing for him was an imperious necessity, and, accordingly, took his pen to many subjects and in various forms, further increasing his popularity. The biography by Andrew Leak, *Jean-Paul Sartre*, gives an idea of the amplitude of Sartre's name and figure:

> Sartre continued to expand and mutate with each posthumous publication. Not only that: with each notable anniversary—and none could be more notable than the recent centenary of his birth—witnesses to his life, both real and purported, partisans and detractors, critics and exegetes, have rolled up to provide the illustrious zombie with ever more textual prosthetics. Sartre long since left Kafka and Borges, Joyce and Proust in his wake of the most written-about twentieth-century author. But why? His works do

[14] The French original title, *Le Mots*, can be literally translated as "The Words," and the earlier English publications carried the title *The Words.* However, the Penguin Classics edition I am using is titled *Words*.

> not possess the spectacular verbal richness of Joyce or Proust, nor do they tease their readers, like those of Kafka or Borges, with the promise always on the point of disclosure. The question as to why Sartre and his work have stimulated so many readers to read, so many writers to write, so many thinkers to think so many critics to critic is one that is surely worth considering… his work, more than any other has become inseparable from the image of the man himself. (Leak 51)

As already indicated, Sartre, generated more interest and gossip for his life than his philosophy. Because of the complexity of Sartre's philosophy, it was not deeply studied or clearly understood. Ronald E. Santoni, a well-known Sartre scholar, wrote in *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Earlier Philosophy* that

> The philosophy of Jean- Paul Sartre is one to which too many philosophers, academics and laypersons allude, but too few read—at least seriously. I believe that, if one attempt to penetrate even part of Sartre's vast and complex philosophical system, one is confronted not only with some important insights into our human condition but also with existentially disturbing challenges and gnawing difficulties. (xv)

But given the importance of his name, many who alluded to his assumptions frequently misinterpreted and cited his ideas totally out of context. "Man is a useless passion" and "Hell is other people" are two examples among many.

To contextualize the research summarized, it is worth considering some biographical details. Born on June 21, 1905, Jean-Paul-Charles-Aymard Sartre would grow to be known as simply "Sartre," the most influential philosopher of modern existentialism. His father, Jean-Baptist, died when Sartre was 18 months old. About him, Sartre wrote, "Jean-Baptist's death was the great event of my life: it returned my mother to her chains and gave me my freedom… If he had lived, my father would have lain down on me and crushed me… But I was delighted:

my unhappy condition imposed respect and established my importance" (W 14–15). Sartre's condition gave him, according to his own words, a certain privileged life. First, he was free of the demands of sonhood, and second, he became the adored son of Anne-Marie, giving Charles Schweitzer, a professor, a chance to guide the young genius on his first steps toward cultural knowledge. As described in *Words,* his grandfather's house, where he lived with his mother and grandmother, was a tableau in which each person properly performed the role needed for a happy family. Anne-Marie never gave any orders, and he saw her as a girl who slept in "the children's room" with him. Of her, Sartre wrote, "Poor Anne-Marie: passive, she would have been accused of being a burden; active, she was suspected of wanting to boss the house" (W 14). Of his grandmother, Sartre did not have kind words: "This aging, cynical woman had only one illusion: she thought she was indispensable. The illusion faded: Louise started to be jealous of her daughter" (W 14). About his grandfather, who introduced him to books, he wrote: "I would feel the warmth of his palms on my head, he would call me his little one in a voice bleating with affection… it was obvious that he adored me. Did he love me? I find it hard to tell sincerity from artifice in so public an emotion… he adored in me his generosity" (W 17). It is very clear that his adoration of Anne-Marie faded when she remarried, and the family had to move from Paris to La Rochelle. Sartre came to loathe his stepfather for having robbed his exclusive access to his mother and removing him from the place that he had been adored and where he could manipulate everyone. Throughout *Words*, Sartre describes how his life was a perennial performance and how he entertained himself by plagiarizing the books he read and writing his own version of them. Nonetheless, the whole time he seems to have been conscious of one thing: "I was lying to myself" (W 20), affirming his concept of bad faith. Ultimately, in *Words*, even Sartre's writing sounds performative. As he once wrote in reference to a different situation, it is difficult to distinguish between genuine and authentic accounts of one's own life and a person's idealized version.

However, coherent with his thought that a self is never considered complete, Sartre changed his positions over the course of his life. In *Words,* which is often compared to Rosseau's *Confessions* and considered by many critics to be his literary masterpiece, Sartre confesses his weakness, his split self and how he has lived his life between authenticity and bad faith (in its various forms). It is possible that his own life experience made the subject of bad faith so relevant for him. Ultimately, the philosopher affirms, "I began my life as I shall no doubt end it: among books" (W 28). He died in Paris from pulmonary edema on April 15, 1980, and was buried at Montparnasse cemetery. Books were absolutely a necessity for Sartre: he acknowledges that his compulsive reading and writing saved him from total madness. Of course, if not for his compelling devotion to his work*, Being and Nothingness*, a mammoth treatise written in a single year, would not have come to light.

The two interrelated concepts of the human "desire to be God" and the various forms of "bad faith" have been selected to be discussed in this research. Other than being important aspects of Sartre's thought, these subjects permeate the narratives of Bandini, which provide numerous accounts clearly illustrating Sartre's assumptions.

3.6 Albert Camus (1913–1960)

> For the actor as for the absurd man, a premature death is irreparable. Nothing can make up for the sum of facts of centuries that he should otherwise have known. But in any case, one dies. For the actor is surely everywhere, but times carries him along, and does with him what he wishes.

Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Albert Camus, a French Algerian intellectual was a journalist, an editor, a translator, a dramatist, a thinker, and a novelist, a man who pursued the knowledge of human truth in general. He died prematurely in a car accident on January 4, 1960, in the small town of Villeblevin. Michael Gallimard, Camus' publisher, had spent the New Year's holiday with the

writer's family, at the house he had purchased with the money he received for winning the Nobel Prize. Camus intended to make this house a refuge from the turbulent and extenuating life he was living in Paris. The Camus family had already bought their train tickets for their trip back to Paris. However, Michael Gallimard insisted on having Camus with him, his wife, and daughter in their car. In accepting the invitation, Camus had sealed his absurd fate.

The unfinished manuscript of *The First Man*, his most autobiographical work, was inside his briefcase when the car accident occurred. Similar to Fante, Camus's writing was much inspired by the events of his own life, a life marked by tragedy. Camus was born in Algeria on November 7, 1913, the son of a deaf mother and a father who died when Camus was eight months old, rendering his infancy miserable. About his mother, Camus said that although he felt that he loved her, he never understood the woman. Beyond being deaf and illiterate, she developed a speaking problem when she received news of her husband's death. Thus, she passed her life in almost absolute silence. She also seemed to be indifferent to the problems around her. She was described as frequently absent-minded, apparently staring into the void. They lived together with an uncle, the brother of Camus's mother. All five of them were packed into a small three-room apartment in Belcourt, a home with no electricity or running water. A bathroom in the corridor served three other apartments as miserable as theirs. This information derives from the extensive 848-page biography by Herbert R. Lottman. Lottman's biography of the Nobel laureate was first published in 1968 and covers all of Camus's short life.

Camus contracted tuberculosis when he was seventeen. He says that his mother reacted as she would to "a headache of a member of the family" (qtd. in Lottman, ch. 4). At that time, the treatments offered for the disease were painful and ineffective. The use of streptomycin, which was proven to cure tuberculosis, was developed a little late for Camus, who died in 1960. Camus knew that his life was constantly threatened by the illness, and his writing captures his

resentment of his condition, especially responding to the periods in which he was unable to produce, which brought him great discomfort and frustration. Therefore, in the periods that he was well, he threw himself into a highly disciplined and organized schedule to read and write as much as possible. His doctor, Stacha Cviklinski, "told Camus to live his life fully" (Lottman, ch. 7), and Camus took these words more as philosophical advice than a doctor's prescription, and "his response to things that might be wrong [in his life] was characteristically stoical" (Lottman, ch. 6).

A very discreet and reserved person and a moralist according to many of his contemporaries, including Sartre, Camus did all he could to keep his private life from becoming public knowledge. Indeed, he was known as a "non-talker man," with Simone de Beauvoir suggesting that "Camus, himself, knew, that his public image didn't coincide with his private truth" (qtd in Lottman, ch. 28). About his ambiguity, Camus described himself to a friend, Jean Daniel, as "a voluptuous puritan." Accordingly, the character of Don Juan was used to exemplify a passionate life in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, about which "a longtime friend (and then an enemy), Jean-Paul Sartre, recalled the magic of the time in an often-quoted description of Camus 'the admirable coming together of a person, an action and a work'" (Lottman Introduction). The close friendship between Sartre and Camus would be strained by their divergent political views and a newspaper publishing an exchange of attacks following the publication of Camus's book, *The Rebel.* While Sartre was a convicted Communist and Stalinist, advocating that the end justifies the means, Camus was a pacifist leftist who saw violence as a privation of freedom and a version of dehumanization. Furthermore, he was horrified by the accounts he heard from witnesses about the reality of the gulag.[15]

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[15] Gulag is an acronym for Glavnoe Upravlenie ispravitel-no/trudovykh. Gulags were Soviet forced-labor camps, analogous to Nazi concentration camps. Millions of people died in the Gulags from starvation, from the harsh cold, and from summary execution under Stalin's regime. Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote *The Gulag*

Lottman's biography describes one episode representing Camus's jealousy. In a bar, the group of friends was united, and a young film critic loudly proclaimed:

> I'm going to speak to you about an injustice worse than those we denounce in column after column of our daily for the intellectual elite; this injustice is alive and it is there before us—it's Camus; he has everything it takes to seduce, to be happy, to be famous, and in addition he dares to have all the virtues. (qtd. in Lottman, ch. 28)

However, this all-confident Camus was the same one who, in his private unhappiness, wrote the following in his diary:

> My exhaustion and this desire to weep. This solitude and this thirst for love… Things, beings are waiting for me and without doubt I'm waiting for them too and desire them with all my strength and my sadness. But here I am earning my living through silence. (qtd. in Lottman, ch.11)

About Camus's renowned silence, Sartre wrote, "His silence, which accord to events and my mood I considered sometimes too cautious and sometimes painful, was a quality of everyday like heat or light, but it was human" (qtd. in Bree 173–175).[16] Although the great admiration Sartre nurtured for Camus, he could never really understand or grasp Camus essence and that disturbed him to the point of giving up on his former friend. It seems though that the rupture of the friendship came from the incapacity of both men to understand and to accept each other positions especially in politics.

Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation based on his own account as a survivor of eleven years in the gulags and the testimony of about two hundred other survivors.

[16] From *The Reporter Magazine*, February 4, p.34. Copyright 1960 by *The Reporter Magazine* Company. Translated by Justin O'Brien. Reprinted by permission of the author and *The Reporter* Magazine.

Camus's political engagement started early in his life when he was personally obsessed with pursuing justice in times of fascism. That Andre Gide, the cultural hero of the left wing, was an enthusiastic anti-fascist and pro-soviet, added to the motivation of the younger generation to join the Communist Party. Very discreetly, as he would be about everything in his life, Camus also joined. About his political engagement, in a letter to Jean Grenier, his professor and mentor, Camus wrote, "I have such a strong desire to help reduce the sum of unhappiness which empoisons mankind" (qtd. in Lottman, ch.7).

The impression that the charming and charismatic Camus lived an ambivalent life or that he was unsure of himself is confirmed by his dear friend, Claude de Fréminville, in a letter to a mutual friend, André Belamich:

> Camus says that he is a communist out of despair… I have noted a disparity between Camus and his acts. Camus continues to think despair, even to write it; but he lives hope… He is not always his own defamer and sometimes I hear a Camus that I know well, who wasn't born in the communist party but who is growing there. (qtd. Lottman, ch. 8)

Fréminville was not wrong in his analysis. Camus had conflicted feelings about the Communist Party's approach. At that time, Jean Grenier was also questioning: "For an ideal of justice, must one subscribe to stupidities?" (qtd. in Lottman, ch. 8). But even his adversaries regarded him as "shy and tender." A moralist and an absolute pacifist, Camus was against any kind of violence and discrimination, which eventually led to his expulsion from the Communist Party. He fought for freedom, democracy, and for the integration of Arab Muslims in Algeria, and he was devastated when he learned that those same Arabs were being persecuted and arrested.

Grenier was the first to "reject the intellectual prison which the Communist Party represented" (Lottman, ch. 7). Gide, the cultural hero of communism, when he returned from

a visit to the Soviet Union in 1936, where he "discovered how communism [really] worked" (Lottman, ch. 7), expressed his deception and frustration with Stalin's program of coercion and violence. Gide's report only endorsed Camus's ambivalent view of the Communist Party, which was suddenly allied with the French Army. Such shifts caused much dissent and discordance. Nonetheless, expelled from the party, Camus continued to defend his leftist ideas, provided they would not lead to any kind of violence. At the time, there was a clear division between those who took a radical Stalinist position following Sartre (these represented the majority) and those who sided with Camus's moderate position. However, after the horrors of Stalinism and the excesses of Chairman Mao, many eminent men and women of intellectual Paris were awakened to the realities of the Communist dream, recognizing that Sartre's influence had led them astray.

Camus also worked intensely in the theater. In fact, for all his life, this was his major activity. He would write, perform, and direct many plays. Furthermore, he helped to produce a trans-Mediterranean literary magazine called *Rivages* (shores). The magazine was intended to be a "showcase for the Mediterranean spirit in literature" (Lottman, ch. 14), and Camus was part of the editorial board. *Rivages* was an eclectic magazine that decided not to represent a single school of thought, instead focusing on quality and freedom. Through his work on *Rivages,* the always-active Camus became the editor-in-chief at Charlot's Publishing House. Nonetheless, his theatrical activity continued. Elsewhere, a new morning newspaper, *Alger Républicain,* came into being to give voice to leftist ideologies. Pascal Pia, the editor-in-chief, soon recruited Camus to work as a journalist and literary reviewer for the newspaper. This whole time, Camus took personal notes for his own writing: his novels, plays, and philosophical essays.

His literary aspirations were concerned with "the absurd" and the advent of World War II completely justified Camus's ideas about the absurdity of existence. On this theme, "the

absurd," Camus wrote a triptych: a play, *Caligula*; a novel, *L'Etrange*r; and a philosophical essay*, The Myth of Sisyphus*. According to Camus, the clash between the human need to pursue meaning for their existence and the godless, silent, and indifferent universe that gave no positive answer regarding meaning or purpose makes for the absurd. For Camus, life is a random event that does not have a rational explanation. It is well known that Camus always refuted the "existentialist" label. He attributed the association of his name with the existentialist movement to his being part in the intimate and exclusive Sartrean circle: they would work, travel and discuss life, theater always together. At one of his many lectures outside of France, Camus responded to a question from a reporter in Brazil about existentialism as follows:

> It is a serious error to treat with such frivolity a philosophical research as serious as existentialism is. Its origins go back to Saint Augustine and its chief contribution to knowledge certainly resides in the impressive wealth of its method. The similarities that one generally remarks between Sartre's work and my own come naturally from the chance of the misfortune that we have to live in the same era and in confrontation with common problems and concerns. (qtd. in Lottman, ch. 35)

For Camus, his philosophical project differed from the existentialism preached and lived by Sartre. Still, one cannot deny that Camus's writings and thoughts are entirely concerned with existence, making them "existentialist." Although some considered absurdism a form of nihilism, Camus was totally against the resignation and hopelessness of nihilism, for "he himself thought that salvation was possible, salvation not through the unfathomable, the mystical, but through man's own will. Camus was going to stay on solid ground" (qtd. in Lottman, ch. 5). Ultimately, he was a humanist, with his central idea being that man should accept (not surrender to) the absurdity of the universe that surrounds existence. Nonetheless, this is not an excuse to give up on life, because the daily struggle of living makes life already

worth living. Awareness that "this life" is the only one we have and will have, results in the need to live it fully. In doing so, the human being ascribes a relative meaning to existence.

Camus himself recognized that his assumptions lacked a more consistent and systematic base, but he excused himself by saying that at 25 he was too young to have a philosophical system. Above all, he conceded that he had insufficient confidence in reason to be able to enter a rational philosophy; for him, the pursuit of rationalization was simply absurd. If humans found a rational explanation for their existence, there would not be so many giving up on life. Accordingly, Camus opened *The Myth of Sisyphus* with the daring and well-known proposition: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy" (MS 4). Because Camus was concerned with living and living fully, he was preoccupied with the spread of nihilistic views. Discussing whether Galileo was right to deny a significant truth in exchange for his own life, Camus wrote, "Galileo, who held a scientific truth of great importance, abjured it with the greatest ease as soon as it endangered his life. In a certain sense [,] he did right. That truth was not worth the stake. Whether the earth or the sun revolves around the other is a matter of profound indifference" (MS 4). Indeed, for the existential question, it is a useless concern. The absolute truth of inevitable death should cause a person to revolt and "intensify the passion of living" (MS 4). Camus advocates for people to balance rationalism and lyricism to permit passion and reason at the same time. To illustrate this balance, he used the expression "la palisse," which describes the too-substantial evidence and the unrealism of Don Quixote, a balance between which gives man the lucidity to choose life over suicide. Although humans have a chronic urgency to understand the universe using reason alone, he negates all that is irrational and all that he cannot understand. Here resides the absurd, and accordingly, Camus despised humankind's incessant quest for the meaning of life: "After so many centuries of inquiries, so many abdications among thinkers… today people

despair of true knowledge. If the only significant history of human thought were to be written, it would be the history of its successive regrets and its impotence" (MS 13–14). Camus's point is that all previous great thinkers who presumably obtained substantial knowledge simply proved human impotence in the face of the Heideggerian "thrownness" of life.

Although "in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and light, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land" (MS 5), humans generally try to elude death, even if others decide to renounce their life, with tenacity and acumen "privileged spectators of this inhuman show in which absurdity, hope [,] and death carry on their dialogue" (MS 8). For Camus, religion might be useful to diminish discomfort before the absurd, with the transcendental hope potentially making the journey more comfortable and bearable. However, it reduces human freedom, thus representing a kind of bad faith that leads a person to live their life in accordance with certain parameters that permit them to be rewarded or punished in the afterlife. For Camus, the hope of an (uncertain) better after-life may hinder a person from living their life in the present. However, he does not promote an immoral life: He is too ethical for that. Camus proposes that humans live fully without the religious constraints that can negate happiness in the here and now. Nonetheless , one's life must be as ethical as possible for oneself and for others. For instance, if a certain religion prohibits divorce, a person is condemned to a torturous relationship without love. This kind of life is for Camus a negation of life itself, rendering it philosophical suicide. Despite all the admiration Camus had for Kierkegaard and the influence he drew from Kierkegaard's clear description of his bewilderment before the absurdity of existence, he considered Kierkegaard's leap of faith a philosophical suicide and considered that many attached themselves to these beliefs because it would be devastating for them to accept the meaninglessness of life and the universe. According to Camus, humanity should rebel

against the absurdity of the world by living it in rebellion with total lucidity and consciousness, thus describing the absurd man as follows:

> He who, without negating it, does nothing for the eternal. Not that nostalgia is foreign to him. But he prefers his courage and his reasoning. The first teaches him how to live without appeal and get along with what he has; the second informs him of his limits. Assured of his temporally limited freedom… he lives out his adventure within the spam of his lifetime. That is his field, that is his action… A greater life cannot mean for him another life. (MS 42)

Like Nietzsche before him, Camus dismissed metaphysical and transcendental hope, suggesting that life should be appreciated regardless of the knowledge that it is finite, regardless of its pains and pleasures, with the awareness that death is unavoidable.

Capturing these notions in a moving eulogy at the time of Camus's passing, Sartre reserved beautiful words for his one-time friend:

> [Camus] represented in our time the latest example of that long line of moralists whose works constitute perhaps the most original element in French letters... Anyone who read or reflected encountered the human values he held in his fists; he questioned the political act… he was indispensable to that tension which makes intellectual life what it is. This Descartes of the absurd refused to leave the safe ground of morality… for all those who loved him, there is an unbearable absurdity in that death… we shall recognize in [his] work and the life that is inseparable from it the pure and victorious attempt of one man to snatch every instant of his existence from his future death. (Bree 173–175)[17]

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[17] From *The Reporter Magazine*, February 4, p.34. Copyright 1960 by *The Reporter Magazine* Company. Translated by Justin O'Brien. Reprinted by permission of the author and The Reporter Magazine.

These touching words proves the grandiosity and the mutual admiration the two philosophers shared despite the intellectual gap that separated them.

Camus summarized his philosophy in the *Myth of Sisyphus*, the man described by Homer, as “the wisest and most prudent of mortals…Homer tells us also that Sisyphus had put death in chains” (MS 75). For his rebellion against death and for having defied the gods, Sisyphus was condemned to push a huge rock uphill just to see it roll back, at which point he had to descend the mountain to start all over again. Most importantly, he never gives up. Sisyphus is the absurd hero, whose “passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted to accomplish nothing” (MS 75). For Camus, that is largely the humans’ lot : to embrace each one’s futile task without illusions, with “all Sisyphus’ silent joy … contained therein. His fate belongs to him” (77). He knows that after descending the hill he will encounter the endless labor of carrying the rock uphill. This self-consciousness allows Sisyphus to master his own fate. In this project’s literary analysis, this research considers how *The Myth of Sisyphus* resonates in the context of the life of Bandini, especially insofar as he represents the alter ego of Fante and that neither Fante, nor Bandini men was able to stop the bolder on the top of the mountain.

4. An Existentialist Reading of *The Bandini Quartet*

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of Arturo Bandini, the protagonist of *The Bandini Quartet,* through the lens of existentialism. Bandini is a very individualistic, contradictory, and self-reflective character. He is constantly searching for the meaning of his existence and his role in the world. Furthermore, he resents his facticity (being born poor to immigrant parents in a difficult historical time) and blames it for hindering him from using his entire capacity and "freedom" in the process of becoming his authentic self. Bandini's split personality and lack of resolutness leads him to a performative and unauthentic life. These traits perfectly align with an existentialist reading of Fante's tetralogy.

4.1 Bandini's Kierkegaardian Despair

> The most common despair is…not choosing, or not willing to be oneself…[but] the deepest form of despair is to choose to be other than oneself.
>
> Kierkegaard in *The Sickness unto Death*

To begin my existential analysis of Bandini, I work with Kierkegaard's concept of "despair" as the author develops it in *The Sickness unto Death*. Written under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus, Kierkegaard's book epitomizes "Kierkegaard's philosophical anthropology, his views of human nature and the implications of the universality of despair" (Hong 350). It can be considered an elaboration of his previous book, *The Concept of Anxiety*, in which the author affirms that anxiety is the "dizziness of freedom," the awareness of having ahead of oneself so many possibilities: "Anxiety in this view, like despair in *The Sickness unto Death*, is not simply a defect but a mark of the human being of becoming spirit, an authentic self" (Hong 138). This "becoming spirit" requires reflection, choice, and decisions, especially between good and evil, finitude and infinitude, necessity and possibility, and doubt and faith.

Thus, the unbalanced interplay, or in Kierkegaard's terms, the disequilibrium of the "relation" between the numerous aspects of a human life, is where despair originates, which, for the author is "the misrelation of a synthesis that relates itself to itself." (Hong 353). In other words, "a human being is a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, of the temporal and eternal, of necessity and possibility, in short, a synthesis… but a human being is not yet a self" (TSUD 326). According to Kierkegaard, there is a difference between being a human being and being a human self, with the human "self" formed from a balanced relation between these aspects.

In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard divides the concept of despair into two main forms and elaborates on each to—intricately and in a complicated riddle-like manner—explicate its origins and implications: "Real life is far too multifarious to be portrayed by merely exhibiting such abstract contrasts as that between a despair which is completely unconscious, and one which is completely conscious of being… characterized by multiform nuances" (TSUD 354). Besides Kierkegaard's multiple nuances, there is another factor that may contribute to the complex nature of Kierkegaard's writing, which is how he adopts different approaches at the same time to treat the same subject. Although his concerns always regards the singular individual; when confronting an argument, Kierkegaard adopts philosophical, psychological, anthropological, and theological approaches. I do not intend to work within a specific approach but to relate his elaborations on the concept of despair to the narrative of Bandini's life.

As Kierkegaard argues, "an individual in despair despairs over something" (qtd in Hong 355). According to the philosopher, "the despair of not willing to be oneself" and the "despair of willing to be oneself" represent the two major forms of despair. The following passage of *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* illustrates at one time these two forms. Although Bandini is just a boy, the reader can sense his self-reflectiveness and his despair:

> His name was Arturo, but he hated it and wanted to be called John. His last name was Bandini, and he wanted it to be Jones. His mother and father were Italians, but he wanted to be an American… His face was freckled, but he wanted it to be clear. His father was a bricklayer, but he wanted to be a pitcher for the Chicago Clubs.… He was an altar boy, but he was a devil and hated altar boys… He wanted to be a good boy, but he was afraid to be a good boy because his friend would call him a good boy… he loved his father, but he lived in dread of the day when he would grow up and be able to lick his father. He worshipped his father, but he thought his mother was a sissy and fool. (TBQ 23–24)

This passage foreshadows the existentialist tone and themes that will assail Bandini, for whom existential crisis is exacerbated as he grows up and strives to affirm his own identity. Until the very end of the last novel, he demonstrates his discontentment with his own self and his desire to be something other than his own self. This enables the reader to conclude that his is a life of despair.

First, Bandini does not like his name, which identifies his Italian heritage, preferring that his name be John Jones, such that he might belong to a more fortunate group of Americans, to the point of saying to Rosa, his sweetheart, "I will change my name too, Rosa. They'll call me Banning…" (TBQ 37). Bandini also hates his desire "to be a good boy," which could be a sign of weakness in front of his friends and wishes he could have different parents. Nonetheless, his feelings toward his father are ambivalent: he says that he loves his father, but there is a loathing nestled inside him that makes him fear the day that he becomes capable of knocking his father down. In another passage, he criticizes his father for being a "noisy Italian" instead of a "quiet American." Furthermore, he realizes that his father has rather bad table manners, which makes Bandini think in disgust, "Oh God, those Italians" (26), as if he were not Italian himself. As for his mother, he makes clear his desire to have a much smarter and more

American mother. His mother, although born in America, would "speak in awe of what American women were doing" (56). Bandini cannot help but desire that his mother be "like the other mothers." This passage could not better illustrate Kierkegaard's two main forms of despair. Here, Bandini displays the mood he will carry into the subsequent novels of the tetralogy.

It seems that in his quest for meaning and his endeavor to construct his own authentic self, Bandini is doomed to be split, incapable of making a definite decision one way or another. His unwilling to be himself and his will to be someone else is again exemplified when his father leaves his mother for another woman, Mrs. Hildegard, a rich and refined widow. Bandini is in a difficult position: He sees his mother suffering, and he goes in search of his father with the firm intention of bringing him back home. However, from a distance, he sees his father on the edge of the woman's porch, and he shudders with delight, realizing that he was seeing the man whose son he wanted to be, in total contrast to the poor man that he was accustomed to having as his father, with holey shoes and miserable rags for clothes. Bandini is so happy at what he sees that he completely forgets that he had come to bring his father home to ease his mother's pain:

> Holy Jumping Judas, but he looked swell! He wore bright red bedroom slippers, blue pajamas, and a red lounging robe that had white tassels on the sash ends… He looked like Helmer the banker and the president Roosevelt. He looked like the King of England. O boy, what a man… to think that [I] had come here to bring [him] home! How crazy [I] had been. Not for anything [I] would ever disturb that picture of [my] father in the splendor of that new world. (TBQ 191)

However, his "split self" demands that Bandini not bear to "look at the wasted sunken face of his mother… and he hated his father again." The confused boy turns back to the rich house and

finally succeeds in bringing his father back home. Bandini has been subject to a tremendous dose of Kierkegaard's dual notion of despair as only a 12-year-old boy.

Interestingly, Kierkegaard wrote a diary entry that resonates with Bandini's discontent: "I have been from childhood on in the grip of an overpowering melancholy… my sole joy being, as far as I can remember, that nobody could discover how unhappy I felt myself to be" (Hubben 14). Before he could explore and elaborate on his feelings, the hyperconscious Kierkegaard suffered the despair of having to perform an inauthentic self for others. This problem assailed the philosopher his entire life, and he deeply considered sincerity and authenticity while also wanting approval and acceptance from those around him. His acute self-consciousness and the tension between those feelings condemned him to an extremely solitary life.

In the first novel of the tetralogy, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, the boy's Catholic faith demands that he attend mass, despite his devilish temperament and unruly behavior, and he desperately runs to church to confess every time that he feels that he has committed a sin, becoming relieved and happy after his confession. For Bandini, the absolution and the feeling of cleanliness was so important that he would say extra prayers to guarantee forgiveness.

The Bandini we encounter in *The Road to Los Angeles* is the same confused and contradictory character. However, he is now 17, and his reading of atheistic literature has taken over his mind and intensified the unbalanced relation Bandini has with the various aspects of his own self. His explicit dismissal of God—"I'm an atheist. I deny the hypothesis of God" (TBQ 297)—shocks his mother. Meanwhile, his disdain for Christianity leaves the boy completely lost and out of his mind, intoxicated with his nonstop reading of atheistic and pessimistic philosophy.

This calls to mind Kierkegaard's notion that "the self cannot of itself attain and remain in equilibrium and rest by itself, but only by relating itself to that Power which constituted the [whole] relation… [whereas] by relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it" (TSUD 326–327). For Kierkegaard, human existence requires this Power, assumed to be God, the creator, the one who "posited" human life in this world. Bandini grew up in a Catholic family and attended Catholic schools, and although Catholic principles exist deep inside his mind, he is now a rebellious teenager who fantasizes about the naked "paper women" from *Artists and Models Magazine* in his "private study, which was the clothes closet" (TBQ 228). Furthermore, although Bandini is inebriated with his reading, he does not really comprehend Nietzsche, Marx, Schopenhauer, or Spengler: As Bandini confesses to himself, "day after day I read, never understanding, never caring either, but reading it because I liked one growling word after another marching across pages with somber mysterious rumblings" (264). Although the boy has lost the frail, connection with his spiritual side remains strong. However, the religiousness of his mother and sister (who wants to be a nun) annoy him greatly. Of his mother, he asks, "How is Jehovah tonight?… Yahweh. Next time you see Yahweh tell him I have a few questions to ask." Later, he vents more explicitly: "'Christian dogs', I said. 'Bucolic rainspouts! Boobus Americanus![18] Jackals, weasels, polecats, and donkeys—the whole stupid lot of you. I alone of the entire family have been unmarked by the scourge of cretinism'" (235). Once he has declared himself an atheist, he would no longer relate himself to the Power that grounded him. His expressing to his mother that he has a few questions to ask Jehovah relates directly to Kierkegaard's comment, "Who has lured me into the thing... I should like to make a remark to him." Bandini's unbalanced

[18] "Boobus Americanus" was an expression much used in John Fante's times. It means complacent, lazy, and stupid US citizens who vote for politicians for vacuous reasons.

self becomes increasingly lost in derision until bordering on madness. In fact, his coworkers think that he is a lunatic, and his mother is seriously preoccupied with her son's mental health.

The entire novel *The Road to Los Angeles* is a parade of nonsensical egoistic and resentful thoughts, desires, and deeds. Bandini's delirious inner monologues and his absurd dialogues with his peers, his family, animals, and even inanimate objects demonstrate the exacerbation of his existential crisis. A passage in which he struggles to put a dying tuna fish on the cutting board recalls Kierkegaard's affirmation that to be in despair is a gift given only to human beings because despair requires consciousness, the advantage we have over non-human animals. Accordingly, the scene sees Bandini yelling at the fish, "You monster!…Spell Weltanschauung! Go on, *spell* it!… But he was a fish from another world; he couldn't spell anything… then I slide my knife under his gill, amused at his helpless gasping, and cut off his head… when I said spell Weltanschauung, I meant it" (TBQ 355). It is worth considering whether Bandini was asserting, in Kierkegaardian terms, his despair over working at a miserable fish cannery, which he absolutely detested, or whether he was despairing over having a sense (if not completely clear) about life and the world, a sense that the fish could not have, or whether he was envious of the alienated condition of the fish, which did not have consciousness, a Weltanschauung, a cosmovision, and would not suffer from despair. It might be argued that Bandini's behavior is somehow comprehensible because he is a 17-year-old from a dysfunctional family suffering from an overdose of philosophical reading which, in his immature condition, he cannot digest. Furthermore, at this age, he is undergoing a hormonal tempest and in the process of becoming his self.

Bandini's despair, according to Kierkegaard, is one of the lower kinds, the despair of the ambitious man: Bandini not only wants to be a writer, he wants to be the best writer. As Kierkegaard puts it, when an "ambitious man whose watchword is 'Either Caesar or nothing' [and this man] does not become a Caesar, he is in despair thereat. But this signifies something

else, namely, that precisely because he did not become Caesar, he now cannot endure to be himself" (TSUD 330). This is exactly what happens to Bandini, who does not become Caesar (i.e., the best writer) and so enters a state that Kierkegaard describes as follows: "[the] despairing self is constantly building nothing but castles in the air" (TSUD 370). In his frustration at not being a great writer or the best writer, Bandini evades reality, constantly building castles in the air.

On one occasion, Bandini searches for a job at Ford Motor Company: "Two years, and I would be director in chief of the Western Division" (TBQ 258). However, he cannot get the job because he lacks the required qualifications, so he leaves and looks around for another castle: "I walked back wishing I had an airplane, a million dollars, willing the seashells [to be] diamonds" (262). He continues to work at Soyo Fish Canneries and continues not willing to be his own self. Whether in Kierkegaardean despair or Sartrean bad faith, he says to himself,

> I was Arturo Bandini, the writer. Haven't you heard of me? You will! Don't worry. You will! My book on California fisheries. It is going to be the standard work on the subject… I'm not here permanently. I'm gathering material for a book on California fisheries. I'm Bandini [,] the writer. This isn't essential [,] this job. I may give my wages to charity: the Salvation Army… and there he lay, no doubt composing something for the ages, this great writer who made fish his specialty, who worked for a mere twenty-five cents an hour because he was so democratic that great writer. (TBQ 279–81)

Here, Bandini despairs greatly, precisely because, in Kierkegaard's words, he did not become Caesar, so he now cannot endure to be himself.

As such, Bandini engages in masochistic acts of self-harm, punishing that self that he cannot endure by inflicting pain on himself, such as when he bites his thumb to prove that he is not a coward: "I bit my thumb until I tasted blood. I felt my teeth against the pliant skin,

refusing to penetrate, and I turned my thumb slowly until the teeth cut through the skin. The pain hesitated, moved to my knuckles, up to, then to my shoulder and eyes… [I] made grunts like a mad dog" (TBQ 339). This is not the only physical self-harm that Bandini engages in: beginning in the first novel, when he was just a boy, he hurts himself, the beginning of a pattern that continues throughout the entire quartet. However, Bandini also engages in psychological self-harm when his self-esteem drops so low that he attacks himself with the harshest and lowest imprecations, again recalling Kierkegaard: "A self which in despair is determined to be [other than himself] winces at one pain or another which cannot be taken away or separated from its concrete self. Precisely upon this torment the man directs his whole passion, which at last becomes a demoniac rage" (TSUD 372). It could be said that the Bandini we see in the first two novels lives in rage, with the verb used most in the narrative being "hate": he hates life, he hates that man, he hates that smell, he hates that house, he hates that girl, he hates school, he hates his family. he hates the snow, he hates his freckled face, he hates his poor clothes, he hates his job. Bandini hates everybody, everything, everyone.

The Bandini of *Ask the Dust* is not much different. He arrives in Los Angeles a little more mature than he was in the first two novels, a 21-year-old man. The rebellious mood of *The Road to Los Angeles* seems to have softened a little, but it sometimes returns with more or less intensity. Bandini remains a great fan of Nietzsche but does not have to publicize it every two pages. He has not overcome the doubts that all the atheistic ideologies have lodged in his mind. But his voice against the church and God are less aggressive, and he sometimes even makes space to compromise:

> The despair of Finitude [which] is due to the lack of infinitude… the lack of infinitude means to be desperately narrow minded and mean spirited… the worldly view always clings fast to the difference between man and man and naturally it has no understanding of the one thing needful (for to have that is spirituality)… By seeing the multitude of

> man about it, by getting engaged in all sorts of worldly affairs, by becoming wise about how things go in this world, such a man forgets himself, forgets what his name is (in the divine understanding of it), does not dare to believe in himself. (TSU D342)

In fact, Bandini does not believe in himself, his self-esteem is very low, and his desire to escape both grandiosity and inferiority is not only paradoxical but overwhelming.

Considered through a Kierkegaardian lenses, Bandini has not yet come to terms with the balance of his own self. It is worth recalling Kierkegaard's two forms of despair and remembering that the philosopher explains that our self is defined by a balanced relation between certain aspects of our nature, a balance between finitude and infinitude, with finitude referring to our bodily flash and infinitude concerning our spiritual side, our soul. The balance between these two is of great importance to the equilibrium of a self. Beyond not willing to be his own self, Bandini desperately wants to be a kind of "Caesar." Additionally, Bandini's relationship between his bodily flesh and his spiritual side is greatly unbalanced. In the first two novels, he goes from being an altar boy from a strict Catholic background to an enraged atheist converted by books alone. For several years, Bandini does not enter a church and despises all forms of Catholic belief. Now, twisted by hormones, all Bandini thinks about are earthly things: women and money. His finite nature gains strength while his infinite nature—that is, his spiritual side—is nullified by the absence of God or religious values. I have already scratched the surface of this argument in discussing Bandini being lost in derision when he proclaims himself an atheist. In Kierkegaardian terms, he is ungrounded by the Power that had positioned him in the world.

After many attempts, Bandini has one of his short stories published by his mentor and idol in an important literary magazine. This accomplishment makes him feel that he has a chance to succeed in his career as a writer, amplifying his already strong will to be the Caesar

of writers. However, a single published short story does not make him a Caesar, and the Bandini of *Ask the Dust* continues building castles in the air, seeing himself as "a great author with that natty Italian Briar, a cane stepping out of a big black car, and she was there too, proud as hell of me, the lady in the silver fox fur. We registered and then had cocktails and then we danced a while…" (TBQ 413). Throughout almost the entire novel, Bandini cannot bear his own self: an Italian American, a poor man, one who doubts his talents, one who at one moment is dreaming megalomaniacally and then quickly indicts himself through lengthy periods of self-deprecation. This person is not able to have a sane relationship with a woman he eventually loves because he contains so much hatred and resentment inside himself.

Bandini's mind is confused and filled with doubt, the disturbance from his lack of spirituality starts to make its way through Bandini's thought, and readers follow a Bandini who continues to affirm his atheism while constantly wincing at his Catholic roots as he searches for answers that could appease his despair. He finds any excuse to enter a church: "And I went to Mass to look at [girls]. That was sacrilegious conduct, but it was better than not going to mass at all, so that when I wrote home to Colorado to my mother, I could write with truth" (TBQ 416). He recalls the time that he could not have sexual intercourse because he thought of the Blessed Virgin and the seventh commandment (i.e., thou shalt not commit adultery). Without God and not being "grounded in the Power that has posited [him]," Bandini feels adrift. Once more, even if he does not realize or assume its necessity, he enters a church:

> I will go inside, for sentimental reasons only. I had not read Lenin, but I have heard him quoted, religion is the opium of the people. Myself, I am an atheist: I have read *The Anti-Christ* and I regard it as a capital piece of work… Sir the Church must go, it's the heaven of booboise[19]… and all brummagem mountebanks… I knelt. This was habit,

[19] " Booboise" A group composed by uneducated and uncultured persons.

> this kneeling… a prayer. Sure, one prayer: [for] sentimental reasons. Almighty God, I am sorry I am now an atheist, but have you read Nietzsche? Ah, such a book! Almighty God, I will play fair in this. I will make you a proposition. Make a great writer out of me and I will return to the Church. And please Dear God, one more favor: make my mother happy. I don't care about the Old Man; he's got his wine and his health, but my mother worries so. Amen. (TBQ 425)

Although it is hard to understand what really goes on inside Bandini's mind, one may infer that he longs for spirituality: He needs the connection with his infinite side. When he thinks that his lack of sexual experience may be a cause of his failure as a writer, he tries to get a prostitute for his initiation, but he prays the whole way up the stairs to the woman's room. Arriving at the room, he realizes that despite his physical urges, he is uncapable of following through because he feels that it is a sin. Even still, he feels guilty. He leaves the prostitute and prays all way down the street: "From now on I will return to my Church. Beginning this day my life shall run like sweet water… Oh Jesus[,] kill me dead and ship my body home, kill me dead and make me die like a pagan fool with no priest to absolve me, no extreme unction" (TBQ 431). By negating the spiritual aspect of his self due to his atheistic reading and by suffocating the spiritual aspect of his self and feeding his mind only on earthly material (i.e., sensual drive and unmeasured ambition), Bandini seems doomed to perennial despair.

Bandini then starts to give increasing space to his spirituality, and he starts to pray more frequently. Furthermore, he opens his heart to uninterested love and charity. However, Bandini does not arrive at an equilibrium, and he does not become a spiritual man in Kierkegaardian terms. Nonetheless, the Bandini we encounter in *Ask the Dust* seems to be on the right path toward a more balanced "self." Therefore, readers might hope to find that he has progressed even further toward it in the final novel.

On the other hand, the Bandini we meet in *Dreams of Bunker Hill* has not evolved; quite the contrary, he seems to have undergone a reversal. This fact deserves a particular analysis, with the novel written 43 years after *Ask the Dust* by an author now 72 years old and recognized as a writer. Although that recognition came very late, with Fante already blind and a double amputee, it is also true that, compared to authors whose appraisal arrives posthumously, Fante could savor a small taste of accomplishment. Reading the preface and other notes in the first pages of the tetralogy, one knows beforehand that there are many autobiographical elements in the narrative. As such, the reader hopes that in this last novel, Bandini will at last have appeased his self. Although he did not become a Caesar, he undeniably received his due recognition.

Even so, in *Dreams from Bunker Hill*, the author does not permit Bandini to age or triumph. Instead, like the Bandini we encounter in *Ask the Dust*, he is a young man just arrived in Los Angeles from Colorado with the great ambition of becoming a writer. As in *Ask the Dust*, Bandini does not accept his own self and continues in the despair of wishing to be another. As before, his ambition is out of step with his possibilities. However, there are great differences between the two characters, even if they are both in Los Angeles and have the same name, same age, same aspirations, and same background. The Bandini of *Dreams from Bunker Hill* has not found a balanced relation between his finite bodily flesh and his infinite spiritual soul. His erotic obsession in this novel is even more accentuated and more cynically and graphically described.

Bandini has lost that romantic, insecure feeling about sex, with that sense of the sinful nature of sex outside of wedlock shown just on one occasion, in the first pages of the last novel. A prostitute at a hotel offers Bandini her services, and he accepts before once again not following through due to his feeling of guilt. He leaves the room relieved and prays: “Oh blessed Infant Jesus… Thank for saving me this day. Bless you for the surge of God’s goodness that moved me from that room of sin… Thank you.… I am your devoted servant forever

henceforth… How good I felt. How recharged with the feelings of my boyhood" (TBQ 618). Soon afterward, he is tempted again, becoming absolutely entranced by a beautiful aspiring writer that presents herself at his new job as an assistant editor. This woman incarnates all his desires: she is beautiful, very rich, lives in an incredible house, and, like him, wants to be a writer. After an awkward attempt to seduce her, he is not only rejected but also insulted. Humiliated and angry, Bandini returns to his hotel and knocks on the prostitute's door with a very direct proposal: "Let's fuck" (628). These words do not belong to the Bandini the reader is familiar with. The former Bandini used brash words to express his inner self and highbrow words to show off his intellect; never before has he used vulgar words. Here is the voice of an embittered 72-year-old man that is heard many times throughout the novel. This shift in the use of language marks a change in attitude from this frustrated old author, who wants at one and same time to appropriate of Bandini's youth for himself and to endow his protagonist with youth to make him capable of avenging his failures and to sooth his painful wounds. This meaningless sex with the prostitute rescues Bandini from the shame and sense of failure he has felt, which has been mixed with his guilt in previous episodes, especially in his failures with Camila, the woman he loved.

The following passage from Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death* may explain Bandini's refusal to age: "the youth is under illusion; he hopes for the extraordinary from life and from himself. By way of compensation one often finds in an older man illusion with respect to the recollection of his youth… both of them are lying or poetizing" (TSUD 363). The young Bandini has lived a life motivated by illusion and hope. Now, he is an embittered old man who knows that he has such a short time to savor his late arriving success. Hence, in a decision that seems to be almost revenge on himself, Fante denies his protagonist any sense of fulfillment. Another way of interpreting the author's attitude is that, out of egotism, he does not want to share his dismal portion of success with Bandini.

At the same time, by giving Bandini youth he is extending Bandini's time to try it again. Nonetheless, Kierkegaard is right when he says that "the majority of [men] do never really manage in their whole life to be more than they were in childhood and youth" (TSUD 362). This might explain the regression that the character suffers. According to Kierkegaard, once a person gets a glimpse of the importance of his spiritual aspect and stubbornly continues to live just on earthly matters, that person is living in "defiance," which describes "a man [doing] wrong, although he understands what is right… [for] the Christian doctrine of sin [this] is pure impertinence…" (556). Bandini finds himself caught by his inability to bear the burden of the guilt that "the Deity as prosecutor takes the liberty of lodging against man… But can anyone comprehend this Christian doctrine? By no means… It must be believed. Comprehension is conterminous with man's relation to the human, but faith is man's relation to the divine" (TSUD 556). Because Bandini does not get to balance these two aspects of his "split self" and because he longs for the infinite and spiritual but is strongly attached on the mundane, lacking resolutness to change, he is condemned to live perennially in despair, never arriving at the construction of a balanced and authentic self.

4.2 Bandini's Dostoevskian Paradoxical Duality

> But man is a frivolous and incongruent creaturelike a chess player, loves the process of the game, not the end of it. And who knows… perhaps the only goal on earth to which mankind is striving lies in this incessant process of attaining, in other words, in life itself, and not in the thing to be attained.
>
> Fyodor Dostoevsky in *Notes from Underground*

That epigraph could easily have been extracted from Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*. However, to consider the narrative of Bandini through a Dostoevskian lens, I use

Notes from the Underground,[20] a novella that perfectly suits the analysis. Dostoevsky's unnamed protagonist/narrator, commonly referred to as the Underground Man, shares many similarities with Bandini, especially the Bandini of *The Road to Los Angeles*, which sees Bandini, like the Underground Man, demonstrate behavior that hints at a pathological personality disorder. John Fante explicitly acknowledged Dostoevsky as a great influence on himself, as both a man and a writer, in his novel *The Brotherhood of the Grape*, considered by many critics as his best novel, Henry Molise, another of Fante's alter-egos, says,

> Then it happened. One night as the rain beat on the slanted kitchen roof a great spirit slipped forever in my life. I held his book in my hands and trembled as he spoke to me of man and the world, of love and wisdom, pain and guilt… His name was Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky… [he] changed me. The hatred for my father melted. I loved my father, poor, suffering, haunted wretched… he turned me inside out. I wanted to write. (72)

No less important in my choosing this particular work from Dostoevsky is the authoritative appreciation of Kaufmann, who declared that "Part One of *Notes from the Underground* is the best overture for existentialism ever written. With inimitable vigor and finesse the major themes are stated here that we can recognize them when reading all the other so-called existentialists from Kierkegaard to Camus" (14). As a novella that covers so much territory, *Notes from the Underground* is a dense, ambiguous, and tricky book, a book of incompleteness, doubt, and constant oscillations. The novella discusses and critiques, from the point of view of a split self, the daily striving of living, capturing a self that is divided between real life and fantasy, between a longing for affection and love and the fear of failing to even attempt to live

[20] There have been many translations of the novel over the years. without the article "the." The most largely used, which is translated by Constance Garnet, and many others omits the article. However, the one I have used keeps the article.

those sentiments. This means that the Underground Man admits that some positive feelings "had been swarming in me all my life and craving some outlet from me, but I… purposely would not let them come out" (NFU 5). Out of his admitted cowardice, he chooses to not give a chance to this "opposite element," instead presenting an always-contradictory psychological and philosophical existential dialogue. Although many critics describe it as a monologue, I agree with Bakhtin's reading of the Underground Man's lengthy confession as a dialogue,[21] a peculiar dialogue between the author of the notes and his imagined audience that anticipates the thoughts and feelings of this audience and responds to them accordingly.

Being the only (diversified and contradictory) voice in the book, the reader cannot count on any information from other than the narrator. In his long and somewhat repetitive considerations, he presents constant counter arguments, consistently undermining what he has just said, making clear that the Underground Man does not want to facilitate the elucidation of his existential riddle. Alternatively, we may consider that he is incapable of ordering his ideas, making his whole discourse a riddle even to himself. Increasing the reader's bewilderment, all the sudden changes in his mind happen without any warning or apparent reason other than the narrator's own caprice. Alternatively, because the narrative is constituted by contradictions, this may simply reflect the inability of the narrator's split mind to make any choice. In Sartrean terms, he has chosen not to choose. Instead, the Underground Man chooses what he himself calls "inertia." This leaves the reader completely in the hands of an elusive character, having to work to identify the possible meanings that the Underground Man scatters throughout the text. Thus, circulating among the many juxtaposed layers of ideological, philosophical, and psychological considerations, the reader arrives at the main point of the narrative, which is apparently to assure readers that the absolute freedom of choice represents the most treasured

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[21] Notably, the work was originally announced by Dostoevsky in *Epoch* under the title "A Confession."

attribute of humans, even if that choice is to prove unreasonable, harmful, and totally not advantageous: "What man wants is simply INDEPENDENT[22] choice, whatever that independence may cost and wherever it may lead. And choice, of course, the devil only knows what choice" (NFU 15). Man would do whatever it takes to have his freedom because "the whole work of man really seems to consist in nothing but proving to himself every minute that he is a man and not a piano-key" (48). The Underground Man emphatically repeats this argument several other times, not only defending the importance of free choice even when this choice will clearly cause harm but also recounting moments when he made choices that were absolutely irrational and disadvantageous to him.

This captures the book's ideological message in favor of free will and the importance of a person's choice in the construction of their own self, which represents a response to the feelings awakened in Russia by Nikolay Chernyshevsky's deterministic and nihilistic 1863 novel, *What Is to Be Done?* Chernyshevsky was a Russian intellectual who, deluded with religion, became the leader of Russian nihilism. Dostoevsky's novella consists of two parts: In Part One, out of boredom and frustration at not finding a meaning for his existence, the Underground Man begins to write about his "seemingly" incongruent impressions and thoughts about his actual life. Now 40 years old, for fifteen years, he has isolated himself from the external world and has given up any social relationships. In Part Two, he recounts various episodes from his past that may or may not explicate his miserable physical and psychological condition. The process of writing his confession leads him into an oscillation that swings from narcissistically considering himself intellectually superior to others, despising people around him for not recognizing his superior qualities, and, at times, loathing himself as an abject liar who deserves to live in the underground with the insects and mice. The Underground Man's

[22] Emphasis in the original.

instability and the uncertain validity of his incongruent statements very much resemble those same characteristics in Bandini.

Indeed, as mentioned, Bandini and the Underground Man share many aspects: they both love to entertain themselves with existential inquiries, they both assume that they are intellectually above the common people, producing a lofty feeling of self-entitlement, and they have no problem candidly affirming it. In one of his convoluted ruminations, the Underground Man says, "I have always considered myself cleverer than any of the people surrounding me" (NFU 12). Bandini is not a modest type either. For example, although he considers his sister a very intelligent person—indeed, she outperforms him in some subjects—he does not hesitate to suggest that although "she was smarter than my mother… I didn't think she could ever approach my mind for sheer brilliancy" (TBQ 232).

Nonetheless, these same men would readily deprecate themselves. Consider this example of the Underground Man's low opinion of himself: "My jests, gentleman, are of course in bad taste, jerky, involved, lacking self-confidence. But of course [,] that is because I do not respect myself" (NFU 23). In another passage, he writes, "I am the nastiest, stupidest, absurdist[,] and most envious of all the worms on earth" (190). Elsewhere, he adds, "But it was not only that I fancied it, it really was so. I was a coward and a slave" (67). In the same way that he positions himself above others, he is aware of his most despicable defects. Isolated in what he calls "his corner," the Underground Man is a 40-year-old who has chosen isolation and inertia. He wishes for nothing more from life, his recollections the product of unsuccessful episodes that happened when he was a young man of 25 and when he still had contact with the real world. Now, as he writes his confessions, he has retired from his job to bury himself in the underground of his ruminations, expressing his only desire as follows: "I wanted 'peace,' to be left alone in my underground world. Real life oppressed me with its novelty so much that I

could hardly breath" (NFU 196). Because reality becomes unbearable for him, he chooses a fantasy world made of books, with reading becoming his sole activity.

In contrast, the Bandini of *The Road to Los Angeles* is a 17-year-old who has lofty aims for his life. He wants to be a writer and, like the Underground Man, who once considered himself a dreamer, Bandini lives life in a constant dream-like state, imagining himself as a Nobel-prize-winning writer. Interestingly, in this "dreaming" passage, he shows a great deal of self-confidence: "I could see them, my biographers… Arturo Bandini, the novelist… terrific… remarkable prose. Nothing like it since Joyce" (TBQ 539). When a reporter in his dreams asks, "Mr. Bandini, how did you come to write this book which won you the Nobel Prize?", he answers, "The book is based on a true experience… every word [of] that book is true. I lived that book, I experienced it" (426). However, in another moment, Bandini doubts his own talent: "your talent is dubious, your talent is pitiful, you haven't any talent, and stop lying to yourself… you are a coward [,] Bandini, a traitor to your soul, a feeble liar" (422–23). When Bandini says that his Nobel-prize-winning book is based on his life, it is interesting to note that in *Notes from the Underground*, the narrator asks his imagined audience, "But what can a decent man speak of with most pleasure?… 'Of himself' is the answer" (NFU 7). Indeed, he proceeds to talk about himself as Bandini does in Fante's tetralogy. This is wholly expected of narcissists, with both characters split-personality narcissists who demonstrate the paradoxical impulse toward the grandiose and the vulnerable. The feelings of both characters, their beliefs, and their wills are remarkably confused. In another passage, Bandini captures his paradoxical feeling in a single sentence: "Sometimes such a great quiet joy came to me that I would turn out my lights and cry, and a strange desire to die would come to me" (TBQ 540). This is all made worse by their acute self-awareness, which increases their suffering. The Underground Man denies reality because he cannot bear it, and he is aware of it: "I swear, gentlemen, that to be too conscious is an illness… for man's everyday needs, it would have been quite enough to

have the ordinary human consciousness, that is, half or a quarter of the amount which falls to the lot of a cultivated man of our unhappy nineteenth century…" (NFU 8). Although a teenager in the twentieth century, Bandini also suffers from his awareness of his condition, which is often reflected in his consideration of the possibility that he is going mad, an insight partially based on his awareness that Nietzsche, his idol, had lost his mind before he died. Notably, Bandini felt such a kinship with the philosopher that sometimes he entertained the idea of being genuinely crazy. In a passage in which he is very frustrated at failing to meet the basics requisites for achieving *übermensch* status, he hallucinates his own tragic death:

> Always he will slink through life… When it ends, they will find him, as yet in that land of white dreams, groping in the fog of himself.
>
> A tragedy sir, A great tragedy. A boneless fluid existence sir. And the body, sir. We found it down by the waterfront. Yes, sir. A bullet through the heart, sir. Yes, a suicide, sir. And what shall we do with his body, sir? For Science—a very good idea, sir. The Rockefeller Institute, no less… A great lover of Science he was, sir. (TBQ 405)

Even in the tragic hour of his imagined death, Bandini's grandiose narcissism demands that his body be donated for a higher purpose to an important scientific institute.

Another feature that these two characters share and which still relates to not accepting or being capable of bearing the reality of being themselves is their affinity for reading. Both characters are very poor, which gives them two major reasons to read: the possibility of amplifying their capacity to dream and imagine adventures that they could not have in real life and to distinguish themselves from their peers. I cannot say friends, because both men, since childhood, always "made friends [with] no one and positively avoid[ed] talking" (NFU 65). Their poverty was always a barrier of shame that their proud mind loathed, pushing them toward a solitary existence. As such, intellectual superiority became their weapon. The

Underground Man openly confesses this. Meanwhile, for Bandini, this feature is confirmed by the many times that he is at the public library and by the many passages that reinforce the assumption that Bandini was a compulsive reader who has lost himself in his reading. Meanwhile, the Underground Man says, "To escape from their derision I purposely began to make all the progress I could with my studies and forced my way to the very top. This impressed them moreover; they all began by degrees to grasp that I had already read books none of them could read and understand things (not forming part of our scholar curriculum) of which they had not even heard" (NFU 105). This expedient worked well to impress The Underground Man's peers and cease the constant mockery he suffered. Nevertheless, the hostility remained, especially because the teachers started to notice the intelligence of the poor boy. As for Bandini, he had read the classics, including some poetry. At seventeen, his taste did not really suit his age: In the period of life during which he was forming his own self, Bandini was intoxicated with the dense and difficult reading of Schopenhauer, Spengler, Voltaire, and Nietzsche. Not having the maturity to understand the content of his heavy reading, he makes a monster of himself, with one particular episode directly capturing his misreading of Nietzsche. He performs a "crab slaughter" that foreshadows the mass murders committed by the Nazis in the process of genocide, events that were also substantially inspired by misreading Nietzsche. Hitler and his underlings misinterpret the philosopher's notion of the will to power and the idea of the *übermensch* in the same way that Bandini does with much more devastating consequences. However, the monster that Bandini becomes is simply a result of his fragmentary interpretations. In the process of creating his own self, his incomplete understanding of what he reads makes Bandini a sort of literary Frankenstein: the inconsequent creator of fragmentary statements and at the same time the awkward creature.

The next chapter considers the "crab slaughter" scene in more depth. However, here it is worth considering how the consequent alienation of Bandini and of the Underground Man is

completely reflected in their language. As Heidegger wrote, "thought and language are strictly inseparable… language speaks and it is language as *logos* that forms and disclose meaning…[of] man's subjectivity" (qtd. in Williams 9). Indeed, for both characters, their being, their thought, and their subjectivity are formed mostly by their reading, meaning that they are only capable of talking in a bookish manner. In one of the recollections of the Underground Man, he delivers an affectionate sermon to Liza, a novice prostitute that he encounters in a brothel. Astonished by his language, she asks, "Why, you… speak somehow like a book?" (NFU 152). He vehemently and even offendedly negates this notion. However, as time passes, he admits to himself, "I knew I was speaking stiffly, even bookishly, in fact I could not speak except 'like a book.' But that did not trouble me: I knew, I felt that I should be understood and that this very bookishness might be an assistance" (160). After this quixotic admission, a new encounter with Liza in his apartment—possible only because he had given her his address—breaks him down completely. The Underground Man could not bear to be seen by Liza in his real poverty and positioned in his real-life frame. Furthermore, he could not dare to dream of a life with Liza, which makes him behave awfully with her and with himself. After realizing that he had completely lost Liza, he affirms in the last lines of the novella, "Why, we have come almost to looking upon real life as an effort, almost as hard work, and we are all privately agreed that it is better in books" (201–03).

Even as a boy, Bandini likes to show off his vocabulary, something that is generally considered a display of vanity that is normally conceded to a boy who likes literature. However, in *The Road to Los Angeles*, that same boy appears genuinely lost. A strangeness in his communication signals an unbalanced self. If we consider that language is the "house of Being [and] in its accommodation dwells the human" (qtd. in Raffoul 237), as affirmed by Heidegger in his "Letter on Humanism," Bandini is homeless or dwells in the house of strangers. He talks bookishly to everyone: to his mother, his sister, his uncle, to his boss, to the barman, and even

to the people he encounters in the street. He has completely lost his own self and his own identity to become nothing more than a deranged mind plunged out of the world of books. To illustrate Bandini's condition, consider the following examples of the absurd and improper language he has adopted. To a grocery-store owner who fires him, he replies, "Listen… I'm tickled to be leaving. I'm sick of your drooling, elephantine hypocrisy. I've been wanting to abandon this preposterous job for a week. So go straight to hell, you Dago fraud" (TBQ 221). In reference to a steak he has just eaten, he says to the barman, "Jim this pabulum is antediluvian… It's archaic, primeval, paleoanthropic, and antic. In short, it is senile and aged" (TBQ 223). Living his anti-Christ phase with Nietzschean fervor, he then shocks his pious mother who threatens him with a broom: "vent your intolerance… persecute me! Put me on the rack! Express your Christianity! Let the Church Militant display its bloody soul! Gibbet me! Stick hot pokers in my eyes. Burn me at the stake, you Christian dogs!" (TBQ 234). The reader may infer that, like the Underground Man, Bandini is prone to exaggeration. His linguistic masterpiece is a letter that he leaves on the table to his mother before escaping to Los Angeles after a family altercation,

> Dear Woman Who Gave Me Life:
>
> The callous vexations and perturbations of this night have subsequently resolved themselves to a state which precipitates me, Arturo Bandini, into a Brobdingnagian and gargantuan decision. I inform you of this in no uncertain terms. Ergo, I now leave you and your ever-charming daughter (my beloved sister Mona) and seek the fabulous usufructs of my incipient career in profound solitude. Which is to say, tonight I depart for the metropole to the east -- our own Los Angeles, the city of the Angels. I entrust you to the benign generosity of your brother, Frank Scarpi, who is, as the phrase has it, a good family man (sic!). I am penniless but I urge you in no uncertain terms to cease your cerebral anxiety about my destiny, for truly it lies in the palm of the immortal

> gods. I have made the lamentable discovery over a period of years that living with you and Mona is deleterious to the high and magnanimous purpose of Art, and I repeat to you in no uncertain terms that I am an artist, a creator beyond question. And, per se, the fumbling fulminations of cerebration and intellect find little fruition in the debauched, distorted hegemony that we poor mortals, for lack of a better and more concise terminology, call home. In no uncertain terms I give you my love and blessing, and I swear to my sincerity, when I say in no uncertain terms that I not only forgive you for what has ruefully transpired this night, but for all other nights. Ergo, I assume in no uncertain terms that you will reciprocate in kindred fashion. May I say in conclusion that I have much to thank you for, O woman who breathed the breath of life into my brain of destiny? Aye, it is, it is.
>
> Signed.
>
> Arturo Gabriel Bandini

In this letter, Bandini is emulating Nietzsche, his surrogate god, who used to leave his mother and sister to isolate himself in Switzerland, France, and Italy to read and write and from there write them letters telling about his immense (deliriant) success and importance. Furthermore, Bandini must leave the environment that he feels is deleterious to him to develop his will to power and become the *übermensch* of his dreams. Beyond that, it is apparent that he is trying to mimic the high language of his hero.

There remain many other similarities between the two characters under analysis here. Both Bandini and the Underground Man draw pleasure from self-pain and sometimes consciously and enjoyably make others suffer: “I was rude and take pleasure in being so” (NFU 3); “[I] watched the bird suffer with cold satisfaction” (TBQ 46). Sometimes, it is difficult to understand whether they are unconsciously or purposely undermining their chances at

succeeding in being accepted and loved. In numerous passages of both books, it is apparent that they even enjoy and take pride in being a victim or anti- hero who exhibits borderline behavior that makes people question their behavior or doubt their sanity. Both are incapable of establishing a real romantic relationship, with the Underground Man seemingly having loved Liza and Bandini demonstrating that he loves Camila. However, their sadomasochism, their fear of the real, hinders both from experiencing a genuine loving relationship. For the sake of brevity, I shall discuss here only one more episode in the life of each character. These episodes are similar in terms of the goal of the character and the failed outcome. Both Bandini and the Underground Man are very poor and envious of the peers who have achieved material success. Furthermore, they are aware of the negative feelings that are worsened by their colossal pride. They hate being poor but, on getting a chance to show themselves in a better light, they allow old wounds to undermine those prospects. They present themselves to this opportunity in a manner that seems an act of willful self-sabotage, whether out of masochism or the fear of failure.

Although the Underground Man tries to avoid associating any real importance with material success, he betrays himself when, in uncontrollable outbursts, he confesses his superficiality: "It is clear to me now that owing to my unbounded vanity and to the high standard I set to myself, I often looked at myself with furious discontent, which verged on loathing, and so inwardly attributed the same feeling to everyone" (NFU 65–66). As for Liza who wants to emotionally support him, he says, "I told you that I was not ashamed of my poverty; so you may as well know that I am ashamed of it; I am more ashamed of it than anything, more afraid of it than of being found out if I were a thief, because I am vain" (190). Bandini and his brothers were the only non-paying students at the Catholic school he attended, "a distinction of great torment to [him] this feeling that others pay[ed] and he did not… He hated August [his brother] for it, for making an issue of their poverty, for his willingness to

remind the nuns that they were poor people… it was awful, it was hateful, it made him and his brothers different from the others" (TBQ 39–40). The shame of their poverty represents a wound that cannot heal. Both characters despise the others but also maintain a desperate need to be accepted, with their social awkwardness only highlighting their sense of inferiority and non-belonging.

Later, the Underground Man recalls something that had happened to him before he closed himself off in the underground of his soul. On one occasion, a dinner was offered by three of his former classmates as a farewell to a fourth, who has been promoted and transferred to another province. The Underground Man accidentally learnt about the dinner plan. As he was, naturally, not invited, he showed himself to be profoundly offended and demanded that he be invited. The three friends were not really convinced but the embarrassment made them accept having him at the dinner. Although the Underground Man "despise[d] them all," he was very anxious and excited about the event, borrowing money from his boss to pay for his part. He "minutely examined [his] clothes and thought that everything looked old, worn and threadbare… The worst of it was that on the knee of [his] trousers was a big yellow stain. [He] had a foreboding that that stain would deprive [him] of nine-tenths of [his] personal dignity" (NFU 107). At five o'clock, he presented himself punctually at the restaurant, where he waited for one agonizing hour before finally seeing his acquaintances arriving. They had changed the time and had not told him, utterly offending him. The entire dinner was a disaster, he drank too much, talked inappropriately, and was uncapable of interacting with the others, who he could not relate to. Nonetheless, the Underground Man thought to himself, "the brutes imagine they are doing me an honor in letting me sit down with them. They don't understand that it's an honor to them… No one paid any attention to me, and I sat crushed and humiliated. Good Heavens, these are not the people for me" (NFU 117). Even if they ignored him and his caustic comments, the stubborn Underground Man remained there for three hours after the dinner was

over, passing before them walking to and fro while they enjoyed themselves on the couches. Looking around and soaked in sweat, he thought, “No one could have gone out of his way to degrade himself more shamelessly, and I fully realized it… I walk[ed] up and down to please myself and no one [could] prevent me” (123–24). The whole time, he was fully aware of his pathetic conduct, but he wanted to prove that he was a man and not a piano key, meaning that it did not matter if he chose something that proved disadvantageous, a choice that would bring him suffering, because, as he had previously affirmed, a man sometimes consciously leaves behind a safe path to “rush headlong” into dangers and uncertainty out of preference for the road not taken: “Perhaps suffering is just as great a benefit to him as well-being? Man is sometimes extraordinarily, passionately, in love with suffering” (54). This is because humans are stupid and do not want to choose by rule or by reason, preferring to choose by passion or even by their perverted and contorted inclinations their “compound” and split personality.

Similarly, as mentioned, Bandini always felt humiliated by the poverty of his family, and he hated always being dressed in the rags that he considered the ultimate declaration of poverty and which meant that Bandini was never invited to the parties of his classmates. As at a certain point in his life, Bandini is living and working in Los Angeles, his photograph has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* alongside a story about “Arturo Bandini [,] an ambitious hard-working kid from Colorado [,] who has crashed through the difficult magazine world with the sale of his first story to *The American Phoenix,* edited, of course, by the most renowned personage in American literature, none other than Heinrich Muller” (TBQ 605).This little “notoriety” gets him a job as an assistant editor, which does not go well, but soon enough, Bandini finds work in Hollywood as a screenwriter. After this spark of success and fame, Bandini screws everything up, finding himself once again unemployed. As such, because he still has some money left and a fine wardrobe to show off, he goes back to his hometown, thinking that he might be better received and will have the chance to soothe the pain of being

bullied and humiliated. That is, Bandini thinks that maybe he will get a chance to overcome the terrible feeling of being an outcast. When he arrives in Boulder, he is interviewed for a job at a local newspaper and is invited to a party at the house of Agnes Lawson, who Bandini remembers with resentment. He still thinks of her as "a haughty, spoiled girl with wealth[y] parents, and when she invited me… my first impulse was to refuse… the same snobbish reserve… she said '[I] want to see you now that you're famous'… The invitation thrilled my mother … 'Isn't it nice? Going into these lovely houses! I'm so proud of you'" (740). Deep inside, Bandini knows it is not a good choice to go, knowing that he would never be one of them. Nonetheless, he decides to go, just to feel like the same outsider, no matter how fancy his clothes are. Like the Underground Man, Bandini has bad memories of this crowd and those feelings are affirmed: "I remembered many summers when Agnes threw parties that always excluded me… they looked at me without expression, as if to deny me even the slightest hint of warm reunion" (743). The party is a nightmare, with people simply curious about Hollywood life and hoping for some juicy gossip about celebrities. Bandini starts to boast, claiming that he had been friends with all the Hollywood stars, that he was making big money and living a lavish life. Between one lie and the next, he drank substantially, ultimately behaving shamefully and finally falling on the floor, with an old "friend" lifting him to his feet. Instead of being grateful, Bandini feels utterly humiliated and hits the guy in the jaw. The guy responds by punching Bandini in the nose. Bandini is taken out of the party with a bleeding nose and a still more wounded soul.

Like the Underground Man, Bandini has made his choices. If he embraces the Nietzschean idea of "*amor fati*," he concludes that he could not have avoided any of what happened in his life, instead having to accept his fate with resignation. Meanwhile, if he follows the example of the Underground Man, he will voluntarily close himself off from every possibility that life can offer him. Alternatively, if he remembers all his reading of Dostoevsky,

he will know that humans are enormously complex beings that are capable of evil and good, of loathing and love, of revenge and forgiveness.

The Bandini of *Ask the Dust,* who chooses a road of faith that might have enabled him to achieve a balanced construction of an authentic self disappears in the next novel. In *Dreams from Bunker Hill*, written by an old, blind, and very sick John Fante, Bandini is more cynical and appears to have fallen deeper into his underground consciousness. The conclusion that can be drawn from this last novel is that out of fear of his overwhelming freedom, Bandini feels paralyzed, incapable of transcending his past. As such, he returns to Los Angeles to start all over again, he is alone in his miserable hotel room, pleading with Knut Hamsun for the inspiration to write. What is clear in the works of both Dostoevsky and Fante is that both their protagonists, despite their desperate lives and conflicting minds, possess an acute self-awareness, are split in their will, and live outside of reality. Nonetheless, they value their individual freedom above all else, wanting nothing more than being free to choose, even if that means choosing pain, delusion, and suffering over happiness.

4.3 Bandini's Nietzschean Anti-Christian Superman

> I will tell the true story of Christianity—Even the word "Christianity" is a misunderstanding—there was really one Christian, and he died on the cross. The "evangel" died on the cross. What was called "evangel" after that was the opposite of what *he* had lived.
>
> Nietzsche in *The Anti-Christ*

Kaufmann asserts that we can only fit Nietzsche in the existentialist movement by considering "extreme states of mind." Bandini is a case in point. Not only does he engage himself in various situations that can be considered "extreme states of mind" but after Bandini himself makes various explicit references and allusions to Nietzsche, making an elaboration on the philosopher mandatory. According to Rene Girard, Bandini's admiration for Nietzsche was

a "mimetic desire," a desire to imitate a model. Notably, his real-world idol, J.C. Hackmuth, who publishes Bandini's first short story in the most important literary magazine of the times (*The American Mercury)*, is based on H.L. Mencken, the author of the first study on Nietzsche's philosophy written in the English language. John Fante maintained with Mencken a personal and expansive correspondence, as discussed already. A book with the letters exchanged between the two men over a period of thirty was published in 1989. I assume that it was through Mencken that "Bandini" first came to know Nietzsche. Beyond his identification with the philosopher, Bandini's desire to imitate Nietzsche increased greatly. In fact, in one of Fante's letters to Mencken, dated March 1938, Fante talks about his reading on Nietzsche suggesting that he found it somehow obscure and asking Mencken for some clarification on a cryptic passage of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* about the *übermensch.* Mencken politely responded,

> I agree with you thoroughly that there is a great deal of bosh in Nietzsche. Worse, the bosh occurs in the midst of his very best stuff. Thus, there is no way to read him without swallowing the whole together… There is enough first-rate stuff… to justify the labor. (FM 120)

Notably, Mencken's book on Nietzsche's philosophy was intended for the lay public. In 1913, for the preface to the third edition of *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, he wrote,

> When this attempt to summarize and interpret the principal ideas of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was first published, in the early part of 1908, several of his most important books were yet to be translated into English and the existing commentaries were either fragmentary and confusing or frankly addressed to the specialist in philosophy. It was an effort to make Nietzsche comprehensible to the general reader.… It soon appeared that a considerable public had awaited that effort, for the first edition was quickly exhausted and there was an immediate demand for a special edition in England…That

> Nietzsche has been making progress of late goes without saying. No reader of current literature, nor even of current periodicals, can have failed to notice the increasing pressure of his ideas. (5)

Clearly, Bandini, as a lover of literature and a disciple of Mencken, had to become acquainted with the polemical philosopher, and Nietzsche's philosophy could not have found a better soil and season to flourish than in Bandini's fertile and receptive mind.

From Nietzsche's philosophy, there are three concepts that Bandini embraces with all his strength. The first is the anti-Christian crusade: Bandini will try to combat the Christian faith, at least inside his family and inside himself. The second and third are very much related: the will to power and the *übermensch*. Bandini first exercises the will to power against a colony of crabs. As for the *übermensch* ideal he wants so desperately to achieve, Bandini dreams much more than he acts, and when he does act, it is a pathetic action.

In the first novel of the tetralogy, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, the reader can already notice the seeds of doubt sprouting in the twelve-year-old Bandini's restless mind. In this first novel, there are several passages in which Bandini expresses his ambivalent feelings toward the Catholic church and questions its dogmas. Bandini hates being an altar boy, he despises his brother who wants to be a priest, and his mother's bigotry disgusts him. However, it is in the second novel of the tetralogy, *The Road to Los Angeles*, that Bandini explicitly invokes Nietzsche's book. He also carries a copy of George Bernard Shaw's play, *Man and Superman,* a satirical and political play (Shaw 279–354). In *The Road to Los Angeles*, Bandini's situation, due to his father's death, is the same if not worse. In the period just after the Great Depression, it was very difficult for anybody to find a job, let alone Catholic Italian immigrants. Now, as the only man in the family, Bandini has to work to provide for himself, his mother, and his

sister. Every job Bandini manages to find is underpaid, and he considers the tasks required of him inferior to his capacities.

With his extended philosophical reading, his breaking with religion, his enlightened intellect, and his will to become one of Nietzsche's *übermensch*, Bandini could not waste time and talent with such lowly jobs. He considered himself worthy of a brilliant and successful career as a writer, of becoming the next Shakespeare. In the opening chapter of *The Road to Los Angeles*, Bandini, faithful to Nietzsche's creed, begins his battle against Christianity. He furiously criticizes his sister: "My own sister reduced to the superstition of prayer! My own flesh and blood. A nun, a god-lover! What a barbarism!" (TBQ 227). Still an immature adolescent, in his need to confirm himself as intellectually superior and to imitate the words of Nietzsche, he imparts philosophical concepts, makes misplaced comments, as for instance, "no use talking to yokels, clodhoppers, and imbeciles. The intelligent man makes certain reservations as to choose of his listeners" (227), to which his mother replies, "you're just a boy who reads too many books" (227). To end the discussion, Bandini reproaches his mother because she continues to wear her wedding ring. The words are clearly not his own, but he cannot prevent himself from using them. "Are you aware of the fact… that a wedding ring is not only vulgarly phallic but also the vestigial remains of a primitive savagery anomalous to this age of so-called enlightenment and intelligence?" (227) His use of this peculiar language is the result of the split in his self: Bandini incarnates the authors he reads, especially Nietzsche.

The first chapters of *The Road to Los Angeles* parade Bandini's philosophical pearls and preaching tone: "I reject my hypothesis of God! Down with the decadence of a fraudulent Christianity" (TBQ 234). These words somehow resemble Nietzsche's own, which Bandini has read in *The Anti-Christ*: "I condemn Christianity, I indict the Christian church on the most terrible charges… The Christian church has not left anything untouched by its corruption" (AC §62). Bandini cannot reconcile the image of the benevolent God received in his education at

Jesuit schools with the misery he is condemned to live and all the embarrassing situations his pride must endure. In another discussion with his family, he mocks his mother for always carrying the rosary and maintaining faith in divine providence above all else. To totally scandalize her, he utters a blasphemous prayer: "Oh Lord Holy Jehovah, behold your sanctimonious and worshipful Mona at your feet, drooling idiotic persiflage… Oh Holy Ghost, Oh holy inflated triple ego, get us out of the Depression. Elect Roosevelt. Keeps us in good standard. Take France off, but for Christ's sake keeps us on!" (TBQ 234). This passage captures Nietzsche's influence, recalling the following from *The Anti-Christ*: "Why bother with a god who does not know about anger, revenge, envy, scorn, cunning, violence? Who might not even know the exquisite *ardeurs* of victory and destruction?… What would be the point of having him for a god?" (AC §16). Bandini desired a god of revenge and, above all else, of victory.

One very hot day, Bandini, now a seventeen-year-old man, decides that he will start his writing career at that very moment. He starts what he calls, "A Moral and Philosophical Dissertation on Man and Woman." In Zarathustra's tone, he writes sentences about power, strength, weakness, and evil: "Be strong my brothers, for I say unless you be strong the forces of evil shall get ye… All strength is a form of power. All lack of strength is a form of evil… avoid weakness that ye might become strong…Oh Zarathustra endow thy men with plenty of strength!" (TBQ 242). Here, he rearticulates aphorism 2 of Nietzsche's *The Anti-Christ*: "What is good?—everything that enhances people's feelings of power, will to power, power itself. What is bad?—Everything stemming from weakness. What is happiness?—The feeling that power is growing… Not contentedness, but more power, not peace, but war…The weak and the failures should perish…" (AC §2). This aphorism contains nearly everything Bandini needs to act. Frustrated with his attempt at writing, he puts his notebook away and decides to cross to the other side of the sea channel. Because it is a very hot afternoon, Bandini decides to crawl

under the bridge. Because this episode loses its impact when paraphrased, it is worth including it here in full in Bandini's own words:

> I crawled under the bridge [,] and I had a feeling I was the only one who had ever done it. The small harbor waves lapped at the rocks and left little pools of green water here and there. Some of the rocks were draped in moss, and others had pretty spots of bird dun. The ponderous odor of the sea came up. Under the girders it was so cold and so dark I couldn't see much. From above I heard the traffic pounding, horns honking, men yelling, and big trucks battering the timber crosspieces. It was such a terrible din that it hammered my ears and when I yelled my voice went out a few feet and rushed back as if fastened to a rubber band… It was a strange place. For a while I was scared. Farther on there was a great stone, bigger than the rest, its Crest ringed with the white dung of gulls. It was the king of all those stones which a crown of white. I started for it.
>
> All of a sudden [,] everything at my feet began to move. It was the quick slimy moving of things that crawled. I caught my breath, hang on, and try to fix my gaze. They were crabs. The stones were alive and swarming with them. I was so scared I couldn't move and the noise from above was nothing compared to the thunder of my heart.
>
> I leaned against a stone and put my face in my hands until I wasn't afraid.… [It was] like a world under the earth, a grey, solitary place. For the first time I got a good look at the things living down there…. [The crabs were] crawling over one another, pulling one another into the lapping blackness as they fought for positions on the stones…
>
> There was a nest of even smaller crabs at my feet, each the size of a dollar… One of them grabbed my pants cuff. I pulled him off and held him while he clawed

helplessly and tried to bite me. I had him though, and he was helpless. I pulled back my arm and threw him against a stone. He crackled, smashed to death, is stuck for a moment upon the stone, then falling with blood and water exuding. I picked up the smashed shell and tasted the yellow fluid coming from it, which was salty as sea water[,] and I didn't like it. I drew him out to deep water. He floated until a Jack smelt swam… examined him, and then began to bite him viciously and finally dragged him out of sight… My hands were bloody and sticky [,] and the smell of the sea was on them. All at once I felt a swelling in me to kill these crabs, every one of them.

The small ones didn't interest me, it was the big ones I wanted to kill and kill. The big fellows were strong and ferocious with powerful incisors. They were worthy adversaries for the great Bandini, the conquering Arturo. I looked around… On the bank against the concrete there was a pile of stones. I rolled up my sleeves and started drawing them at the largest crab I could see… I threw about twenty times before I got him. It was a triumph. The stone crushed his back with the sound of a breaking soda cracker. It went clear through him, pinning him to the stone… I watched him disappear and shook my fist at him, waving angry farewells as he floated to the bottom. Goodbye, goodbye! We will doubtless meet again in another world; you will not forget me, Crab. You will Remember Me forever and forever as your conqueror!

Killing them with stones was too tough. The stones were so sharp they cut my fingers… Then I climbed it on to the bridge and walk it down straight to a ship chandler's shop… where they sold guns and ammunition.

I told…[the] clerk I wanted to buy an air gun. He showed me a high-powered one [,] and I laid the money down and bought it without question. I spent the rest of the

ten [dollars] on ammunition—BB shot. I was anxious to get back to the battlefield so [I] left the shop as fast as I could but not running.…

I shot crabs all that afternoon, until my shoulder hurts behind the gun and my eyes ached behind the gunsight. I was dictator Bandini, Ironman of Crabland. This was another blood purge for the good of the fatherland. They had tried to unset me, those damned crabs, they had had the guts to try to foment a revolution, and I was getting revenge.… These God Damned crabs had actually questioned the might of Übermensch Bandini! What had got into them to be so stupidly presumptuous? Well, they were going to get a lesson they would never forget. This was going to be the last revolution they'd ever attempt, by Christ. I gnashed my teeth when I thought of it -- a nation of revolting crabs. What guts*! God, I was mad.*

…I killed over five hundred and wounded twice as many…. The siege was on. They swarmed toward me. Others came out of the sea, still others from behind rocks, moving in vast numbers across the plain of stones toward death who sat on a high rock out of their reach.

I gathered some of the wounded into a pool and had our military conference and decided to court martial them… There was one crab, bright colored and full of life who remind me of a woman: doubtless a princess among the renegades, a brave crabess seriously injured, one of her legs shot away, an arm dangling pitifully. It broke my heart. I had another conference and decided that, due to the extreme urgency of the situation, there must not be any sexual discrimination. Even the princess had to die [;] it was unpleasant [,] but it had to be done… She died instantly, gloriously, a flaming mass of shell and yellowed blood…

> The slaughter finally stopped when my head ached from eye strain. Before leaving I took another last look around. The miniature cliffs were smeared with blood. It was a triumph a very great victory for me. I went among the dead and spoke to them consolingly, for even though they were my enemies I was for all that a man of nobility and I respected them and admired them for the valiant struggle they had offered... You were brave in fighting and braver in death and [Führer] Bandini has not forgotten. He overtly praises, even in death. To others I said goodbye, thou cowards. I spit on thee in disgust. Thy cowardice is repugnant to the [Führer]. He hateth cowards as he hateth the plague. He will not be reconciled. May the tides of the sea wash thy cowardly crime from the earth, thou knave. (TBQ 242–248)

This episode illustrates how ideas, especially if not expressed clearly, may be misinterpreted and how this can affect the construction of a self that is not mature or well-structured. This self is split and, in Heideggerian terms, unauthentic because it incorporates and performs the ideas of another self. Bandini's self is badly constructed because he does not accept the circumstances of his thrownness. His pre-given self, which Heidegger calls Dasein in its facticity, clashes with the new *übermensch* he wants to build based on his reading of Nietzschean.

There are certain aspects of Bandini's pre-given situation that, more than others, he is not able to come to terms with. One is the fact of being born very poor, which produces a sense of inferiority. Accordingly, in Nietzsche's *übermensch*, he finds an ideal to pursue and to fight for. When Bandini is on the line of candidates for a job at the Ford Company, he sees a man smiling at him and thinks, "no doubt he saw through my disguise and recognized a person of depth and importance, one who stood out from the herd" (TBQ 261). After being rejected for the job, he goes on hallucinating, "No, there is no work for Arturo Bandini. I left feeling better, glad of it… I will go to the park. I am not yet a sheep. Read Nietzsche! Be a Superman, *Thus*

Spoke Zarathustra… Don't be a sheep, Bandini. Preserve the sanctity of your mind… read the master under the eucalyptus trees" (262). Among Bandini's Heideggerian possibilities for becoming Dasein, of becoming a Kierkegaardian Caesar among writers and a Nietzschean "super author," this aspect of his self must be overcome for him to achieve his authentic self.

Another arduous struggle that Bandini must face concerns his religious dilemma. Since childhood, Bandini has had an ambiguous relationship with his religiosity. Despite his doubts, he has always felt the necessity of the transcendent, a feeling that comes to him in the most improbable situations. Once while trying to have sex with a prostitute and another time after an earthquake, he considers it his fault because he has sinned and thus provoked God's anger. This shows how frangible is Bandini's self-proclaimed atheism and captures his paramount narcissism, which drives his thinking that God would shake the fundaments of the earth especially because of him. One particular Nietzschean aphorism illustrates Bandini's relation to the God of his upbringing: "And how many gods are still possible! As for myself, in whom the religious, that is to say god-forming instinct becomes active at impossible times—how differently, how variously the divine has revealed [itself] to me each time" (WP §1038)! It is also apparent that Nietzsche's profound religious background led to the necessity of a god presenting itself, with the philosopher replacing the Judeo-Christian God with Dionysius. Indeed, in his most megalomaniac moments, he would sign his writings as Dionysius. Nietzsche arrived to be his own god, just as he preached.

This necessity of God becomes active in Bandini two years after he abandons his faith and begins his compulsive reading. In this moment of existential crisis, he feels empty and lonely. In his own words, "It was a loneliness that really ached… I wanted to pray again. I was sure it would help, that it would make me feel better, because when I was a kid[,] prayer used to [do] that for me" (TBQ 339). The problem is that Bandini could not think of prayer words, realizing, in that moment, that prayer words were not ordinary words but a different kind of

word. But the right words did not come to him: "There was a prayer in [him] like an egg. But there were no words… surely not the old prayers! Not the Lord's Prayer, about our father in heaven… I didn't believe it anymore. There was not such a thing as heaven; there might be a hell, it seems very possible" (340). After much consideration of the argument, Bandini tries to pray to Nietzsche, his surrogate god: "'Oh dearly beloved Friedrich'… [it did not work] 'Oh dear Mr. Nietzsche' worse… he was an immortal writer, and his words burned across the pages of his books… but he was dead and I knew it… Then I tried Spengler. I said, 'my dear Spengler' worse." (TBQ 240–241). Bandini goes on thinking of other names. Then, about to abandon the idea, he has an epiphany, thinking, "I should not pray to God or others, but to myself. 'Arturo, my man. my beloved Arturo. It seems you suffer so much and unjustly. But you are brave… a mighty warrior… let your tears run down, for yours is a life of struggle… and nobody knows it but you…" (TBQ 241). After this prayer, Bandini cries until his sides ache, but, according to him, it is so sweet to cry, such a relief that soon after he laughs with pleasure.

Elsewhere, Bandini long struggles with his acute erotic sensuousness. He has many paper women from pornographic magazines and constantly uses them for masturbation. Now and then, he is preoccupied with this one-way love. Later, upon finishing the manuscript of his first attempt as a writer, a novel, his sister and his mother heavily criticize him regarding the cheap erotic content. Bandini himself realizes that it is a "stinking book," and, recalling the old belief that masturbation leads to blindness,[23] Bandini comments on himself in the third person:

> The writing of a maniac. Insanity… he got that way for so many secret women…A pathetic case, sir. Once he was a good catholic kid…Was very devoted… He got ideas…There was always something just screwy about the guy, but it took those

[23] Notably, Richard Wagner wrote a letter to Nietzsche's doctor, Otto Eiser, suggesting that his health problems were the result of too much masturbation. This letter is reproduced in *Wagner and Philosophy* by Bryan Magee on pages 335–336 and is hypothesized as one of the possible reasons for Nietzsche's break with Wagner, with Nietzsche referring to the "mortal insult" he suffered from Wagner.

> phonies (the women) to bring it about… Had a lot of jobs around here. Could not keep any though… You should have heard the monkey talk. Like a lunatic. Goddamenedest liar… [he] had hallucinations. Delusions of grandeur… Killed a lot of crabs too. Killed them all afternoon… Glad they locked him up. You say they found him wandered around the docks is a stupor? Well that's him. Probably looking for more crabs to kill… A sad case though. Awfully sorry for his mother and sister. They pray for him every night. Can you imagine that? Maybe they are crazy too… Ha! The madman wants to pray!… Maybe it's his religious background. Maybe he was too pious when a kid. (TBQ 391–392)

Bandini's mental confusion is linked to his inner never resolving the conflict between the facticity of being born in a strongly Catholic family, his strongly Dionysian instincts, and his will to create new values for himself inspired by his readings. Here, Fante traces a parallel between Bandini and Nietzsche. The just-quoted passage captures Bandini's ardent self-awareness and the level of his self-inquiring mind. It will be this hyper-consciousness and his incapacity to overcome his situation that will hinder Bandini from constructing an authentic self. Bandini's problem is that he wills himself to follow his own impulses but does not dare to position himself above the herd. He lacks resolutness.

There is an essay by Nietzsche entitled "The Challenge of Every Great Philosophy." It was Translated by Kaufmann and presented for the first time in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre.* A passage in that text may explain Bandini's lack of resoluteness: "men are inclined to laziness… They hide behind customs and opinions… But what is it that compels the individual human being to fear his neighbor and act [in a herd fashion] and not be glad of himself? A sense of shame… the desire for comfort… in short, that inclination to laziness (qtd. in EDS 122). Despite Bandini's proclaimed will to "be himself" and his wanting to stand above the herd, he craves the comfort he was denied from birth, that is, his thrownness facticity. Thus,

in the last novel of the tetralogy, *Dreams from Bunker Hill*, the reader is confronted with a divided and paradoxical Bandini, a Bandini that has chosen (out of laziness?) profitable work in the Hollywood movie industry. However, despite all the comfort and the material goods the money has brought him, Bandini is not "glad of himself." He sabotages himself as a screenwriter because his innermost desire is to be a novelist.

As discussed, the novels of *The Bandini Quartet* are highly autobiographical, with the Bandini of the last novel written by a Fante who, in his son's words, knew that "his once[-]promising career as an author had been replaced by forty years of cranking out fix-it hack screenplays for an industry that cared more about the price of popcorn than a line of prose" (TBQ xiii), a Fante who knew he was, in Heideggerian terms, going "towards death." Accordingly, in this last novel, *Dreams from Bunker Hill*, Fante allows Bandini to be a little more Dionysian, permitting Bandini to live a sexuality that was strictly repressed and heavily associated with guilt in the previous novels. Still, in terms of Nietzsche's philosophy, Bandini does not achieve much. He fails in his attempt at atheism, and he fails at his will to power. This is because, no matter how much money he receives from Hollywood, for forty years he has been a minor screenwriter constantly comparing himself to William Faulkner, Nathanael West, and Sinclair Lewis, among others. Bandini has felt like an outsider from his infancy to his adolescence and during all these years in Hollywood. The only attempt he makes to leave his office and socialize with his colleagues is another failure, with Bandini recounting it as follows:

> I took a seat at a long table… To break the ice I said to Garfield, 'please pass me the salt.' He passed it without saying a word. I turned to Brown and asked, 'You been here long?' 'Christ yes,' he said and that was all. It wasn't their fault, I decided. It was I, a social misfit, intimidated, lacking confidence. I never went back there again (TBQ 644).

This passage allows the conclusion that Bandini has not obtained the power and fame he dreamed of, inspired by his misinterpretations of Nietzsche. The stature of a Nietzschean *übermensch* that he aimed to achieve was and would forever be outside of his reach, first because he has not understood the real nature of the *übermensch*, which in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* describes Nietzsche's hope for a still-distant future, and second because he has not overcome his most base feelings of resentment, and he has never really appreciated life. Had Bandini accepted the Nietzschean formula of *amor fati*, he might have saved himself so much frustration, bitterness, and suffering.

4.4 Bandini's Heideggerian Facticity and Transcendence

> With its facticity, the being-in-the-world of Dasein has already dispersed itself in definite ways of being-in, perhaps even split itself up.
>
> Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time.*

With a different approach from that of Nietzsche and of all the others that preceded him, Martin Heidegger's philosophy finds its closest counterpart in that of Kierkegaard. Heidegger builds his study of "being" as *Dasein*, a German word that describes a notion of "being-there": "*Dasein* is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned about its very being. Thus, it is constitutive of the being of *Dasein* to have, in its very being, a relation of being to this being" (BT 11). The definition Heidegger gives of *Dasein* resembles very much in form and (somewhat) in content, Kierkegaard's concept of "Self" as detailed in *Sickness unto Death*, only that Heidegger's idea does not have the strong religious connotations of Kierkegaard's. As observed by Hubert Dreyfus, "This repudiation of the Christian-dogmatic side of Kierkegaard we call Heidegger['s] secularization of Kierkegaard" (BW 299). In

Heideggerian thought, *Dasein* implies that the human being is conceived of as concretely "being-in-the-world," with all the aspects that being-in-the-world in its everydayness contain.

The scope of this section is the analysis of some of Bandini's life instances according to the Heideggerian assumptions of the tripartite existential structure of *Dasein*: "thrownness" (facticity), "existentiality" (circumscribed possibilities) and "fallenness" (authenticity and inauthenticity). This recognizes "the factuality of the fact of *Dasein*, as the way in which every *Dasein* actually is, [which] we call its *facticity*. The complicated structure of this determination of being is itself comprehensible as a *problem* only in the light of the existential fundamental constitutions of *Dasein*" (BT56). When a being is thrown in the world, it finds itself in a preexisting circumstance, which Heidegger refers to as a constituent of *Dasein* called "facticity" or "given situation." We encounter a simplified idea of Heidegger's highly complex elaboration of being in *Existentialism, a Very Short Introduction*, in which Thomas R. Flynn refers to the Heideggerian concept of "given" as follows:

> Humans exist "in-situation," meaning that they are immersed in the givens of their conscious lives such as the parentage, nationality, gender, social identity, and previous choices. This is their "facticity," but they also "transcend" those "givens" by the manner they relate to their facticity, for example, with shame or pride, with resignation or refusal, in hope or despair. The human situation is an inherently ambiguous mixture of these two components, facticity, and transcendence, the given and the taken. (35)

Through a Heideggerian lens, it cannot be denied that Bandini's "given situation" at his "thrownness" is considerably unfavorable in many aspects: He was born very poor, he is of Italian ancestry, and he is the son of an Italian uneducated bricklayer and a submissive mother whose whole life constitutes taking care of her family and praying the rosary. At the time, mainstream Americans were very hostile toward Italians: "Many Italian immigrants found

themselves toiling for low pay jobs in unhealthy conditions… labor conditions were not the only conflicts Italian immigrants faced… they also had to confront a wave of a virulent prejudice and nativist hostility… Anti-immigrant sentiment continued until the 1920s" (*Library of Congress*). A few years before Bandini was born, Catholic churches were vandalized and burned, and Bandini was born in a Catholic family in a predominantly Protestant America. Bandini is not white enough, not tall enough, and not educated enough. He makes friends with nobody and is constantly bullied by his peers, which makes him aggressive and tough. Nonetheless, the reader knows well that Bandini is sensitive, fearful, capable of acts of tenderness, and prone to crying very easily. Thus, it is not difficult to understand why, as Bandini grows up, his thoughts and attitudes are so opposing and conflicting.

The second element of *Dasein* is "existentiality." According to Heidegger, each *Dasein* has a limited number of possibilities in life, which related to the situation the *Dasein* has been thrown into. That is, when a human being is born, its existence begins in a random pre-existent situation: a particular time in history and a pre-determined socio-economic and cultural context. Meanwhile, physiological aspects play a role in limiting *Dasein*'s possibilities. For instance, one may have a physical handicap or suffer from an illness. This means that "becoming what one can be in being free for one's own most possibilities (project)… is an "accomplishment"… care determines the fundamental mode of this being according to which it is delivered over [thrownness] to the world" (BT 192). That is, the freedom to choose to accomplish a certain project is determined by the circumstances at one's thrownness and its concerns.

When a being is thrown into the world, it simply exists, with the choices that this being makes from their birth until their death defining its essence: "Only the being 'between' birth and death presents the whole we are looking for" (BT 356); "The '*essence*' of *Dasein* lies in its *existence*. The characteristics to be found in this being are thus not present 'attributes' of an objectively present being which has such and such and 'outward' appearance but rather

possible ways for it to be, and only this" (41); "The two characteristics of *Dasein* [sketches out are] on the one hand [,] the priority of "*existentia*" over *essentia*, and then[, on the other hand], always-being-mine" (42). From this presupposition, Sartre drew his famous dictum: "existence precedes essence."

Although Bandini has great ambitions, although he dreams of being a famous writer, his possibilities of fully achieving that dream are not really promising. Despite the difficulties Bandini confronts, he does not give in to this situation. Instead, he makes choices that he believes will lead him to his goal: He is always reading; He tries to excel at school to compensate for "the big patch on the knee of his pants, or the fact that he needed a hair cut… or the remodeled shirt his father once wore and that never fit him smartly" (TBQ 38); He writes short stories and sends them to various magazines in the hope that one of them might be published. It is apparent that Bandini believes in Heidegger's affirmation that "as being, Dasein always defines itself in terms of possibility" (BT 43) and decided that he would maximize his possibilities.

After a period of mental instability that Bandini experiences due to compulsively reading and not comprehending Nietzsche's philosophy and his frustrated attempt to become an atheist amidst reveries of turning himself into an *übermensch*, Bandini realizes that his little town in Colorado has nothing else to offer him. Accordingly, he leaves for Los Angeles in pursuit of his only dream: To become a great writer. His persistence pays off when one of his short stories is published in the most important literary magazine of the time. Nonetheless, in the meantime, Bandini works various kinds of unskilled jobs.

The last two novels of the saga represent two different accounts of the same period of Bandini's life. The main plot is the same: A poor boy leaves his town and goes to Los Angeles in his quest to become a great writer. Both novels feature a "facticity" and a desire for

transcendence that is identical. The only difference is that *Ask the Dust* sees Bandini writing what he is living at that moment as a young man that even with all the difficulties still has hope and persists in searching for a way to see his name printed on a book's cover. In fact the novel ends with a Bandini that after so many frustrated attempts achieves to publish his first novel. Bandini, however, is constantly haunted by its past, his facticity. This situation is described by Heidegger as follows: "In its factical being *Dasein* is how and 'what' it already was. Whether explicitly or not… it *is* its own past. In such a way that its past, as it were, pushes itself along 'behind' it, and that it possesses what is past as a property that is still objectively present and at times has an effect on it. *Dasein* 'is' its past" (BT 20). Accordingly, Bandini's past will haunt him for all his life.

As an aspiring writer with only one short story published, Bandini, now a twenty-year-old man, falls in love with a Mexican waitress named Camila, who seems to reciprocate his feelings. Nonetheless, Camila, an immigrant who has felt the prejudice of American society, wants to marry a mainstream American to improve her equally unfortunate facticity. The couple engage in a love/hate relationship, which, in a rather emblematic passage, allows the reader to see the weight of Bandini's past and his will to transcend it. The following quote from *Ask the Dust*, in which Bandini tries to justify to Camila why he has treated her so badly, enables a Heideggerian interpretation of how his past remains his present:

> I was miserable, for tonight I had acted like them. I had never been one of them… Ah, Camila! When I was a kid back home in Colorado it was Smith and Parker and Jones who hurt me whith their hideous names, called me Wop and Dago and Greaser, and their children hurt me, just as I hurt you tonight… but I am poor[,] and my name ends with a soft vowel, and they hate me and my father, and my father's father, and they would have my blood and put me down, but they are old now, dying in the sun and in the hot dust of the road, and I am young and full of hope and love for my country and

> my times, and when I say Greaser to you it is not my heart that speaks, but the *quivering of an old wound* (emphasis mine), and I am ashamed of the terrible thing I have done. (TBQ 458)

This passage illustrates two core concepts of Heidegger's existentialist philosophy. The "given"—that is, the facticity, the conditions one finds oneself thrown into and which they cannot choose to change—and "transcendence," which involves overcoming one's thrownness to move beyond one's given situation. The other constituents of the tripartite structure of *Dasein* are "fallenness," which refers to how during its life, *Dasein* may get lost in everydayness and the "idle talk" of being-with-others, in doing so giving up on reflection about the authentic self. However, Bandini does not lose his self-awareness: in several passages of the four novels, he demonstrates his capacity to critically interpret himself and his situation. One such passage is particularly illuminating:

> Absurdly fearless Bandini, fearing nothing but the unknown in a world of mysterious wonder[,] Are the dead restored—the books say no, the night shouts yes… frightened of no man, but scared of the Third Street Tunnel, scared to walk through it—claustrophobia. Scared of high places too, and of blood, and of earthquakes; otherwise, quite fearless… Your talent is dubious, your talent is pitiful, you haven't any talent, and stop lying to yourself day after day… I know what you are thinking, Bandini. The thoughts of your father before you, lash across your back, hot ire in your skull, that you are not to blame: this is your thought, that you were born poor, son of miseried peasants, driven because you were poor, fled from your Colorado town because you are poor, hoping to write a book to get rich, because those who hated you back there in Colorado will not hate you if you write a book. You are a coward, Bandini, a traitor to your soul, a feeble liar. (TBQ 422–423)

This corresponds to Heidegger's idea that "*Dasein* grows into a customary interpretation of itself and grows up on that interpretation. It understands itself initially in terms of this interpretation and, within a certain range, constantly does so. This understanding discloses the possibilities of its being and regulates them" (BT 19). Regarding Bandini, this Heideggerian affirmation is twofold, as already discussed, because of his hyper self-awareness he is constantly "interpreting" himself, on the other hand, Bandini has great difficulty regulating his possibilities. His expectations are most often too substantial in regard to his real possibilities, and he often oscillates toward an exaggerated self-deprecation.

When Bandini attempts to justify and explicate his deplorable racism against Camila, he clearly demonstrates that he is conscious of his given, unchangeable past, a past marked by the "quivering old wound," a reference to the first novel, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, when Bandini was a boy of twelve fighting the world into which he found himself thrown. Still, Bandini expresses his will to "transcend" his unchangeable past, and he confides in his youth, his hope, and his love for the country in which he was born to accomplish his goals in life.

In the last novel, *Dreams from Bunker Hill*, a second version of Bandini's life in the same period depicted in *Ask the Dust*, we encounter a slightly different Bandini. Where *Ask the Dust* was written by a young author drawing from his actual experiences, *Dreams from Bunker* Hill is the recollections of an embittered 72-year-old. The sometimes very optimistic and at other times pessimistic verve of the young Bandini of *Ask the Dust* is absent in this last novel, with cynicism and resentment pervading the narrative. In this novel, Bandini is allowed the (many) sexual experiences that were denied to him in *Ask the Dust* and which represent a subject of constant physiological desire intertwined with strong feelings of guilt due to his Catholic upbringing. Although Fante had obtained considerable success and recognition, as recounted in this paper, it is interesting to note that he too, continued to live in his past. Despite the considerable achievements during that lengthy career, his resentment at living

inauthentically hinders him from narrating in this last novel, his forty years as a well-paid Hollywood screenwriter. It might be suggested that Fante's choice represented self-punishment for having lived inauthentically. again recalling Heidegger: "*Dasein* always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibility to be itself or not to be itself. *Dasein* has either chosen these possibilities itself, stumbled upon them, or in each instance already grown up with them. Existence is decided only by each *Dasein* itself in the manner of seizing upon or neglecting such possibilities" (BT 11). The author and his protagonist/alter ego know that their achievements were not the product of their authentic self and despises them accordingly. Bandini considers his work in the movie industry to be a possibility that he has "stumbled upon" and "seized" due to its ease. Seemingly, he is even ashamed of his long Hollywood career. This means that the Bandini we see in *Dreams of Bunker Hill* is both a failed screenwriter and a failed writer. The reader can assume that Bandini's self is split: "With its facticity, the being-in-the-world of *Dasein* has already dispersed itself in definite ways of being in, perhaps even split itself up" (BT 57). Concerning this "dispersion" and the "split self," Heidegger expands the above excerpt to exemplify how complex it is to be one's own self among the multiplicity of possibilities of being-in-the-world, all influenced by "idle talk" of "the they" by human "curiosity" and the "ambiguity" of certain possibilities. These aspects make it easy for Dasein to fall prey to an inauthentic mode of being, especially when these "possibilities of taking care are kept to a 'bare minimum'" (BT 57). Given the circumstances of his thrownness, one assumes that Bandini's possibilities have been reduced to a "bare minimum," demanding that he seize the possibilities at hand. Because "*Dasein* not only has the inclination to be entangled in the world itself in terms of that world by its reflected light; at the same time *Dasein* is also entangled in a tradition… This tradition deprives *Dasein* of its own leadership in questioning and choosing" (BT 20). Entangled in the world's "tradition," Bandini has lost his own "leadership," that is, control over his choices. Meanwhile, the only thing

preventing Bandini from enjoying the wealthy life Hollywood has awarded him and his family is again his acute self-awareness. He never forgives himself for “falling prey” (BT 169), instead deploring his choice to live an inauthentic life.

This situation prompts several overarching questions: How can we describe the complex nature of the being of Bandini in its manyfold aspects? Who is this Italian American *Dasein* whose behavior, sometimes, abruptly changes? Who is this being that, following authentic self-reflection, falls pray into the world of others? Here, Heidegger again proves illuminating: “The who is answered in terms of the I itself, the ‘self.’ The who is what maintains itself as an identity throughout changes in behavior and experiences, and in this way relates itself to this multiplicity… It could be the case that the who of everyday *Dasein* is precisely not myself” (BT 112). Bandini, like most *Dasein*, experiences his own self in constant change, suggesting the possibility that Bandini lived precisely as a *Dasein* who himself was not.

Notably, this research has only considered the main structures of *Dasein*, excluding other important aspects. According to Heidegger, The fundamental constitution of the being in question, being-in-the-world, [is that] essential structures are centered in disclosedness” (BT 231). Sartre, whose *Being and Nothingness* draws heavily on Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, shares the assumption that humans, from birth to death, are constantly disclosing themselves through the choices they make. For Sartre, humans are never complete but in a perennial process of self-construction. Thus, the question remains: Who and what is *Dasein*? It might be best to close this chapter with Heidegger’s conclusion to his long study on *Dasein*, in which he asks, “Has the inquiry up to now brought *Dasein* as a *whole* into view at all?” (BT 220). It may be that the study of human existence, from Kierkegaard’s Self to Camus’s Sisyphus, is doomed to always finish with a renewed cause for interrogation.

4.5 Bandini's Sartrean Desire to be God and Bad Faith

> Then, God said, "Let us make a man, someone like ourselves, to be the master of all life upon the earth and skies and in the seas." So, God made man like his maker. Like God did God make man.
> *The Living Bible*[24]

> We seem to be in an extremely difficult position, being able neither to reject not to understand bad faith.
>
> Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*

Hitherto this project has attempted to analyse Arturo Bandini's life through the lenses of four existentialist philosophers. Of the four, Sartre's philosophy likely most strongly resonates with Fante's tetralogy and the accounts of its protagonist. One of my aims is to establish how, in the construction of his own self, Bandini's behavior and the events of his life may illustrate existentialist assumptions. Moreover, to discuss how his self-reflectiveness sometimes posited him in a mode of inertia, constituting an obstacle for him to grow authentically and leaded him to a performative life.

Two of Sartre's assumptions are discussed. The first is the negation of a God outside of humans and the consequent affirmation that man's ultimate project is to be God, an affirmation that strongly resonates with Nietzsche's proclamation of God's death and the advent of the *übermensch.* The second assumption is the human inclination to flee the condemnation of absolute freedom and the burden of responsibility, an inclination that leads people to act in bad faith between their facticity, the uncertainty of contingencies, and the desire for transcendence.

Denying God's existence, humans have nothing to cling to: free of any bond or support, they become their own creator. However, that realization also generates a sense of pride and empowerment, which paradoxically becomes a burdensome and overwhelming feeling. At first, one may infer that the assumption of being absolutely free produces in humans a relieving

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24 *The Living Bible*, Genesis 1: 26–27.

and liberating sensation. However, more often, what happens is that the feeling of confronting so many possibilities and the consequent responsibility for any and each choice increases anxiety and anguish. However, even in anguish, humans obstinately persist in their endeavors. As Sartre says,

> It is a consciousness that it wants to have the in-itself's [God's] impermeability and infinite density; it is as the nihilation of the in-itself, and the constant escape from contingency and facticity, that it wants to be its own foundation… precisely in-itself-for itself, i.e.[,] the ideal of a consciousness that could be the foundation of its own being-in-itself purely by means of its own being conscious of itself. To this ideal we can give the name "God," so we can say that the best way to conceive of human-reality's fundamental project is to regard man as the being whose project is to be God. Whatever the rites of any religion we may consider, God is the first instance "felt by the heart" of man heralding and defining him in his ultimate and fundamental project… God as the supreme goal of transcendence, represents the permanent limit in terms of which man becomes acquainted with what he is. (BN 735)

This is further explained by Pier Aldo Rovatti: "Human anguish has its origins as he/she acknowledges to be a failed God, in other words, of their impossibility of being God"[25] (12). As Dostoevsky's "Underground Man" insistently asserts, to be so self-aware is an illness. The human realization of the impossibility of being God, with all God's attributes, generates a feeling of frustration and overwhelmingness. Accordingly, Sartre himself admits that "atheism is a cruel, long-term business" (W 157). Different philosophers have described this sentiment differently, as anxiety, anguish, and nausea, all of which hinders humans if they do not find a balanced view of them. According to Camus, unless a person, even in revolt, decides to

[25] My translation from the Italian original.

understand the indifference of the universe before their urge for meaning, they are condemned to despair.

Bandini's thirst for knowledge, his yearning for fame and importance, his will to power, and his overly narcissistic self-idolization are described in many passages of the novels analysed in this research. Some of them, which have been cited previously to illustrate certain assumptions of the other philosophers of interest, conform to the Sartrean notion of the human desire to be God. During his adolescence, Bandini elects Nietzsche as his quasi-God, not only accepting but openly stating that God is dead. In addition, Bandini follows in Nietzsche's footsteps in his crusade against Christianity, at least temporarily.

The episode of the crab's slaughter exemplifies Bandini's will to prove his superiority and transcend his state of powerlessness: "These goddamned crabs had actually questioned the might of Superman,[26] Bandini! What had got into them to be so stupidly presumptuous? Well, they were going to get a lesson they would never forget" (TBQ 246). Furthermore, he affirms, "By fear I would rule, even though I was not present, changing the course of their existence… They would make me a god, and some of them would secretly worship me and have a passion for me" (250). Incapable of overpowering himself and others, Bandini searches to jumble himself in a battle with inferior and helpless creatures to give an outlet for his will to power. In pursuing these poor creatures, he acts "in bad faith" in an effort to feel like an *übermensch*.

In his Nietzschean period, there is an odd occasion in which Bandini, while reading in the park, encounters an old woman and offers to carry her basket. As he accompanies the lady, he goes deliriously thinking about her as a miserable character in the book that he was just reading, in his mind reflecting, "I know what life has been for you, because my back is bent too, but my heart is whole, my love is yours, to give you joy where God has failed" (TBQ 265).

[26] In this passage Bandini uses the term "superman" in reference to Nietzsche's *übermensch*.

A possible explanation for Bandini's deranged words and strange behavior in this instance, may be as Sartre says that "many people would blithely resort to the unconscious" (BN 91). However, he does not accept Freud's theory of the unconscious, a "project [of bad faith that] implies an understanding of bad faith as such, and a pre[-]reflective grasp [of] consciousness as performing its bad faith" (BN 90). Nonetheless, "the condition of possibility of bad faith is [still] that human-reality, in its most proximate being, in the internal structure of the pre-reflective cogito" (113 As "pre-reflective" mode Sartre means one step before the pure certainty of reflection. Given that he strongly denies the Freudian "unconscious" this is the only possibility for explaining how one can lie to oneself and consciously "half-believe" it. In short, bad faith occurs in a pre-reflective manner.

A few pages later in the same novel*, The Road to Los Angeles*, Bandini arrives at the culmination of his desire to be God: In a moment of deep existential crisis, he feels the need to pray. However, because he no longer believes in the Catholic God, he tries to pray to his own gods. After failed attempts to invoke Nietzsche and Spengler and considering other "eminent" people, he concludes, "I should not pray to God or others, but to myself." (TBQ 341). Subsequently, after a moving prayer to himself, he is so happy that he cries.

Later, Bandini, still in his teens, writes his first novel, a rubbish thing, as he acknowledges. But when his sister says that it was the craziest and silliest book she has ever read, he decides to be indifferent to her comments: "To the walls at large. They can't touch us. No—they can't! We have put the church to rot. Dante, Copernicus, Galileo, and now me—Arturo Bandini, son of a humble carpenter. We go on and on. We are above them. We even transcend their ridiculous heaven" (TBQ 381). After this diatribe, in which he denies Christianity but conflictingly positions him in Christ's place, his sister, in a great rage, throws a vase at him, narrowly missing his head. In response, Bandini says, "A miracle! Calm and unhurt… Like one of the apostles I spoke [:] 'Even God Almighty is in our side. For amen I

say unto you, even when they breaketh vases over our heads, they hurteth us not, neither do our heads cracketh open'" (TBQ 381). Bandini certainly feels himself endowed with some kind of divinity. It is unclear whether this is madness or bad faith; it is clear though that Bandini is having an identity crisis and that his psychological state is problematic. As Joseph S. Catalano, in a discussion of bad faith in *A Commentary in Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness*, asserts, "For Sartre, our lack of identity with ourselves touches all our emotional and psychic states" (85). Bandini's Catholic upbringing was so deeply rooted that it made it difficult for him to dissociate himself from his Christian beliefs. On the one hand, this passage illustrates Bandini's desire to be God. On the other hand, by the many religious allusions, it suggests that he is trying to conceal from himself the truth that lies deep inside of him, namely, that he is still a Christian. This is a clear example of bad faith.

According to Flynn in, *Sartre: A Philosophical Biography*, the notion of "bad faith" is "Sartre's 'signature concept'… It has been widely discussed and, one might venture, even more widely exhibited. Heidegger is correct to point out its function as a 'moral' disvalue. It is a form of self-deception and thus a (kind of) lie. But the kind of lie and the form of deception is peculiarly Sartrean" (184). According to Sartre, bad faith differs from a general lie or falsehood, because it represents an attempt to lie to oneself and to flee from one's facticity toward its transcendence (and vice-versa). And as Catalano affirms, "The human can maintain itself in bad faith because it is simultaneously facticity (*facticitè*) and transcendence (*transcendance*)… Man, for Sartre should be in some way a synthesis of facticity and transcendence… As transitory attitudes, good and bad faiths are metastable and slide into each other" (82–89). One tries in bad faith to flee freedom by denying one's facticity or the possibility of transcendence. As Santoni has argued, it may be the case that Sartre's concept of bad faith rests on a mistake. After all, if one accepts Sartre's view, because Sartre does not admit the unconscious, it is not clear how can consciously lie to oneself and it is not clear how

one can consciously believe their own lie. Santoni also indicates that "Sartre affirms that the 'true problem' of bad faith originates in the fact that bad faith is 'faith'… In any case, what can be inferred, according to Sartre, is that the primitive project of bad faith is in bad faith… bad faith flees being by finding refuge in 'not-believing-what-one-believes.' By exploiting the identityless nature of consciousness" (37). Meanwhile, in the words of Sebastian Gardner, "Sartre is fully aware of the paradoxical character of self-deception [bad faith].[27] Indeed he spells it out in terms so clear that his descriptions are often quoted by philosophers pursuing the challenge of reinterpreting the propositional attitudes which self-deception involves." (174). Santoni is among those who go to great lengths to reinterpret the evanescent and metastable nature of bad faith. Bad faith is such a problematic and ambivalent notion for Santoni that he questions whether Sartre's idiosyncratic "view of bad faith is 'salvageable.'" Accordingly, he suggests, "perhaps, as his position develops, lying to oneself takes on a modified meaning. We must probe further" (Santoni 37). Santoni had to rely on further Sartre works, because as the philosopher's thoughts matured, the probability of understanding the elusive nature of Sartre's notion of bad faith increased. Not that the matter has been fully settled: bad faith remains a controversial and difficult subject to accommodate.

Accordingly, this research does not aim to elucidate this complex Sartrean assumption. Thus, the following considers "bad faith" to mean "simply and roughly 'a person not being honest with herself'" (Gardner 174). In *Words,* Sartre's autobiography, he blatantly asserts that he lived, most of his life, in a performative way. Likewise, Bandini, fluctuates between bad and good faith. Indeed, he is someone that most often is not honest with himself. From Sartre's perspective, the mode of bad faith is the general mode of humans. The philosopher asks, "What therefore is sincerity, other than a phenomenon, precisely, in bad faith? (BN 108).

27 The original citation writes self-deception instead of bad faith, which is how Kaufmann referred to bad faith. He explains his choice in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (page 280).

From these words one infers that Sartre is very sceptical about the human capacity for good faith, authenticity, or sincerity,

The Bandini Quartet depicts many instances of Bandini's life that demonstrate how he has lived most often in bad faith. He performs to deceive himself and sometimes just to please or affirm himself to others. However, according to Sartre, "There are an infinite number of ways of behaving in bad faith…"[28] (BN 97). Bad faith is not a static condition and does not derive itself from the same circumstances: Sartre divides bad faith into what he calls forms, one of which derives from negation. Negation does not imply that one does not have a choice: Instead, one has freely chosen not to choose. Hence, they have already utilized the freedom to not choose. In this respect, people constantly confront choices and make decisions. In the opening paragraph of *Ask the Dust*, Fante positions his protagonist on the verge of making a crucial decision. In that passage, Sartre's idea of choosing not to choose is well illustrated by Bandini's behaviour:

> One night I was sitting on the bed in my hotel room on Bunker Hill, down in the very middle of Los Angeles. It was an important day in my life because I had to make a decision about the hotel. Either I paid or got out: that was what the note said, the note the landlady had put under the door. A great problem, deserving accurate attention. I solved it by turning the lights and going to bed. (TBQ 411)

This shows how Bandini dealt with his "big problem": by ignoring it, and thus, in bad faith, negating it. For Sartre, many people choose to live their lives in negation, preferring not to choose out of fear of responsibility. They choose not to choose, "bear this 'No' within their

28 In the context of the sentence Sartre is discussing the theory of the unconscious as contradictory of many forms of behaving in Bad Faith. Nonetheless he made it clear that bad faith may occur in various forms.

very subjectivity… as a constant negation" (BN 88). Negation is among the most common forms of bad faith: by being neutral, a person has the illusion of escaping from responsibility.

Bandini is not always in this mode though. He constantly moves to and from bad faith, movement that includes another aspect of bad faith, which Sartre calls "abrupt awakening." A good example in *Ask the Dust* is the passage in which Bandini thinks that he is uncapable of writing a good novel because he has "never had any [sexual] experience with a woman" (TBQ 430). This seems a clear instance of bad faith, with Bandini wanting to blame his lack of experience on growing up in a small town within a deeply Catholic family. Out of pride, he denies doubting his talent and his personal fears and lies to himself, saying that above all he did not have even a dollar to pay for this "sexual experience," which would magically unblock his incapacity to write. Nonetheless, he experiences an "abrupt awakening" and completely changes his attitude. Returning to reality and authenticity, Bandini affirms, "Even if you had a dollar you would not go, because you had the chance to go once in Denver and you didn't. No, you coward, you were afraid, and you are still afraid[,] and you are glad you haven't got a dollar… oh, you lousy fake,…no wonder you can't write" (TBQ 420). As already mentioned, bad faith is not a fixed mode. Instead, its nature faith is evanescent, temporary and, using Santoni's term, "mercurial," easily adapted to many situations.

One situation that confirms that both facticity and transcendence and good and bad faith can occur in the same consciousness is when Bandini wakes one morning with what he calls a brilliant idea, a "masterpiece": he will find a job as a night clerk, which will give him the chance to read and work at the same time. In a great hurry, he prepares himself to go out in search of this wonderful job. Once outside the house and fully awake under the sunlight, he says, "Strange. Now I was wide awake and the idea didn't seem so good, one of those which comes in half-sleep… I [cannot] get a job as a night clerk in this harbor town for the simple reason that no town in this harbor [uses] night clerks" (263). Caught by his mother in a hurry, he

explains that he is running to get some exercise. Interestingly, he says that his great idea came to him when he was half-sleep, suggesting that he believes in a pre-reflective mode, aligning with Sartrean thought: “It happens quite frequently, that the liar is to a greater or less extent a victim of his lie, that he is half-persuaded by it. But these common and everyday forms of lie are also bastardized versions, which represent a half-way between lying and bad faith” (BN 89). Bandini was a chronic liar in all forms, with his self-awareness provoking many Sartrean “abrupt awakenings”: occasions of high narcissism and unrealistic (bad faith) thoughts and actions. This sees Bandini fall to the ground of reality and sometimes to the underground of self-deprecation.

Bandini demonstrates a varied repertoire of lies to himself and to others. When trying to obtain the love and admiration of Camila, the Mexican waitress, he suddenly remembers that he still hadn’t “written a poem to Camila. As [he] lay there, inspiration came. [He] wrote it out from memory” (492). After writing beautiful words and sending them to Camila, he ponders to himself, “I sent it by telegraph, proud of it... beautiful poem, my poem to Camila, a bit of immortality from Arturo to Camila” (492). Bandini sees Camila’s reaction when she reads the poem and becomes distressed that she has read it and ripped it to pieces. Frustrated, he walks away thinking that not “Even the poetry of Ernest Dowson [had an] effect upon her” (492). Each time he says that “the inspiration came” and calls the poem “my poem,” he knows that he is lying to himself because he has plagiarized the poem, demonstrating clear bad faith and reflecting Sartre’s instruction that “The person who espouses bad faith must be conscious of his bad faith” (BN 90).

There is still another tool a person may employ in conjunction with bad faith. Sartre called this “more subtler attitudes—such as irony—whose description would take us further into the intimacy of consciousness. In case of the irony, man annihilates, in the unity of a single act, what he advances; he makes you believe something in order not to be believed; he affirms

in order to negate and negates in order to affirm" (BN 88). Fante's use of irony in developing his protagonist is abundant. The following passage, in which Bandini's landlady is threatening to evict him for not paying his rent, represents a good illustration of his carefully crafted bad-faith irony:

> "I just got a letter from my agent," I told her. "My agent in New York. He says I sold another one; he doesn't say where, but he's got one sold. So don't worry Mrs Hargraves, don't you fret, I will have it in a day or so."
>
> But she could not believe a liar like me. It wasn't really a lie; it was a wish, not a lie and maybe it wasn't even a wish, maybe it was a fact, and the only way to find out was watch the mailman. (TBQ 414-15)

This passage makes apparent that Bandini is attempting to lie to himself again, this time hoping that his lie not be a lie but instead a fact.

When commenting on *Being and Nothingness*, Catalano says that "sincerity escapes us from all sides…Thus, true sincerity [good faith] is impossible… Sartre maintains that we are well aware of the impossibility of sincerity… what we usually describe as sincerity is, in fact bad faith, for it is an attempt to escape the constant obligation of 'becoming' and rest in a state of stability" (85). After a tiresome attempt to grasp the real nature of Sartre's bad faith notion, we have no choice but to arrive at an agreement with the philosopher: "We seem to be in extremely difficult position, being able neither to reject nor to understand bad faith" (BN 9). Given that Sartre could not posit his theory of bad faith on wholly stable and concrete grounds, scholars, and laypersons continue to inquire about it in different ways. For example, the Freudian uses the theory of the unconscious to help explain the phenomenon. Meanwhile, because the Bible says that the devil is a liar and the father of all lies,[29] Christians may affirm

29 *The Living Bible*, John 8:44

that it is the evil nature of humans and the devil's temptation that induce one to act in bad faith. Finally, determinists might say that it could not be otherwise.

Existentialists have viewed and thought about human beings mysteries of life in different ways. Albert Camus For example, considered that the mind, upon encountering the absurdism that surrounds life, would likely dismiss all of the above explanations. Camus, although not a determinist, asserted that humans were capable to arrive at an answer to the enigma of their original existence and purpose in the universe. This would mean that only by accepting Camus's premise can humans hope to live happily. That assumption drives discussion in the next and final section of this research.

4.6 Bandini's Absurd Camusian Sisyphus

O my soul, do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible.
Pindar, Pythian iii

Although the title of Walter Kaufmann's book is *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, the last chapter is dedicated to Albert Camus. In the first chapter of his book, Kaufmann acknowledges that Dostoevsky was not a philosopher in the strict sense, and the same is said of Camus, who always denied being a philosopher and an existentialist. Both are, above all, great writers whose works are deeply philosophical. In this view Kaufmann concedes that "Part 1 of *Notes from Underground* is the best overture for existentialism ever written" (EDS 14), and Camus's *"Myth of Sisyphus*" is the ideal final act in this broad analysis.

In his metaphorical reflection on human existence, Camus draws on the Greek myth to write his hallmark essay on the absurd, *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In this book, Camus confronts the subject of suicide, questioning whether life is worth living. To illustrate his point, Camus

tells the story of a Greek man, Sisyphus, who is sometimes referred to as the king of Corinth. Because Sisyphus defied the gods, he was condemned to push a heavy rock up to a hill only to have it roll back down again. His punishment was pointless because he would never complete his task. Camus uses this myth to affirm that persistence amidst the senseless routines of daily life may give a relative meaning to it.

Like Dostoevsky, Camus, although an atheist, was preoccupied with the increasing violence, disbelief, and political schisms reflected in increasing murder and suicide rates, with his loss of a friend to suicide shaking Camus's deeply. Considering the odds of life and whether it is worth sustaining that life, Camus assumes that murder proves how low a value a person places on the other's life, with suicide proving how the limited value one places on their own. A person may feel that life is boring, pointless, and unjust. Nonetheless, given that life is short, especially for those who want to know and accomplish much, Camus's advice resembles the words of Pindar, suggesting that people should "exhaust the limits of the possible" and make good use of every moment because humanity's existence is a succession of senseless acts. Specifically, Camus writes,

"Rising, street-car, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, street-car, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement" (MS 9). From the moment one questions the "why," from the moment one becomes conscious of one's futile routine, emerges the amazement of confrontation with the absurd, producing what Camus calls "the absurd man." Other than the urge to find order, "The present and the succession of presents before a constantly conscious soul is the ideal of the absurd man" (MS 50). The absurd man numbs himself or in Heideggerian terms, "falls pray" in the mechanical routine of the "they"

Because life's perils, frustrations, and unpredictability generate overwhelming anxiety, three are three ways one may respond to the need for order and reason when it collides with the chaotic and indifferent silence of the universe, with "the mind, when it reaches its limits, [needing to] make a judgment and choose its conclusions" (MS 26). First, when a person who has no hope in an afterlife and the consolation of a paradise, might in extreme conditions, commit suicide. Camus is totally against this "solution." Second, a person who finds hope in religious beliefs and that after all the probation of this worldly life, one will be awarded with a better existence in unity with their creator, finds solace and encouragement to go on. Camus considers this solution to be an instance of bad faith, which he calls a "moral and philosophical suicide". The third option, which Camus promotes, suggests that humans consciously accept that life's shortness and this acceptance of certain death demands they welcome this reality and, in an act of defiance, embrace the absurd life, living not in the past nor in the future but enjoying every moment of this contradictory existence.

As Kierkegaard once suggested, humans oscillate and change position throughout their lifetime. This swaying nature is illustrated by the many instances of Bandini's life that this research has referred to. Given to precocious self-awareness, in his early years, unsatisfied with his poverty and his freckled face, Bandini already questions the purpose of human existence: "a sense of life's futility occupied him… What was the good of living? And last night he had used lemon juice, too. Who was that liar of woman who has written on the Home Page of yesterday's *Denver Post* that freckles 'fled like wind' from lemon juice?" (TBQ 35). Although just a boy's preoccupations, the passage shows his bewilderment before life, especially his contempt for many aspects of his given condition. Due to his strict Catholic upbringing, he anguishes at his awareness of having committed any sinful action. This even leads him to reflect on the nature of sin: "But was that a mortal sin? That always bothered him. A mortal sin was a serious offense. A venial sin was a slight offense" (TBQ 86). Although certain of having

committed many mortal sins, he always manages to confess them on time: "Bandini was pretty sure he wouldn't go to hell when he died. The way to hell was to commit a mortal sin. He had committed many, he believed, but the confessional had saved him. He always got to confessional on time—that is, before he died" (TBQ 84). Moreover, in a clear instance of bad faith, "he would leave the confessional… vowing with body and soul to be clean forevermore… He would walk out of the church in a dream" (TBQ 90). He is relieved and free to sin again because he is a good runner and always gets to confession on time.

Bandini's atheist period, the period during which he celebrates Nietzsche's "death of God," devouring all of the work of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Spengler, and other similar figures that he could get his hands on allows him to become free to be the master of his own destiny:

> "There is no afterlife," I said. The celestial hypothesis is sheer propaganda formulated by the haves to delude the have-nots. I dispute the immortal soul … I reject in no uncertain terms the hypothesis of God. Religion is the opium of the people. The churches should be converted to hospitals and public works. (TBQ 253)

This prompts moments in which he tries to live his life fully and enjoy it for what it is. For example, the following passage is very Camusian in its tone and sentiment. After unsuccessfully pursuing a woman that he is attracted to, he says,

> I felt frenzied: deliriously and impossibly happy. There was the smell of the sea, the clean salted sweetness of the air, the cold cynical indifference of the stars, the sudden laughing intimacy of the streets, the brazen opulence of light in darkness, the glowing languor of slitted crescent moon. I loved it all. I felt like squealing, making noises, new noises, in my throat. It was like walking naked through a valley of beautiful girls on all sides. (354)

Even if Bandini tries to embrace and enjoy existence as a Camusian absurd man, this is the period of his life in which he suffers the most. Without the solace of belief in his mother's God, he feels completely derided and doubts his sanity, "I used to think I was a psychic… Mexican faces, glutted with stupidity, watching me return, thinking me crazy, making me shiver… They thought me crazy because I didn't look like an old whipped animal from a field. Let them think me crazy! Of course I'm crazy!" (314–15). He continues, "I wanted to bump my head against the closet wall and hurt myself so much that I would be senseless" (338) and even contemplating suicide: "I hated myself so much that I sat in bed thinking the worst possible things about myself… By then I was ready to commit suicide" (236). According to Camus, this is a possibility that at least once in a lifetime crosses every human mind. Interestingly, regarding his confusing and desperate state Bandini says, "Maybe it's [my] religious background. Maybe [I] was so pious when a kid" (392). Accordingly, because his atheistic state is terribly destabilizing and crushes him, Bandini chooses to return to God, unable to afford to renounce this consolation. Thus, even if not totally convinced in his atheistic militance, he always invokes God's name.

In *Ask the Dust*, Bandini is in a transition mode, not yet ready for a total return to Church and a leap of faith, but oftentimes finding an excuse to go to the church, "for sentimental reasons only" (TBQ425) because he has read a lot of significant books and considers himself too cultured man for "superstitions." Like Camus, Bandini is very sensitive and masquerades his sensibility with extensive use of irony, as the following exemplifies:

> [A]bsurdly fearless Bandini, fearing nothing but the unknown in a world of mysterious wonder. Are the dead restored? The books say no, the night shouts yes. I am twenty, [and] I have reached the age of reason… frightened of no man, but scared of the Third Street Tunnel, scared to walk through it—claustrophobia. Scared of high places too,

> and of blood, and earthquakes; otherwise, quite fearless… except the fear of appendicitis… otherwise, quite fearless. (422)

Camus writes about the subject as follows: "I must learn to tame my sensibility, [which is] too ready to overflow[, to be hidden] under irony" (qtd in Lottman, ch. 5). In his writing, Camus mastered covering up his fears and his moral and physical aches and handicaps under coats of irony.

Another characteristic shared by both authors is insecurity about their talent. When he encountered sudden fame and influence, although deep down a disguised narcissist—or just conscious of his value—which was confirmed profusely by those surrounding him, Camus doubted his capacity: "[Although he] began with the maddest of ambition... there was a 'temptation to give it up' He thought that this long debate with a truth more powerful than himself needed a simpler heart, a greater intelligence" (Lottman, ch. 29). Furthermore, "he began to feel the onset of a writing block, the 'evaporation of his confidence' that he had something to say" (Lottman, ch. 21). Camus, not prepared for the Holophotes, thought for a moment that he was not made for this calling. "[The question that I asked myself, lying in the grass, in the heavy and hot evening: 'If these days were the last…' Reply: a tranquil smile in myself. Yet, nothing of which I can be proud: nothing is resolved, my behavior is not so decided" (qtd. in Lottman, ch. 21). In the course of this research, we have seen that Bandini was highly narcissistic and that he desired the glory and fame that Camus found via commitment to his task and to ethical behavior. However, the less-talented Bandini often exaggerates, deprecating himself. In one emblematic passage, he says to himself, "your talent is dubious, your talent is pitiful, you haven't any talent, and stop lying to yourself."

It may be that their insecurity owed to their facticity: Camus was born in extreme poverty in Algeria when it was a French colony, which gave him a *pied noir* status. It is said of him that

educated, he had not come from the Sorbonne or from the École Normale although he was highly Supérieure and never lost his *pied noir* accent. Hence, even with a prestigious role at Gallimard Publishing House, compared to "a Paulhan or a Groethuysen or even a Parain, a Camus could never be a member of their group… [Nonetheless, on] his side Camus had his youth, and the sensation he had created with his first books" (Lottman, ch. 22). Continuing, Lottman says, "Outsider that he was, Camus didn't know these good people, and they had little opportunity to know him" (Lottman, ch. 21). Similarly, Bandini was always considered a *dago* and a *wop* for being born in America to Italian immigrant parents. Even when he was a well-paid Hollywood screenwriter with his own office at the studios like the others, he was never a part of the group. The only time he tried to integrate with the other writers in their dining room, he was treated coldly and even ignored by many of them. His inferiority complex was so great that he concluded that "it wasn't their fault… It was I, a social misfit, intimidating, lacking confidence. I never went back there again" (TBQ 644). Bandini went back to his office and went on writing for the Hollywood industry he loathed but which he never renounced because he loved the money and he loved all the things that money could bring him. Nonetheless, he lived in anger and regret at not being the novelist he dreamed of being.

In contrast, in a letter to his mentor Jean Greener, Camus wrote, "I regret nothing…I acted according to my heart and my feelings" (qtd. in Lottman, ch. 6). With a different temperament and firmness in his beliefs, Camus managed to live without regrets. Except for his illness, he was very grateful for all that he had achieved in life, successes and failures included . At the end of his essay Camus writes,

> I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him

> neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled the mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (MS 77)

Across Fante's entire tetralogy, Bandini carries his burden and persistently tries to reach his goal. In contrast to Sisyphus and Camus, Bandini needs the Master, the Creator, the God of his infancy to give meaning to his life. With each fragment of that life, Bandini too constructs his world, never giving up, always ready to start to roll his rock uphill again. However, it is difficult to perceive any happiness in him.

As already discussed, although the focus of this analysis is on Bandini, the protagonist of *The Bandini Quartet*, Bukowski's preface, the essay by Dan Fante, and the author's note make it impossible to ignore that Bandini is Fante's alter ego. In the last novel of the tetralogy, *Dreams From Bunker Hill*, the author presents Bandini as an aspiring writer, the young man of *Ask the Dust*. Nonetheless, Fante's narrative betrays him: He has lost the 'verve and the briar' of the young Bandini. His mood is completely different. He is tired and deluded. Fante, by that time an anger and despairing soul who does not understand why life denied him recognition, denies his protagonist the happiness of having his artistic dream fulfilled. *Dreams from Bunker Hill* ends with a frustrated Bandini, who after many unsuccessful and sad experiences, loses his job and returns to Los Angeles and to Helen, his lover, only to learn that she has just died:

> "She is gone, she's dead"… "a week ago"… I felt myself weakening as I staggered toward an armchair… something deep and abiding had caved me in… I got up, hefted my suitcase, and walked out. At the depot in Angels Flight, I sat on a park bench and let my grief have its way. For two hours I was there grief-stricken and bewildered… for all her years she nourished a love in me… Now that she was dead, I could think of her no longer. I had sobbed and whimpered and wept until it was all gone, all of it, and as

> always I found myself alone in the world… I had seventeen dollars in my wallet and the fear of writing. I sat erect before the typewriter and blew on my fingers… I started to write, and I wrote:
>
> The time has come, the Walrus said,
>
> To talk of many things:
>
> Of shoes—and ships—and sealing wax—
>
> Of cabbages—and Kings[30]—
>
> I looked at it and wet my lips. It wasn't mine, but what the hell, a man had to start someplace. (TBQ 747–49)

These cryptic lines illustrate the absurdity of humankind and its quest for meaning. Although Bandini does not fully accomplish his dream of living faithfully according to his Self and finds no answer to his inquiries, he never gives up. As Camus asserted, "Tenacity and acumen are privileged spectators of this inhuman show in which absurdity, hope, and death carry on their dialogue (MS 7). While human beings carry on their existence in a state of absurdness, as the last words of Bandini illustrate, "a man had to [re]start someplace," and, no matter what, in a Camusian manner, he goes on with his life. Just like Sisyphus, he defies the given facticity of his thrownness, he battles with his adversities, takes his boulder, and starts pushing it up the hill once more.

[30] These lines are from Lewis Carrol's poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter." They appear in the 4th chapter of *Through the Looking Glass.*

5. Final Considerations

This project never had the ambition of exhausting the possibilities of an existentialist reading of John Fante's tetralogy *The Bandini Quartet*. I am conscious of having just scratching the surface of such a vast and complex subject. Nonetheless, it breaks a new ground on Fante's studies and brings thee neglected writer, once more, to the academic arena. Moreover, it proved true the words of professor Elisa Bordin when she said that,

> The label of an 'Italo American' writer had, in many cases, blocked wider-scope readings of his work…bringing a certain interpretative monotony of his texts… making emerge only specific textual aspects inhibiting other possible readings…in connection to other literary groups or literary movements…limiting Fante-s potential as a writer, with relevant consequences regarding Fante's position in the American literature panorama… Above all because other than Fante's Italo Americanism up to now the critic has not highlighted… [the] many other details which impel a reading of Fante as an Italo American author and 'something else' (Bordin 16-20)[31].

Recognizing the many potentialities of readings in Fante's works, this research intended, under the lenses of great representatives of the existential philosophic movement, to analyze the life struggles of Arturo Bandini in the construction of his Self. This project tried to follow The protagonist of Fante's tetralogy *The Bandini Quartet*, throughout his quest for existential meaning and the purpose of his life.

Since existentialism had his days of glory in the late thirties and forties when Sartre made the movement worldwide popular, one may argue that existentialism is an outdated subject today. At this proposition, I would firmly reply that in accordance to Flynn, As I have mentioned in the first section of chapter three existentialism is atemporal. I cited

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[31] My translation from the Italian original.

well-known passages of the Old Testament that illustrates existential concerns. The book of Job is a good example and I agree with Flynn, who affirms in his book, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*, that “Packing [existentialism] as a cultural phenomenon of a certain period [is a] misreading … existentialism as manner of doing philosophy is at least as old as philosophy itself” (x). The existential concerns of our days may have changed, but inquisitive minds are and always will be concerned about the meaning and purpose of existence.

Bandini was found in the Kierkegaardian despair, between faith and disbelief; he was also present in Dostoevskian Underground mad existence. In his adolescence, Nietzschean readings led him totally astray, in his attempt to become a feverish atheist, which he never achieved to be. Although Bandini seemingly transcended his personal facticity, The Heideggerian situation at his ‘throwness’, the marks of his ‘given situation’, his ‘living in the past’ and ‘lack of resolutness’ showed to be determinant contributed on his outcome. Besides, he failed badly in his desire to be God, living most of the time in Sartrian bad faith In his performative and inauthentic life, Bandini goes on living in the gray territory of ‘betweenness’ choosing the assurance that a practical, though, unsatisfactory carrier would guarantee him. Even confronting many difficult situations, he never gives up his dream of being a great writer. Bandini, like Camus’ Sisyphus, is ready to descent the mountain and push his heavy boulder uphill. Always willingly searching for a new beginning.

The thesis statement of this research was to elaborate on Bandini’s construction of his own Self and how some of his characteristics hindered him of achieving authenticity. As said above, the theme of Bandini’s existential struggles was far from being exhausted. Hoping that this research has contributed to a more ample discussion of Fante’s work, I may propose to expand Fante’s reading in an eventual doctoral dissertation which, main aim will be to explore the elements of autobiography and autofiction in John Fante’s life, as a writer and as a man.

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