

John Fante's Arturo Bandini

A Study of Character

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A Thesis Presented to The Department of Literature,
Area Studies and European Languages

THE UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Spring 2013

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2013

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<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Print: Representeren, Universitetet i Oslo

Abstract

This thesis aims to conduct a characterological study of John Fante's protagonist Arturo Bandini from the two novels *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* and *The Road to Los Angeles*. Through an analysis of the narrative technique in the novels and an application of characterization theory, the goal is to describe Arturo Bandini as accurately as possible. The thesis argues that the character is multifaceted and interesting and that extensive comparisons with his creator are not required in order to understand Arturo.

The theoretical approach in this thesis is two-fold, inferring character based on characterization theory on the one hand and narrative technique on the other. Through an analysis of the narrator's role in the narrative, much of the characteristic features of Arturo are revealed to the reader. In addition to this, an analysis of the character through *direct definition* and *indirect presentation* portrays the protagonist's traits in the story. This characterological study, then, will put emphasis on the narrative point of view and the establishing of character in the story, both of which will combine to create a coherent and accurate description of Arturo.

Through the analysis, this thesis demonstrates Arturo's struggles to become integrated in American society. It is his dream to assimilate completely and to rid himself of his Italian heritage. In the process, Arturo embodies the story of an immigrant's struggle to pursue the American Dream. The toils and hardships of immigrants are described through the Bandini character in an agonizing journey from young boy through adolescence. This journey reveals a vivid character with moral ambiguities and an intensely felt emotional existence.

Acknowledgements

From the day I first discovered his books in the library, the works of John Fante aroused my interest for several reasons. Fante's richly inventive character gallery evoked strong emotions in me, with the author's strongly felt empathy for their feelings of alienation from family and society. Fante's ability to relay such heavy and personal subjects gave me an intensely realistic reading experience of their struggles. The character and protagonist of the Bandini quartet, Arturo Bandini, is the best-known of Fante's characters, and perhaps the character who is most representative of Fante's literary themes. A thesis concerning Arturo Bandini's plight will not only satisfy my interests, but also, hopefully, arouse interest in John Fante's work from other scholars.

Looking back at the writing process, many thanks go out for the helpful aid of some and the invaluable patience and insight from others. Firstly, I would like to direct thanks for the untiring patience and perceptive insight displayed from Laila Vedvik during the development of my thesis. Secondly, many thanks go out to my terrific supervisor on this project, Nils Axel Nissen. I would also direct thanks to Jørgen Øverås and Joachim Wold for their perceptive thoughts and thoughtful comments during the writing process. Finally, I would like to thank the staff at the university library for assisting me in my searches throughout their infinite racks of books and magazines. Last, but definitely not least, thanks to Fagerborg High School for providing me with a great place to write and to contemplate my thoughts.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis will explore two of John Fante's novels, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* and *The Road to Los Angeles*, in an attempt to characterize the protagonist, Arturo Bandini. It is the aim of this thesis to conduct a character study of him drawing on theory about characterization and narration. Focus will be on narrative theory as interpreted by Gérard Genette and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, while theory on characterization will be drawn mainly from Rimmon-Kenan, but also from Seymour Chatman and Jonathan Culpeper. The theory will be applied in order to give a portrayal of Arturo Bandini and the findings will be discussed with references to critics of Fante and authors who have contributed to the relatively new field of Fante studies.

This introductory chapter will give reasons for the choice of primary texts and outline which aspects of them that will be examined. After an outline of the approach to the primary works and Fante studies, the problem to be investigated will be highlighted, with a brief discussion of the significance of the author in this context. Further, as readers of the thesis might be unfamiliar with Fante and Bandini, a short part of this introduction will introduce the character and the novels. The theory applied in this thesis will be discussed in the introduction in the section titled "theory." The final section of this introduction will orientate the reader as to how the thesis chapters are organized.

Characterization theory has been a concept regarded with less importance than an exploration of plot and the interpretation of action in the story. In his book from 2001, Culpeper quotes Chatman's 1978 assertion on characterization: "It is remarkable how little has been said about the theory of character in literary history and criticism" (qtd. in Culpeper 5). From this we might infer that characterization still has not been given much playing ground in literary studies. This thesis does not hope to change this, but rather will focus on the assertion that the two Bandini novels in question do in fact require a greater understanding of character than of plot and that an analysis of character in this thesis is therefore well justified. Whereas the plot of both novels are straightforward and plot is even close to absent in *The Road to Los Angeles*, it is my claim that a focus on character is what brings the stories to life and creates the meaning between the reader and the narrator. This meaning will find its way to the reader of this thesis through an analysis of some of the narrative and characterological aspects of the stories, which the thesis will outline in the section concerning theory. Further, through an analysis of narrative technique much of Arturo Bandini's character will be revealed.

When it comes to studies about John Fante and his works, this is a relatively new field. Having seen a revival in the beginning of the 1980s and the time following his death in 1983, Fante's works began to be given critical attention. In 2002, literary critic Donald Weber asserted that the field of Fante studies is now a fact ("Collins Review" 225). This claim relied on the three nearly simultaneous publications about the author and his works: Stephen Cooper's *Full of Life: A Biography of John Fante* (2000), the only biography of the author to date; the collection of essays in *John Fante: A Critical Gathering* (1999), the result of a 1994 conference about Fante; and Richard Collins's *John Fante: A Literary Portrait* (2000). This thesis, however, will not engage in much discussion about Fante's life, as it does not take a biographical approach to the novels. Still, in order to understand the aims of this thesis it is important to mention the weight critics have put on the relationship between the character and the author.

The scholarly interpretation of Arturo Bandini has to this point primarily focused on the relationship between Fante and Bandini as Fante's literary projection of himself. A critical reading of the novels in the series has not been thoroughly conducted without either viewing Arturo Bandini in the light of the author or with references to Italian-ness or placing Fante's authorship in some context. Such a reading reduces Arturo to a mirror image of the author and a tool for understanding and appreciating Fante, decreasing the importance of the character. With Fante having written and published more material than just the series of Arturo Bandini, this is not to say that much attention has not been paid to the characters in Fante's novels. Quite to the contrary, the rich character gallery through which Fante is able to relay his novel's subjects of immigration and integration is, along with the character's inner feelings and emotional life, what many critics view as Fante's strongest features (Kordich 130-131). However, the attention given to the characters has always justified their comparison to Fante's life, never really detaching the characters from the author. Arguably, due to the similarities in Fante's and his character's lives, the author does merit a comparison to his characters. Consequently, there is little wonder that scholars look to the intertwining subjects of Fante and Bandini. However, a reading of Arturo Bandini on his own, detached from the supporting structure of Fante, is long overdue. There is need for a broader attention being given to Fante's characters in order to put more emphasis on his works and his writing abilities, and to look away from his life and rather focus on the creation of his characters. The thesis will show that the character Arturo Bandini is an interesting and thoroughly developed character, able to

stand on his own feet, and who does not need the comparison with his creator's life in order to be meaningfully interpreted.

Moreover, the series of novels about Arturo Bandini contains stories of a character's struggle to find identity in an estranged society. It is also a complex exploration of the self. Both novels chosen, but especially *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, will be used to discuss Arturo Bandini's struggle to fit into American society in his refracted view of American ideals. *The Road to Los Angeles* will be used to discuss Arturo's attempts at integration and his pursuit of the American Dream. Through these primary works it is the aim of this thesis to show that Arturo Bandini is a multifaceted character trying to find his version of the American Dream in a country whose ideals are at odds with his heritage. Analyzing and interpreting the character through a characterological study based on narrative theory will refocus the discussion of Fante's recurring presence and demonstrate that Arturo Bandini has innate interest beyond biographical parallels with the author's life.

The choice of primary works to support my views relies on two things. The first novel ever written about Arturo was *The Road to Los Angeles*. It was attempted published in 1935, but rejected by the publisher (Cooper 133), and not published in Fante's lifetime. Regardless, this means that Fante's first envisioning of Arturo is to be found in this novel, meaning that the Arturo of *The Road to Los Angeles* is the Arturo that is closest to the author's original conception of the character. Consequently, an interpretation of Arturo without Fante's first attempt at creating the character will not suffice as a thorough investigation of the character. However, the novel's rejection by the publisher caused Fante to rethink his strategy and view of Arturo, leading up to the next attempt at a novel-length story about him: *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*. The rejection of *The Road to Los Angeles* then, arguably, made Fante look toward Bandini's roots, deciding to write a novel about a familial and more likeable character than the one in *The Road to Los Angeles*. Interestingly, the narrative point of view in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* shifts to the third-person from the first-person in *The Road to Los Angeles*, arguably because the first-person point of view might have been what led to the rejection. Literary critic Richard Collins attributes the change of point of view to the discouragement Fante felt when he was rejected for narrating the protagonist's story "in the cynical voice of Arturo at his most eccentric" (99). Fante never returns to the strong influence his heritage has had upon him in the last two novels in the series. A characterological study of Bandini based on the first two novels written about him, then, provides a good basis for a coherent description of the character in terms of the subjects of the two first novels in the series.

Consequently, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* and *The Road to Los Angeles* should be considered together, as they are Fante's first attempts at creating and establishing a character and they deal with similar aspects of the character. *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* presents the childhood and earliest memories of significance for Arturo. *The Road to Los Angeles*, on the other hand, puts more emphasis on the character's pursuit of happiness through his refracted view of American ideals. Much of Arturo's behavior throughout the series can be traced back to these chronologically first written and first published stories of Arturo, as they are the origins of the character and represent the first envisioning Fante had of Arturo Bandini.

Collins's accurate description of Arturo Bandini as "the eternal adolescent, the incurable idealist, and, above all, the archetypal struggling artist" (19), is a succinct and to the point portrayal of the young man we meet in what Fante studies have come to label "The Saga of Arturo Bandini."¹ As this thesis will show, the description of Arturo as an eternal adolescent and an incurable idealist is, perhaps, the most apt description of the character. The following parts of the introduction will provide a brief familiarization with the novels and the character, as both may be unknown to the reader. This way, the reader may also know what to expect from the main chapters.

In *The Road to Los Angeles*, the characterization of Arturo as an eternal adolescent is clearest. As the title of the novel implies, the character takes the long road to discover the life he wants to lead, metaphorically depicted as the promised land of 1930s Los Angeles. That being said, the chronologically first published novel in the series, where we meet Arturo at his youngest, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, offers a very different Arturo in terms of social and emotional competence, even though he is only a young boy. The Arturo of this novel struggles to unite his family in an idealized vision of the American Dream, while at the same time trying to rid himself of a looming Italian heritage.

Taking these differences into consideration, it is clear that Fante does not transpose his character from one work to another with the exact mental state Arturo was in in the preceding novel. By this I mean that Fante alters his vision of Arturo Bandini to fit the aspects of the character he wishes to explore and highlight in that particular novel. Seen this way,

¹ The stories of Arturo Bandini do not combine to make a saga. Whereas a saga denotes a long chronicle of generations or families with multiple characters, the saga of Arturo Bandini chronicles only episodes in one character's life, not even mentioning his death and final departure. Describing the series of Arturo Bandini as a saga is thus not very descriptive of the stories in the collection of novels. However, a saga might also denote the chronicles of heroic endeavors, as one might be able to argue is the case in Arturo Bandini's story. But still, the argument is very thin, and falls short as a mere gimmick based on what Fante himself has to say about it being a saga or not: "No, I don't see it as a saga. But somebody who was publishing it might see it as that; it's a good gimmick" (Pleasants). References to the novels in this thesis will therefore be references to a novel series.

Fante explores his character's journey from a young boy to a young man through the course of four novels, while creating different traits for Arturo in order to illuminate different characteristics. This might imply that the character is not a coherent one, and therefore cannot be considered as one character in a character study, but this is not the case. Quite the contrary, Arturo needed to be altered over the course of the series to meet with different aspects of his life and his thoughts, and thus makes the character more developed and vivid. Especially in the exploration of the self in *The Road to Los Angeles* Arturo needs to relay more of his innermost feelings to the reader than he is able to in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*; he needs to be put more in the spotlight in order to convey his inner thoughts and emotions. Consequently, the character alterations are small adaptations of the character that serve to illustrate more of the character's traits.

Supporting the dynamic character change of Arturo from novel to novel is Fante's note to *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, where he reflects on his first published novel, stating that "all of my characters are to be found in this early work. Nothing of myself is there any more" (3).² Consequently, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* covers Arturo's struggles with his heritage and familial value, while *The Road to Los Angeles* introduces the early stages of an artist emerging and his exploration of himself in order to find and establish his own identity. In this novel, the father is dead and the family is replaced. This indicates a breach with Arturo's heritage and family from *Wait Until Spring Bandini*, and underlines the emphasis on the role of his self. In this alteration and dynamic change of character, Fante manages to convey a more complex portrait of a character than had he decided to write four novels about the same aspects and struggles of the protagonist.

Theory

As stated earlier, this thesis will mainly draw upon theories from Genette, Rimmon-Kenan and Chatman in discussing narrative techniques as well as in the characterization of Arturo, but other theorists will be included to give contrasting or supporting views. This section of the introduction will give reason for the choice of theory and how it will be applied in the thesis to provide a characterization of the protagonist.

In narrative theory the terms *point of view* and *narrative voice* refer to how the story is narrated and through which perspective the events are told. The point of view refers to the

² Future references to the primary works will refer to the collected edition of the four Bandini novels, *The Bandini Quartet*.

physical and cognitive position from which the story is being narrated. That means that the point of view may be from inside or outside the story – this describes the observational role of whoever narrates the story and relates it to the reader. This way, a narrative point of view might translate into a perspective from which the story is being told. The narrative voice, however, is not to be confused with the narrative point of view although they both refer to how the story is told. In general terms, the narrative voice is meant to denote how the narrator presents the story, not in terms of a viewpoint, but rather in terms of overt means, such as speech or thoughts. In Chatman's words, narrative voice "refers to the speech or other overt means through which events and existents are communicated to the audience" (153). Thus, narrative voice puts emphasis on how the events are narrated to the reader. Chatman continues by distinguishing voice from point of view, which "does *not* mean expression; it only means the perspective in terms of which the expression is made" (153). Whereas Arturo's begrudging tone towards the sun's effect on his skin in *Wait Until Spring Bandini* is told in the third-person, the narrative voice is Arturo's: "[T]he count around his nose and cheeks had jumped nine freckles to the grand total of ninety-five. What was the good of living?" (35). The distinction between voice and perspective is useful, as both terms become useful to know when characterizing the protagonist of Fante's two books. Furthermore, knowledge of these terms will contribute to a greater understanding of Arturo Bandini and his sentiments toward his surroundings.

Throughout the analysis of character in the novels, an analysis of narrative technique will be conducted and applied where it is relevant for the understanding of Fante's establishing of character. Consequently, an analysis of how the author establishes character through narration and thus how the reader perceives the character based on the author's choices of narration will be highlighted. With this in mind, the role of the narrator and character of Arturo will be analyzed with regards to participation in the story.

This brings us to the field of *narrative levels*, which Genette advocates as a more accurate description of narrative point of view than the terms *first-person* and *third-person* point of view (243-244). He distinguishes between narratives with the narrator absent from the story and narratives with the narrator being a character in the story (244-245). These two types of narrative he dubs *heterodiegetic* and *homodiegetic* (245). In Fante's two novels, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* is narrated with a heterodiegetic narrator and *The Road to Los Angeles* is narrated with Arturo as the narrator and protagonist, making it homodiegetic. This division is complicated slightly in Genette's distinction of narrative levels (228). A narrator who

narrates from outside the story and does not participate in the events themselves, as the narrator in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, is identified as being on an *extradiegetic* level with a heterodiegetic relationship to the story (248). A narrator who is a participant in the story and also the protagonist, as in *The Road to Los Angeles*, Genette identifies as *autodiegetic* – the hero narrating his own story (245). This type of narrator does have a strong degree of the homodiegetic (245). These distinctions will be exemplified in the main chapters of this thesis.

A narrator who is absent from the story has led such narrators to be distinguished as omniscient narrators, giving them more narratorial authority. However, this is not the case in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, as this novel employs *focalizers*. This term is illustrated by Rimmon-Kenan as she identifies the user of the third-person as the narrator, and the center of consciousness in the story as the focalizer (74). As shown in the second chapter of this thesis, the narrative point of view may be third-person extradiegetic, but the focalizers in the story are the two main characters, Arturo Bandini and his father. How this affects the reader's perception of character will be illustrated in the following chapter.

Drawing on the assertion from Culpeper, that characterization theory still remains to be a relatively undiscovered field, this thesis will demonstrate the importance of the characters in Fante's two novels. In order to do this accurately, a theoretical framework from Rimmon-Kenan will be applied to characterize Arturo.

Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes between two forms of character inferring that occurs during the reading process. Through narrative elements of characterization selected by the author, the reader learns who the characters are and consequently establishes his understanding of them. She distinguishes between *direct definition* and *indirect presentation* of the character (59). *Direct definition* is the character as defined by the narrator. When the narrator defines Arturo as the eldest of the three boys in the household (21), a direct definition of him as the eldest son in the house has been given. The narrator can be an omniscient narrator, or he may be a participant in the story with an interest in the events. Based on this distinction, Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes two subcategories within the direct definition of the character: *objective* and *subjective* characterization. Objective definitions of character stem from the authoritative voice in the story, and define traits that the reader ought to accept as true. Subjective definitions, on the other hand, stem from characters with an interest in the story, such as an unreliable narrator, or a minor character who cannot objectively characterize the protagonist (60). When Arturo in *The Road to Los Angeles* during an interview for a cannery job tells the boss that he is not interested in the money because he is only there to

conduct research for his forthcoming book on California fisheries (275), the reader is presented with a subjective definition of the character, to which he should be skeptical.

Indirect presentation, on the other hand, is the displaying and exemplifying of a character's traits through the discourse, instead of naming it explicitly (Rimmon-Kenan 61). This may be carried out by the author through acts, speech, thoughts, environment and physical appearance. With Arturo's almost obsessive thoughts about his freckles and how they disrupt his physical appearances, the reader is able to interpret the character's struggles with self-confidence and emotional insecurity. Through presenting the character indirectly, the author is able to relate to the reader the character's traits in a more convincing manner, meaning that the actions and speech acts performed by the character are left to the reader as a raw material through which the reader has to use his own experiences of human behavior and mannerisms to infer the meaning of the acts and thus make up his own mind about who this character is and why he behaves as he does. The aspects of direct definition and indirect presentation of character will be discussed with use of examples from the novels in order to establish a thorough and accurate portrayal of the Arturo that is presented to the reader.

In explaining character-classification, Rimmon-Kenan identifies E.M. Forster as the man who coined the terms *flat* and *round* character. In Forster's words, flat characters do not develop during the story. They are "analogous to 'humours', caricatures, types [and they] 'can be expressed in one sentence'" (qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan 40). Forster's definition of the round character is the opposite of the flat, a complex character who experiences a development in the story (Rimmon-Kenan 40). This means that round characters are by definition characters with several qualities that combine to make out the characteristics of the character. As Chapter Three will suggest, the Bandini character in *The Road to Los Angeles* is a round character with complex characteristics, but he shows few signs of development throughout the story. Further, Rimmon-Kenan offers a development of Forster's black and white distinction into a continuum in which flat characters can tend to be round (40-41). She supports Joseph Ewen, who believes that characters may be spread along a continuum of flat and round into categories of *complexity*, *development*, and *penetration* into the inner life (Rimmon-Kenan 41). These distinctions serve to illustrate the degree to which one character may be described as round or flat. The reduction of characterization into either flat or round deprives the characters that are flat the ability to have a deeper meaning than serving a mere function within the story. Instead, the continuum allows characters who at first may seem static to become dynamic throughout the narrative.

Moreover, the distinction of character and characterization is useful to know when navigating this thesis. Both terms are ambiguous and open for interpretation, so it is important to stress the use of them in this thesis. Character will be used to denote the people who inhabit the discourse. Characterization, on the other hand, will denote what the reader infers from the discourse to make out the qualities and traits of the character.

Seymour Chatman recognizes the need for an exploration of the term *character* in order to understand how we construct the character during the reading process. During this process, he distinguishes *traits* as vital in the reader's comprehension of character. He relies on the definition by J.P. Guilford to explain the term: "any distinguishable, relatively enduring way in which one individual differs from another" (qtd. in Chatman 121). This definition of what constitutes characteristics seems very wide and open for interpretation, but is still useful in approaching features of what constitutes character. The term *traits* is narrowed down later in Chatman's book, when he labels it a "relatively stable or abiding personal quality" (126). The problem then arises of how the reader is to infer what is a quality of the character, and what is just an ephemeral mood or an action that the character may never repeat again and thus cannot be viewed as a characteristic. Mary Doyle Springer puts emphasis on the habitual exercise in order to depict character: "Literary characters are, and must be, creatures of a certain kind of regularity and *habit* so that their voluntary acts exhibit a pattern that is 'characteristic,' that is, true to their character traits" (28). The idea of habit contributes greatly to what can be seen as a relatively stable or abiding personal quality.

While the habitual repetition of action and thoughts might constitute an unchanging aspect of a character's personality, when the character performs actions and has sentiments that are non-habitual, Rimmon-Kenan argues that these acts should be viewed with scrutiny, as this one-time action "often suggests that the traits it reveals are qualitatively more crucial than the numerous habits which represent the character's routine" (61). Erratic behavior thus contributes to the shaping of the character and reveals his dynamics, and arguably has a greater impact on the reader. Throughout, this thesis will illustrate how Arturo Bandini's habitual actions and also his erratic behavior contribute to shape the reader's understanding of him.

The Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is chronologically structured, discussing one novel per chapter, starting with *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, where we meet Arturo at his youngest, and concluding with his adolescent years in *The Road to Los Angeles*. Throughout the chapters I will apply, as shown in this introduction, narrative and characterological theory to the primary works in order to characterize the protagonist. Both chapters will intertwine with respect to characterization, but the focus of each will be slightly different due to the primary text's difference in terms of narration and style. This will become clearer throughout the two chapters.

The first of the main chapters, Chapter Two, will deal with the first of the two novels in question, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, paying much attention to how the narrative point of view contributes to the reader's characterization of Arturo. Especially the relationship he has with his father and their symbolic relationship will be explored here. Throughout, theory on characterization will be applied to characterize Arturo.

The second main chapter, Chapter Three, will naturally deal with *The Road to Los Angeles*, focusing on the development of the protagonist from childhood to adolescence. This chapter will focus more on a characterization of Arturo from a characterization theoretical approach, meaning that I will go more in-depth into the traits and characteristics of Arturo that are revealed to us through his thoughts and interior monologues. The chapter will also discuss the choice of the first-person narration and how that affects the reader's view of the character. Throughout both chapters, a coherent presentation of the character will be offered, attempting to paint a thorough picture of Arturo based on the primary works.

The conclusion will try to concentrate the findings established in the main chapters, and consequently summarize and characterize Arturo in order to highlight the most important findings in the main chapters. Furthermore, the conclusion will offer suggestions for further Fante studies, especially with a focus on Arturo Bandini.

Chapter Two: *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*

This chapter of the thesis will deal with the youngest version of Arturo Bandini in the series, as we meet him in the small town of Rocklin, Colorado during the winter, in the novel *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*. In this novel, the reader learns of Arturo's first impressions of religion, his Italian heritage, while also exploring Arturo's relationship to his father – a relationship that will come to permeate the entire novel. Being the chronologically first narrative of Arturo, where Arturo is just a child, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* presents the reader with an Arturo in the making, being molded by his surroundings, his upbringing, and the sensory impressions from his family and friends. These are elements which contribute to the shaping of Arturo into an interesting and well-developed character. This chapter will first introduce the character of Arturo Bandini through a brief presentation of him and the story's plot, before illustrating how the character is portrayed and developed throughout the discourse. In doing so, focus will be put on how narrative theory can be applied in the construction of character. The narrative style employed by Fante in his books plays an important role in the reader's characterizing process of Arturo. The following sections of the thesis will explore how narrative point of view contributes to the forming of the character into a vivid personality. The majority of this chapter will focus on how Arturo is portrayed to the reader through characterization in the discourse, and show the character's intense eagerness to integrate into American society and to distance himself from his Italian heritage.

Arturo Bandini is the oldest of Svevo and Maria Bandini's three sons. His father is an immigrant from the Italian city of Abruzzi, and Maria is the daughter of Italian immigrants. Balancing his Italian heritage and the dream of assimilation into American society will prove to be a recurring theme for Arturo throughout the story, which takes us to Rocklin, Colorado during a winter in the 1920s, where the Bandini family lives together in a small, unpaid for house. The story is complicated by Arturo being pinned between his father and mother when Svevo leaves the family in search of jobs right before Christmas, working as a stonemason and bricklayer – a trade hard to maintain during a snowy, cold winter. It is around this predicament that the story revolves. Arturo rises to the occasion to bring his father back home and to try to juggle between his heritage, family and his aspirations to become and live up to his idea of what it means to be an American.

The story's narrative style is important to take into consideration in order to create a thorough understanding of the protagonist. The narrative perspective in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* is external, told from outside the story, as the narrator is not a character within the story. Consequently, the narrator can be identified as an *extradiegetic* and *heterodiegetic*, following Gérard Genette's terminology (245). The narrator is also able to communicate the thoughts of the characters to the reader. Seemingly, the narrator in this novel is a good example of a fly on the wall type of narrator with insight into the minds of the characters. However, there are complications of this type of categorization in the novel, as the focus of attention shifts between Arturo and his father. This emphasizes the tension between Arturo and Svevo, and enables Fante to get under the skin of the father as well. Furthermore, the narrator only enters into the minds of these two characters. Genette recognizes the slant of focus that the author can employ in his narrative, and dubs this focus of narration *focalization* (189). However, first it is important that we label *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* a novel with *internal focalization*, where the narrator knows as much as a given character does and communicates this to the reader (Genette 189). Genette goes further by dividing internal focalization into subcategories where his second distinction of the focalization is called *variable* focalizer, where the focus point of the narrator alternates between characters (Genette 189). This is the case in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, where Arturo and Svevo are the focalizers in the story, meaning that the story alternates between them as focus points.

Consequently, the story is told with an external third-person limited narrator, and the focalizer is internal and variable. This means that the center of consciousness in the story is the focalizer, and the user of the third-person who narrates from the outside perspective is the narrator (Rimmon-Kenan 74). Illustrative of this narrative perspective is the author's choice of having the narrator thoroughly define only the two focalizers in the story through direct definition of character. Here Arturo:

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 father was a bricklayer, but he wanted to be a pitcher for the Chicago Cubs. They lived in Rocklin, Colorado, population ten thousand, but he wanted to live in Denver, thirty miles away. His face was freckled but he wanted it to be clear. (23)

This narrative definition of the character reveals most aspects of Arturo to the reader, as the reader trusts the narrator to convey the truth about the characters portrayed in the story. The paragraph goes on, illustrative of Arturo and his inner wishes for how his life ought to be. This definition of character could not have been relayed to the reader in such an effective way had the author opted for a different narrative perspective. However, one might argue that a first-person narrative perspective could have defined the character even better, but the third-person external narrator is suggestive of the narrator having validated the information coming from the character, giving a sense of truthfulness about the definition of him. Fred Gardaphe argues the significance of this passage as illustrative of Arturo being “torn between love and hate of the people he calls ‘these Wops’” (“Fantasia” 48; Fante 26), which describes the character succinctly, recognizing the inner workings of Arturo well.

However, as *Wait Until Spring Bandini* has Arturo as one of the novel’s main focalizers, the other being Svevo, the reader is left at odds with the objectiveness of the narrator in the story. This is shown through the connection the narrator and the focalizer have to each other, as the reader frequently has to ask himself whether this part of the story is narrated through Arturo’s eyes or if the story is narrated completely unbiased from an external viewpoint. With Arturo as the focalizer, the reader is left with a feeling that the narrator approximates the Arturo character, passing judgments on his father, thus revealing the character’s sentiments toward Svevo. Whereas perspective refers to what viewpoint the events are narrated from, voice refers to the expression by which the events are narrated, namely with what sentiments the reader is presented to the events (Chatman 153). This can be illustrated by a few passages in the novel where the narrator comments on Svevo’s character: “Was he a millionaire? He might have been, if he had married the right kind of woman. Heh: he was too stupid, though” (15). This passage illustrates not the narrator’s thoughts of Svevo, but rather the chapter’s focalizer, Svevo, lamenting his own choices in life and commenting on his own incapability to succeed.

Perhaps most indicative of the reader being guided in how to perceive Svevo is the passage where the narrator seemingly enters into the mind of Maria, lamenting Svevo’s adultery and escape from the family: “You are a beast, you have hurt me and I shall not rest until I have hurt you. [...] I hope you die. You will never touch me again. I hate you, God what have you done to me, my husband, I hate you so” (127). This passage illustrates not the exact thoughts of Maria, as the reader is never granted access to them, but rather through narrative voice approximates Arturo’s loathing of his father and is then his comment on how

badly Svevo hurt his mother by having another woman instead of her. Based on the focalizers in the story, and the story's central focus of attention being Svevo and Arturo, the reader gathers that Maria's thoughts here can be attributed to denote Arturo's sentiments toward his father and how Arturo perceives Maria's feelings. Through choice of focalizer, the author is able to guide the reader's interpretation of the events in the novel. This is done by Arturo being the character the reader sympathizes with. Consequently, events like these shape the reader's understanding of the characters' attitudes in the novel and contribute toward a thoroughly developed character.

In the same vein of indirectly judging his father, the problem of Arturo's age changing in the first chapter can be explained by Fante's choice of focalizer. Over the course of thirteen pages, Arturo is at first fourteen years old, then twelve, and then fourteen again. This suggests that the narrator, who in this chapter has Svevo as the focalizer in the story, is trying to imply that Svevo does not know his children very well. This illustrates well how narrative theory can reveal much about character. Catherine Kordich, however, wrongfully assumes that the changes in age should be attributed to inattentiveness from Fante (138). Such an interpretation of the changes in age reduces the importance of the narrative tools of focalization.

In the novel's penultimate chapter, the narrator and the focalizer seem to collapse into one entity, leaving the reader uncertain of who narrates whose events, thoughts and ideas – a clever device utilized by the author in underlining the ambiguity of who is really telling the story. Upon a third-person recollection of a past event Arturo went through, the narrator suddenly changes the third-person pronoun “he” to “my” when having Arturo recall a beating he once received from Svevo (190). Furthermore, a scene a few pages later depicts Arturo leaving the dinner table mourning the death of his crush, Rosa Pinelli, from pneumonia: “He wanted to be alone so he could let go and release the constriction on his chest, because she hated me and I made her shiver, but his mother wouldn't let him” (197). This passage alternates narrators mid-sentence, from the external to Arturo himself, narrating one of his biggest defeats when finally acknowledging that Rosa did not approve of him. Both these examples display a collapse of the narrator and the focalizer into one voice, and contribute to a reading of Arturo Bandini as a vivid character, not just present in the external narrator's recollection of the events, but as a living character who almost seems to leap out from the pages and cry out to the reader his inner feelings.

Based on dialogue and the character's acts, the reader is able to infer certain characteristics of Arturo, and consequently establish an image of him. The following section

deals with Arturo Bandini as he is presented to the reader in the novel, looking at traits and how he is constructed through the use of direct definition and indirect presentation. This section will primarily rely on Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's concepts of inferring character.

The first encounter the reader has with Arturo is on the fourth page of the novel, preceded by a thorough presentation of his father's troubles and aspirations, along with establishing the setting and the social conditions of the Bandini family. Interestingly, this encounter is not very descriptive of Arturo himself, as we so far cannot distinguish Arturo as one of the novel's main characters. He is in this passage reduced to a tool for illustrating Svevo's resentment of winter, poverty and, above all, family. However, the encounter does suggest the propelling forces of the story and the dynamic relationship between him and his father: "[Svevo] had a son named Arturo, and Arturo was fourteen years old and owned a sled. As he turned into the yard of his house that was not paid for, his feet suddenly raced for the tops of the trees, and he was lying on his back, and Arturo's sled was still in motion. [...] That Arturo. That little bastard!" (8). This first meeting with Arturo in the discourse is important for the understanding of the rest of the text, and also eloquently communicated to the reader through Svevo's unambiguous sentiments toward his son. Clearly, the father is impatient with his unemployment, and his frustration affects those closest to him. This renders those closest to him, especially Arturo, at odds with his father, as we shall see, throughout the novel. It also forms the foundation of how the reader is to interpret Arturo's character, and also be on his side against the antagonizing features of his father, who serves as the catalyst for Arturo's growth throughout the novel.

In terms of being suggestive of Arturo's character is the importance of character names. Assigning characters names that can have a symbolical meaning is a device well-known in literature. Name as a character trait is what Rimmon-Kenan calls a reinforcement of characterization, because the "characterizing capacity depends on the prior establishment, by other means, of the traits on which it is based" (67). Jonathan Culpeper argues for the potential significance of names as a tool the writer can exploit to construct character (230). He receives support from Jacob Lothe, who argues that assigning names symbolical meaning can have a characterizing function, but does not need to (82). However, the assigning of symbolical meaning to names of characters is a potential tool that writers can make good use of in their establishing of character, as it suggests for the reader something about his background or his prospective aspirations – or even his flaws. In the case of Arturo Bandini, name is highly suggestive of his future aspirations, his background and also his mentality.

Arturo's name first and foremost connotes national identity, and is suggestive of his Italian heritage. Consequently, the name succeeds in estranging him from the society in which he struggles to find his place. However, the name is also suggestive of other characteristics that we may infer on the background of his name. Rimmon-Kenan argues the visual elements of the name as something that could be used to infer character (68). Rounded vowels are suggestive of the roundness of a character, primarily physically, but perhaps also narratively as in a round character, and not a flat one. Also, the name Bandini does resemble the Italian noun "bambino," meaning child or infant, which is true for Arturo, as he is a child and not mature enough to understand the gravity of his actions or the bigger issues at stake in the family. One example of this is when Arturo contemplates the meaning of adultery, thinking that it has to do with bank robbery: "to him adultery always has had something to do with bank robbery" (89). However, these are elements that are only suggestive of a character's traits and should not be accepted without qualification from characterization in the discourse.

On the other hand, these symbolic inferences from a name go to show the vast potential in naming as a tool at the disposal of the author, and as an element that can enable a reader to better understand or at least have a starting point from which to grasp the meaning of the character. Due to the relevance of the name in light of *The Road to Los Angeles*, Arturo's name will be discussed more in-depth in the next chapter.

The novel's second mention of Arturo provides an excellent depiction of who he later will develop into – a boaster, daydreamer and storyteller: "Arturo, he knew plenty. He was telling [his two brothers] now what he knew, the words coming from his mouth in hot white vapor in the cold room. He knew plenty. He had seen plenty. He knew plenty. You guys don't know what I saw. She was sitting on the porch steps. I was about this far from her, I saw plenty" (19). This paragraph both defines Arturo as a know-it-all who thrives in the spotlight, boasting his latest achievements to his brothers, but also indirectly presents him to the reader as a slightly unlikable character with a large interest in himself, who might not be trusted. However, as Rimmon-Kenan points out, "these kinds of action can (but need not) be endowed with a symbolic dimension" (62), meaning that the reader is now to suspect the character to be unlikable, but not to expect him to behave that way again until he reaffirms the suspicion by acting in an unlikable manner again. Only then will the action have a symbolic meaning. The suspicion of how a character is based on his actions, forms the foundation of how the reader interprets the character, and is thus a tool which the author should use to his advantage to influence the reader's impression of character.

Whether an action performed by a character should be inferred as a character trait, arguably depends on the frequency of the action. Based on the discussion between Seymour Chatman, Rimmon-Kenan and Mary Doyle Springer from the introduction, on traits and how traits should be inferred from actions, there is reason to investigate the habitual actions performed by the character. Chatman's distinction of a trait as a relatively stable personal quality is challenged by Rimmon-Kenan's division of actions as habitual or non-habitual (Chatman 126). Contrasting the argument made above on not to infer characteristics based on one-time actions, Rimmon-Kenan also argues that actions performed by the character only once, carry more impact on the reader as a character trait than if the action performed is habitual (61). This means that a non-habitual action may be interpreted as a dynamic aspect of the character, rendering him as a round character, and often suggesting a turning point in the story. Also, non-habitual actions tend to carry more meaning for the reader, because he suspects that the author must have chosen to implement this one-time action for a reason. In the introduction, I quoted Springer on the assertion that the acts characters perform ought not to be random, and that literary characters are habitual creatures whose acts exhibit a pattern that is characteristic and true to their traits (28). That their acts should not be presented at random is a choice made by the author, but the acts should be implemented in the discourse in order to establish a character trait. Thus, a reading of any text will have the reader looking for acts performed by the character and looking for ways to connect the acts to a relatively stable personal quality, meaning that having the character performing acts at random will be redundant to the story if it does not have a greater significance to the shaping of the character.

One of the first direct definitions the reader has of Arturo is a physical description of him as a miniature of his father, who has so far been presented thoroughly. The reader knows Svevo's appearance as a short, but strong, handsome man. However, Arturo's gentle comparison to this fine man is distorted through the depiction of his face as a freckled one: "Freckles swarmed over his face like ants over a piece of cake" (21). This abrupt depiction of Arturo's shortcomings compared to his father is what Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes as disguised direct definition (66), meaning that the external traits of a character may have a metonymical meaning for his character traits, and that they should be taken into consideration when the reader shapes his understanding of the character. However, as Rimmon-Kenan rightly points out, aspects of external appearance that are out of the character's control, such as freckles, do not necessarily relate to a character's traits. Still, external appearance may have a symbolical meaning for the character. In Arturo's case, his freckles prove to be a recurring

object of irritation for him and a symbol of everything that is wrong with him: they separate him from the clean features of the typical American boy, and underline the gap that lies between him and his father, thus emphasizing the conflict of the story. Through effective use of direct presentation of character, Fante is able to comprise the challenges facing Arturo in a few words. For Arturo, freckles symbolize him being different from the ideal, clean faces. If he is not like an ideal and mainstream American, Arturo wishes for it: “His face was freckled, but he wanted it to be clear” (23). This underlines the feeling of being different in society and at the same time the difference reminds him of his Italian heritage.

However, family is not the only symbol that marks Arturo’s resistance to his heritage. Looming large is Catholicism, with which every young Italian is brought up and which Arturo also must live in fear of. Upon one of the nuns at the Catholic school’s request, Arturo stops by the church on his way home to say a prayer for his mother. At the same time as he enters, the conflicting ideas of Italian heritage, family, church, American identity and adolescent curiosity intertwines in Arturo’s mind as he thinks of Rosa Pinelli in a manner considered sinful by the catechism: “He was thinking of Rosa evilly, [...] something he had never thought of before in his whole life, and he was gasping not only at the horror of his soul in the sight of God, but at the startling ecstasy of this new thought. [...] He might die for this: God might strike him dead instantly” (43). This God-fearing sensation is repeated in the following chapter, after Arturo has killed one of the family chickens in order to supply dinner for the family. Arturo finds the murder of the chicken sinful and an offense to God’s words, as he launches into forty-five Hail Marys and nineteen Our Fathers in order to redeem his sin: ““Oh Virgin Mary, give me a break! I didn’t mean it! I swear to God I don’t know why I done it!”” (51). These events indirectly characterize Arturo as too young to understand religious issues, but also suggest that he is afraid of ever making the wrong decisions that sometime in the future might make him pay. His constant worrying over what constitutes a sin, or more importantly, what constitutes a mortal sin, illustrates his ignorance of his heritage, and also suggests his lack of understanding of Catholicism: “Damn was a sinful word; possibly not a mortal sin; probably only a venial sin, but a sin for all that” (53).

Indicative of character traits that are important in the analysis of Arturo Bandini are the character’s thoughts as they are represented in the discourse. Chatman labels thoughts as unspoken speech, which usually is accompanied by quotation marks and tags such as “he thought” (182). However, these thoughts are few in the novel; Fante places more emphasis on a more vivid mode of relaying a character’s thought process. Such a mode Chatman identifies

as direct free thought, or interior monologue (182), which removes the quotation marks and tags and thus produces a more coherent form of communication from the character, uninterrupted by intervention in the text from the narrator. The interior monologue enables the reader to get closer to the thoughts and personality of the character, and is often employed in Fante's writing to relay Arturo's thoughts and wishes.

Arturo's one true love and only ray of light in a rather dreary and meager life is Rosa Pinelli. Through interior monologue, the reader is able to understand his secret feelings for this girl, and also just how secret his love for her is, as it is evident that no one except him believes that they are a couple. In a passage about his vision of their future together, the reader is granted access to the deeper parts of his mind. In this passage he dreams not only of being with her physically, but also about how she adores his achievements and physical traits, and also how he has distanced himself from his weighty Italian heritage. The passage sets off with him acknowledging that the love he feels for her is not reciprocal:

I know you hate me, Rosa. But I love you, Rosa. I love you and some day you'll see me playing center field for the New York Yanks, Rosa. I'll be out there in center field, Honey, and you'll be my girl, sitting in a box seat off third base, and I'll come in, and it'll be the last half of the ninth, and the Yanks'll be three runs behind. But don't you worry, Rosa! I'll get up there with three men on base, and I'll look at you, and you'll throw me a kiss, and I'll bust that old apple right over the center field wall. I'll make history, Honey. You kiss me and I'll make history! [...] I won't have any freckles then, either, Rosa. They'll be gone – they always leave when you grow up. [...] I'll change my name too, Rosa. They'll call me Banning, the Banning Bambino; Art, the Battering Bandit... (36-37)

The interior monologue is used here to convey to the reader a sense of who Arturo really is when he finds himself alone with his thoughts, and consequently is most true to himself. From this passage the reader is able to infer through indirect presentation how the character envisions himself and his future, but also how strong resentment he feels toward his heritage and his family. The freckles symbolize Arturo's differentness from his view of the ideal, and consequently remind him of his heritage. The freckles are something young Arturo desperately hopes will go away as he grows older, which in reality is an impossibility and nothing but a daydream. Further, Arturo is able to underline his resentment of heritage and family through the changing of his name into the more Americanized Art Banning. However, the inclination to imagine himself as a star and a center of attention is something that repeats

itself throughout the novel. Arturo constantly needs to remind himself of who he is not, almost bordering on narcissism, but a pathetic version of it, because he knows deep down that he cannot change who he is. Melissa Ryan argues the importance of Arturo's imaginative self as a means for him both to escape reality, but more importantly, as a means for him to visualize himself as an American "through imaginative acts of taking possession" (187-88). Arturo's acts of possession are his conquests both on the baseball pitch and as a man conquering a woman through heroic acts. Ryan's argument is to compare Arturo's imaginative acts of conquest to the acts of conquering the land on which much of American identity is based, and apply this analogy to Arturo in his search for American identity. Fante's use of interior monologue to relay Arturo's imagination establishes a relationship between the reader and the characters, which ultimately makes Arturo a character the reader cannot help but sympathize with. It is this Chatman identifies as the effect of interior monologue, that it enables the reader a breathing space from the narrator, allowing for a brief moment to step into the mind of one of his characters (185). In this glimpse of the inner feelings of the character, the reader comes closer to the character and develops an even deeper understanding of the character and his personality.

Learning that his monologue has been whispered out loud in class, Arturo rages quietly in his mind as his classmates laugh at him. However, Rosa's laugh hits him hardest, and he falls into a fit, calling her racist remarks in his mind, as he envisions how poor and lowbred her family is, comparing his father to her father, before he swears his vengeance on everyone who makes fun of him (37). According to Culpeper, the reader "rarely gain[s] undistorted information about other people through self-presentation" (168). The self-presentation he mentions in his book deals with how a person presents himself to other people, but can be applied to the interior monologue, which is a place of opening up the character for the reader to shape his opinion of him. Arturo's interior monologues help the reader infer his characteristics, and become one of the most important narrative elements in the discourse on how the reader perceives him. This way, the monologue illustrated above and Arturo's sudden mood swings depict a frustrated young man, whose acts follow only the impulses of emotion, and who above all else desires acceptance in a society he feels estranged from.

Fante makes excellent use of the interior monologue in order to portray his character's inner feelings and attitudes toward his social environment. Keeping Ryan's argument about Arturo's imaginative acts of escaping reality in mind, a passage in the novel depicting

Arturo's admiration for the "celluloid drug" (60) of the movies, makes Arturo envision himself as the male lead in the movie and Rosa as his woman. This is reminiscent of Alison Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory, where being able to empathize with and share the experiences you are being relayed is considered one of the prime sources for memory development in the human mind (2). One example of a prosthetic memory is going to the movies, something which enables you to have a prosthetic memory of the events that unfold on the screen, a memory that is not your own, but acts like your own because you lived through it with the characters on the screen. Arturo's love for the movies and his ability to identify with the characters emphasize the influence American values have on Arturo, and further strengthens his anti-Italianism, while also symbolizing his seizing of prosthetic memories through a very American medium.

In order to maintain his American ideas, Arturo at one point lashes out through interior monologue at his father's uncivilized behavior at breakfast:

What kind of people were these wops? Look at his father, there. Look at him smashing eggs with his fork to show how angry he was. Look at the egg yellow on his father's chin! And on his moustache. Oh sure, he was a dago wop, so he had to have a moustache, but did he have to pour those eggs through his ears? Couldn't he find his mouth? Oh God, these Italians! (26)

Comparing his father's behavior to their neighboring family, the Moreys, Arturo sees his whole worldview in the two houses standing next to one another: "you never heard a peep out of them, never; quiet, American people. But his father wasn't satisfied with being an Italian, he had to be a noisy Italian" (25). Stefano Luconi acknowledges the tug and pull within Arturo's consciousness, arguing that the American influence represented by the movies has a greater effect on Arturo than does his parents' influence, so that he eventually vents his rage not only toward his parents, but also toward other Italian Americans, as illustrated by the quote above (57). Regardless, Arturo's attitude toward Italians and their values signify his desire to distance himself from that world. Luconi also views Arturo's derogatory remarks about his mother as a further strengthening of his anti-Italian attitudes (57). Especially the passage where Arturo contrasts his mother to the mothers of his schoolmates supports this argument: "Why was his mother so unlike other mothers? [...] Jack Hawley's mother excited him" (24). Continuing his tirade, he describes a moment when he stared from the back porch at Carl Molla's mom's hips while she was sweeping the floor, reminding him that "his mother

did not excite him [and that this] made him hate her secretly” (24). These instances of setting himself apart from anything Italian marks Arturo’s desires for American values, but that desire arguably does not come from movies especially, but rather from a heart-felt eagerness to become accepted in the society. Going to the movies, then, nourishes this desire and feeds Arturo’s lust for becoming American.

The deepest blows Arturo take to his pride deal with his interactions with Rosa. Rosa is neither ethnically American nor does she come from a wealthy upper-class family. However, due to the conquering of land and taking possession, which Arturo imagines is his way of achieving American identity, in Arturo’s mind winning Rosa Pinelli over is a key to American identity. Consequently, there is no wonder, then, that upon receiving a letter from Rosa’s friend, Gertie, stating that Rosa hates him for his heritage, poverty and hygiene, and that Rosa has told her that Arturo makes her shiver because he is “so terrible” (195), Arturo spirals into the abyss of his identity crisis. To this, Gardaphe insists that “[t]he letter confirms [Arturo’s] fears of not being accepted as an American” (“Fantasia” 51). The hammer falls hardest when Arturo is actually confronted by Rosa, who suspects him of having given her stolen property, a cameo that belongs to his mother. Rosa states that she cannot accept stolen property, but Arturo persistently denies the origins of the cameo, screaming “I *didn’t* steal!” while charging toward her, pushing her into the snow (125). “I’m *not* a thief,” Arturo reaffirms before sprinting away and tossing the cameo over a rooftop (125). This event does not characterize Arturo as a liar, although that is what he is doing, but lying is not something he does habitually. Rather, this event represents Arturo as misguided, perhaps, but first and foremost sympathetic, as the reader cannot help but feel sorry for him in his aspirations. To the reader, the depiction of Arturo as sympathetic is perhaps the most covering adjective of his traits. This point has been argued by Kordich in her book about John Fante’s novels, which does not dedicate much space to the characterization of Arturo, but still offers a succinct interpretation of his actions. She calls him “sympathetic because his intentions are usually kind” (28). However, it should be underlined that this is an impression only the reader has of Arturo, as he cannot help but feel pity for the young boy. The characters in the story do not understand his actions, and stealing and lying in order to help himself leaves Arturo at odds with his peers and family. Although Arturo’s actions are spiteful, vengeful and at times even harmful to those around him, he still manages to have a superior thought behind it all which the reader can understand, but not the characters in the book. However, it is in the performing of the actions, and the carrying out of his plans that he fails so miserably.

Roundness implies a character who has more than one quality and who develops throughout the story (Rimmon-Kenan 40). Whereas the foregoing section of this chapter has established external appearance, personality and Arturo's struggles, this part will explore the character's development as he tries to overcome the story's central conflict.

At the early stages of the story, the Bandini family receives a letter from Maria's mother, who wishes to pay her daughter's family a visit, or rather, come and make sure that the family is functioning and taking care of itself. Svevo resents this visit, and leaves to find work, cursing both the family and winter. Maria is left with her three sons and enters into a mild depression throughout his absence. However, it is when his father bolts that Arturo finds his place in the sun and sees this as his opportunity to take on the role of the man in the house. During Svevo's absence, which lasts the rest of the story, Arturo spirals into something reminiscent of an Oedipal conflict. Finding his mother in the coal shed, crying, Arturo becomes infuriated by her intrusion into this place, remembering once when he had committed "a boy-sin" on the same spot on which she sat (107). He then remembers his fascination with an old picture he once saw of her: "a beauty of a girl standing under the apple tree in Grandma Toscana's backyard. Oh Mamma, to kiss you then!" (112). He continues his admiration saying that "here was the mother he had always dreamed about [...]" (113). However, his obsession with his mother is forgotten when he discovers that it is a girl his own age, Rosa, he desires, not his mother. This is shown when Arturo finds and steals his mother's cameo sitting next to the old picture of her, intending to give it to Rosa. The inscription reads: "For Maria, married one year today. Svevo" (113). Richard Collins maintains that this event is a turning point in Arturo's understanding of his role in the family, and declares the theft as the resolution of the Oedipal conflict: "By throwing his mother over for Rosa, he takes on his father's role in courtship, but the object of his desire is no longer his mother" (103). Based on the resolution of an Oedipal conflict that has not taken up much space in the discourse, but apparently has had a hold on Arturo for a long time, the reader is able to infer a new direction for the novel: Arturo has now rid himself of much of his antagonistic attitudes toward his father, and is now, for the first time, aware of the similarities between him and Svevo, and is thus able to understand and relate to his father better. This event marks a shift in the novel's conflict, and Arturo's aim now is to help his family out of the predicament they find themselves in and restore order in the household. Collins argues that in order to do this, Arturo needs to bring his father home by "confronting him on his own turf" (104), which is

his work place and his temporary housing at the Imperial Poolhall, and reminding him of his responsibilities as a father.

This change in Arturo's mentality toward his family is one element that contributes to the roundness of the character. Chatman uses a comparison to real life characters in his distinction of roundness: "Like real-life friends and enemies it is hard to describe what [round characters] are exactly like" (132). Arturo's newfound way of stabilizing a family is an unpredictable change in his character, and an epiphany for him personally. The reader is surprised by round characters as they are unpredictable, and Arturo is no exception in this case, giving the reader an impression of his ability to surprise and show off new traits. However, Arturo's realization has not been fully completed, as his conflict with feelings of exclusion from American society has not found its resolution yet.

During Svevo's absence, Maria is depicted as an omniscient creature, knowing every one of his actions. The longer he stays away, the more she finds out. The reader can deduce this as her knowing her husband very well. The young Arturo knows this, but still tries to hide from her what she already knows. One brutal scene depicts Arturo and his younger brother, Frederico, as they accidentally witness their father and one of the town's wealthiest women, Effie Hildegarde, drive by in the same car. Arturo, remarking on what an achievement it is for his father to have found himself such a dame, identifies himself with his father in the quest for finding a woman (96). Having better understood his father's absence, Arturo tries to shield his mother from Svevo's acts outside the home, as she is convinced that he is with another woman. August, on the other hand, is determined to let his mother know what he and his brother saw, but Arturo reacts violently, giving him one last chance to avoid a beating: "Promise not to tell or I'll knock your face in" (99). Blood pouring from August's face as he adamantly rejects Arturo's ultimatum, Arturo deals one final blow to keep his brother from talking, as he tells him that he will tell the whole school that August pees in bed (101). Finally, August agrees to his brother's demands. This event is characteristic of Arturo's roundness as a character, as the reader is surprised by Arturo's choice in shielding his mother from his father's adultery, as the events before have depicted a father and son in stark opposition to each other, where Arturo would have liked nothing better than to antagonize his father further. Arturo now feels that he can relate more to his father, finding himself together with him in the same project of finding a female. Adding to the importance of this event is the fact that his father has found an American woman, doubling Arturo's interest in keeping his father's whereabouts a secret.

However, it is not until the final scene of the novel that Arturo has his greatest epiphany and experiences his greatest recognition and inclusion in American society. Learning that he needs to bring his father home to his family in order for them to lead a life with American values, Arturo shows up at Hildegarde's house, ordering his father home. The situation goes awry, as Hildegarde shouts at Arturo for not leaving her property: "You peasants! [...] You foreigners! You're all alike, you and your dogs and all of you" (213). To this, Svevo reacts firmly in defense of his son: "Mrs. Hildegarde, [...] [t]hat's my boy. You can't talk to him like that. That boy's an American. He is no foreigner" (213). It is in this scene that Arturo has his great release from his self-made prison of inferiority and exclusion from American society. Uttering these words, Svevo, unaware of his powers, gives Arturo what he has desired all winter: recognition from his father and being considered an American. "That boy's an American" rings true in Arturo's ears only when the sentence comes from the mouth of his father. This is evocative of felicity conditions, where only Svevo has the authority to affirm Arturo's social adherence to American society.

Culpeper notes that felicity conditions cannot be met unless the speaker has the authority to grant those conditions (122). Just like a priest may baptize a child through his authority, Arturo's father displays the authority to grant his son an American identity. This event marks the end of the story, as spring is now approaching, and Arturo has developed into an American, as was his wish at the start of the story. Supporting this argument is Donald Weber's essay on Fante's Italian heritage, arguing the symbolism in the final scene of the novel: "Arturo's deepest if perhaps guilty wish for a new world affiliation at last comes true," as Arturo is baptized by his father "in the filio-political terms [he] has long desired" ("Oh God" 69). However, other critics of Fante have read this event as an important event not so much for Arturo, but rather for his father, who has been living with the wealthy Hildegarde during much of his holiday escape from the Bandinis. Rocco Marinaccio argues that Hildegarde embodies "the depth of America's loathing of the Italian American" and in being humiliated by her, "Svevo sees his quest to achieve an American identity collapse [...] in the eyes of the gate-keeping WASP establishment" (62). This reading focuses on the Svevo character, and reduces Arturo to a supporting character who is there to help Svevo's development. This is not an entirely wrong interpretation of the event, but it does little for Arturo, as it leaves him in the same condition as when we first met him, without achieving his long-desired American identity. Interestingly, the conclusion of *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* illustrates the last encounter the reader has with Arturo's father throughout the series,

suggestive of the fatherly absence in Arturo's life, and Fante's final "definitive judgment on Svevo Bandini" (Marinaccio 63). On the other hand, this event illustrates how careful an immigrant should weigh his actions in order to adjust to the new world, as the same event leaves one falling out of society and the other being accepted. Thus Svevo's failure to achieve an American identity enables his son to finally regard himself as an American.

Chapter Three: *The Road to Los Angeles*

The foregoing chapter focused on the characteristics of Arturo Bandini and gave an adequate description of his childhood's hopes and challenges through his traits and the narrative techniques employed in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*. In the same vein, this chapter will continue the characterization of Arturo, but with an older version of him under the looking glass in *The Road to Los Angeles*. As mentioned in the introduction and by Richard Collins (18-19), Fante freely transforms Arturo from the chronologically preceding novels. *The Road to Los Angeles* was written before *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, but was published posthumously. This means that *The Road to Los Angeles* was the first of the two to be written, but deals with an adolescent Arturo. *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* was written later, but deals with the young boy version of Arturo. However, as this chapter will show, traits combine to make the character coherent and relatable to *The Road to Los Angeles*.

Whereas the preceding chapter characterized the boy Arturo and his childhood, this chapter will characterize a more adult, independent, at least to his own mind, and more goal-oriented Arturo. He has moved with his family from Rocklin, suggesting the shift in the character's mood, and a new start. Arguably, this chapter will illustrate a contrast to the family-oriented Arturo, introducing the reader to a selfish character with only his own well-being in focus. Based on these elements that separate Arturo in both novels, Fante illustrates different aspects of the character, combining to create a well-developed and coherent protagonist that makes for interesting interpretations. *The Road to Los Angeles* also differs significantly in the choice of narration. Whereas the events in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* are narrated through a third-person narrative perspective, *The Road to Los Angeles* is a first-person, extradiegetic recollection of events. In order to give the reader a sense of how the novel is narrated, this chapter will first discuss the importance of the narrative perspective and how it affects the reader's comprehension of Arturo. Subsequently, a thorough analysis of the character based on his actions will be offered, and critical readings of the character will be discussed throughout.

This thesis has already established that the narrative perspective of *The Road to Los Angeles* is first-person, extradiegetic. As the narrator in *The Road to Los Angeles* is the protagonist himself, Arturo Bandini, the narrator is homodiegetic, a part of the story. Gérard Genette labels narrators who participate in the story *homodiegetic* and narrators who do not

participate in the story *heterodiegetic* (244-45). The importance of distinguishing between these two types of narrators relates to their participation in the story and where their interests lie. This means that a homodiegetic narrator should be met with some skepticism, as he recounts the events he participates in himself. Had the events been relayed by a heterodiegetic narrator, the reader would automatically assume that this narrator has more validity to his observations, meaning that the reader would trust him more to tell the truth. Supporting this view of distrust further is the labeling in the introduction of the narrator in *The Road to Los Angeles* as an autodiegetic narrator, a hero who narrates his own story (Genette 245). This brings us into the field of reliability, which the thesis will deal with in relation to *The Road to Los Angeles* later in this section.

Furthermore, in the novel, Arturo recounts his experiences to the reader primarily through his own first-person recollections of the events, but largely ventures into direct and indirect speech to report his dialogues with other characters. All homodiegetic narrators are focalizers, narrating through “some prism or perspective” (Rimmon-Kenan 3). Arturo narrates his memories from a place in time outside the story. Rimmon-Kenan calls this relationship between narration and story *ulterior narration* (90). Moreover, the narration in *The Road to Los Angeles* fits Genette’s category of internal focalization, where the narrator says only what a given character knows (189).

However, the first-person narrator frequently switches to a third-person point of view, viewing himself from outside himself in order to illustrate how other people might regard his actions. This type of narration is on a level above the world of the story, the diegesis. One passage among many, toward the end of the novel, describes Arturo lamenting how people might see him:

A pathetic case, sir. Once he was a good Catholic kid. He went to church and all that sort of thing. Was very devoted, sir. A model boy. Educated by the nuns, a fine young chap once. Now a pathetic case, sir. Very touching. Suddenly he changed. Yeah. Something happened to the guy. He started off on the wrong foot after his old man died, and look what happened. (391)

The effect Arturo here seeks to achieve is ambiguous, as it might suggest that he is insecure and uncertain about his life, but also that his life must be worth recounting in some future text. Regardless, these third-person thoughts he has of himself further complicate the character and make for interesting interpretations.

However, the effect Fante achieves by having Arturo view himself in the third-person is to let the reader gain even more insight into the character's mind, as Arturo shows his most uncertain and confused state. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan supports this effect, as she underlines the effect such narrators have on the readers, being able to relate the "characters' innermost thoughts and feelings" (96). These third-person accounts occur more frequently toward the end of the novel, arguably due to the novel's build-up of the character. However, in such third-person thoughts Arturo only finds himself pondering escapist dreams, not coming to terms with his real life obligations, which ought to occupy most of his waking hours.

In the previous chapter, much emphasis was put on the interior monologue. However, in *The Road to Los Angeles*, the reader's attention should be brought to the use of a similar tool: stream of consciousness. Whereas an interior monologue removes the quotation marks and tags, stream of consciousness presents syntax at its closest to the human thought process. This does not necessarily require correct orthography, and approximates a "random ordering of thoughts and impressions" (Chatman 188). Frequently, Arturo recounts his achievements and social standing in the form of something approximating a stream of consciousness. Right before being accused of theft by his uncle, Frank, Arturo affirms his stature and importance through a long passage of narcissistic and self-reassuring thoughts (249-250). However, this passage has correct orthography and follows a somewhat logical train of thought, meaning that it is not a complete stream of consciousness, but rather free direct discourse. On the other hand, due to the disarray of logical and coherent thinking in the passage, it gives the reader associations to stream of consciousness, and consequently labels the narrator as not only a daydreamer with a wild imagination, but also as a character with grand delusions who is losing his grip on reality. Seen this way, the free direct discourse in the novel resembles a stream of consciousness and makes the reader infer traits that are characteristic of Arturo.

Whereas the narrative perspective in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* is third-person, the depictions and definitions of the characters in *The Road to Los Angeles* are, due to the shift in perspective, seen solely through the eyes of the focalizer, Arturo. This leaves the reader at odds with the depictions of Arturo, as he is unsure whether they are trustworthy or not, coming from the mouth of Bandini himself. Furthermore, the reader cannot really ever be sure whether the events and the dialogue are reported accurately, or if they have even happened at all. The thesis will illustrate these challenges in relation to reliability of the narrator.

Whereas the direct definitions of Arturo in the previous chapter carry more elements of truthfulness due to narrative perspective, the protagonist in *The Road to Los Angeles*

describes himself to the reader through his own narrative first-person perspective. However, these depictions rarely appear as direct definitions of him, but occur as indirect presentations through acts and dialogue. Interestingly, it is from the characters in opposition to Arturo in the novel, his mother and sister, Mona, that the reader learns the most accurate depictions of Arturo. This leads an observant reader to recognize their indirect presentations of him as more truthful: “You’re nothing but a boy who’s read too many books” (227). This statement will come to characterize Arturo effectively throughout the novel, providing a better presentation of his personality than he could have provided himself.

In first-person narratives, the reader must question whether or not he believes the statements coming from the narrator to be true or not – this is the question of reliability. The heterodiegetic narrator is more liable to provide a reliable account of events and characters than a homodiegetic one. However, the decisive factor in reliability is the interest the narrator has in the story he narrates. Out of three indicators Jacob Lothe puts forth that might suggest a narrator’s unreliability, one applies to the narrator in *The Road to Los Angeles*: “The narrator has a strong personal involvement (in a way that makes his narrative presentation and evaluation strikingly subjective)” (26). This means that with a narrator who has a strong involvement in the story, the reader ought not to blindly trust the narrator’s words. With Arturo Bandini narrating his own life, the reader knows early on to suspect the events to be colored by a questionable value-scheme (Rimmon-Kenan 102). Rimmon-Kenan argues the fact that “a young narrator would be a clear case of limited knowledge (and understanding)” (101), which further strengthens the suspicion of Arturo as an unreliable narrator of the story. He is too young to appreciate what is right in front of him, too ambitious for his own good, and a daydreamer who does not appreciate what he already has. His impression of how to lead a life stems from his too vivid imagination and failure to see himself not as the hub of the universe.

The reliability of Arturo is in some cases so questionable that the reader at times is unsure the events he reports have ever happened. The most striking example of this is a dialogue between Arturo and his uncle, where Arturo says the oddest things to him when being confronted with stealing a ten dollar bill from his employer, Romero. These utterances would unquestionably require a response of some sort from the uncle, but instead Frank speaks as if they had never been uttered:

He said, 'look here, you little sonofabitch; I didn't know you were a thief too. I knew you were lazy, but by God I didn't know you were a thieving little thief.' I said, 'I'm not a sonofabitch, either.'

'I talked to Romero,' he said. 'I know what you did.'

'I warn you,' I said. 'In no uncertain terms I warn you to desist from calling me a sonofabitch again.'

'You stole ten dollars from Romero.'

'Your presumption is colossal, unvaunted. I fail to see why you permit yourself the liberty of insulting me by calling me a sonofabitch.'

He said, 'Stealing from your employer! That's a fine thing.'

'I tell you again, and with the utmost candor that, despite your seniority and our blood-relationship, I positively forbid you to use such opprobious [sic] names as a sonofabitch in reference to me.'

'A loafer and a thief for a nephew! It's disgusting.' (251)

From this dialogue the reader is able to infer the possibility that the narrator is only giving the impression of having spoken the lines he supposedly has uttered. The reader suspects that Arturo is only thinking the lines silently in his mind, while his uncle gives him a talking to in the form of a monologue. With a more objective narrator, the event might have been narrated differently, with Arturo being told off, and not answering. With the first-person perspective, on the other hand, Arturo is able to present himself as a bold person trying, at least, to stand up for himself. However, just minutes later, after Uncle Frank has left, the mother walks in on Arturo, saying: "You look like you've been crying" (254). This further strengthens the suspicion that Arturo did not riposte in the manner he recounts, but rather sat there weeping when his uncle told him off. Still, the effect is the same, with the reader laughing at Arturo, whether he said those lines or not.

Mary Doyle Springer argues the significance and potential of the first-person point of view. At novella length "first-person narration may well be a good means for accumulating with intensity the centrality of a character" (163). With the third-person point of view in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, the narrator is not able to pierce the minds of the characters as intensively as with the first-person homodiegetic narrator. However, that is not to say that we do not get to know the character's innermost thoughts and feelings with that point of view, but to a greater extent the first-person narration lets the reader feel and experience with more effect the struggles of the character. Opting for the events being narrated through Arturo's eyes this time, Fante allows the reader to experience and perhaps even share more of the emotions and feelings displayed by Arturo. With this point of view the character's traits come across very vividly and give the reader a good opportunity to be empathic with the character.

Springer goes further by suggesting that in first-person novels, the characters may seem to struggle toward an external goal in the story – her example being the protagonist of *The Aspern Papers*, who seeks an object kept by two women – whereas the real conflict in the story lies within the protagonist himself (163-64). Consequently, “the story is about him, and not about the papers or the women who possess them” (163-64). The first-person point of view, then, might suggest a story where character is more important than plot, and therefore more apt for dealing with studies of character. In this vein, *The Road to Los Angeles* could not have been narrated with the same effect from a third-person point of view. The events need to be seen through Arturo’s eyes in order for the reader to have the same experiences he has. This view enables the reader to reach a higher understanding of his actions, and not write them off as pointless. Had the narrator been a fly on the wall, Arturo’s character would not have come across as outspoken and aggressive, as it does in its first-person version.

Adding to this, Springer notes an odd effect of the first-person narration, which she has taken from to Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: “a prolonged intimate view of a character works against our capacity for judgment” (Booth qtd. in Springer 165). This means that through the first-person narration, the reader is unable to judge the character as he would judge him had he met him in real life. The reader of *The Road to Los Angeles* is likely to sympathize with Arturo throughout the story, and even be on his side, although nearly all events in the book point toward a very unlikable, racist and infantile character. The first-person narration enables this effect, through the intensive centrality of the character. However, it is important to keep in mind that the character only achieves this sympathy from the reader. In the story, on the other hand, he is met with the same judgment as a real life character would in the real world.

Following this argument for the importance of character, there is cause to mention one of the influences on the style in *The Road to Los Angeles*. Norwegian author Knut Hamsun’s novel *Hunger* is probably one of the novels that shares the most similarities to *The Road to Los Angeles*. According to Stephen Cooper, Fante’s work merits a comparison with Hamsun’s (8), and especially the style of *The Road to Los Angeles* is reminiscent of the Norwegian author (157). The similarities between *Hunger* and *The Road to Los Angeles* are easily detected, as both protagonists are hungry for artistic freedom and expression, and both aspire to become renowned novelists, rising from rags to riches. However, it is not the aims of this thesis to conduct a comparative study of the style in these two novels, nor will the similarities between the two authors be dealt with at great length, but it is important to identify the

stylistic effects Fante adopted from Hamsun and how they influence the Arturo we meet in *The Road to Los Angeles*.

Collins is supportive of the argument that *The Road to Los Angeles* does not display a very developed plot or chain of events, and puts emphasis on the fact that the novel is “an episodic elaboration of the picaresque Arturo” (110). He concludes his contemplations about the novel’s theme by stating that “[a]s in any picaresque novel, there is no progress, peripety or resolution, only an abrupt conclusion with a final, curtain-closing departure” (110). Collins here argues the importance of the novel as an exploration of character. It is therefore reasonable to regard *The Road to Los Angeles* as a novel about character and not about plot. Arturo’s character, his development and his ability to communicate and reach out to the reader are the aims of this novel. Further, Collins links the novel to Hamsun’s style of inward exploration (110). Whereas *Hunger* explores the depths of the human mind as it is ravaged by hunger and an existential crisis, *The Road to Los Angeles* depicts the same subjects in a second-generation immigrant family in Wilmington, California – cleverly through the first-person point of view.

Fante was eager to relate the confessional truth to the reader and according to Collins “the point of the autobiographical narrative is to reflect on one’s life with candor and self-conscious earnestness” (28). It is in this vein of confessional truth that Fante recounts the experiences of Arturo, through having Arturo relay his story from the first-person point of view. However, Collins states that the confessional truth Fante speaks of does not really cover his style adequately, and refers to Hamsun’s term “unselfish inwardness” as the most accurate term for Fante’s style in *The Road to Los Angeles*. Unselfish inwardness is a feature of Hamsun’s style, where the author seeks to convey the truthfulness of fiction: “Truth telling does not involve seeing both sides or objectivity; truth telling is unselfish inwardness” (Hamsun qtd. in Collins 126). In other words, the term denotes the brutal honesty and candor with which a first-person narrator can be able to tell his story. Hamsun’s influence on Fante comes across in the style of *The Road to Los Angeles* as a “ruthless exposure of the self and its delusions that connects the inward truth of the teller with that of readers” (Collins 126). Cooper is also aware of the similarities between Hamsun’s and Fante’s protagonists: “Under *Hunger*’s influence, *The Road to Los Angeles* captures the tensile grip of a consciousness pushed to the extremes by poverty, ambition and failure” (134). Fante’s first-person perspective in the novel communicates to the reader the anguish and despair, but more importantly the brutal truth and the consciousness, of his protagonist, Arturo. Through the

intensive and honest storytelling that Fante displays in Arturo's narrative account, the reader is able to infer much more of the characteristic traits that contribute to shape Arturo.

This chapter deals with a different Arturo than the one we met in *Wait Until Spring Bandini*, which primarily dealt with Arturo's upbringing in winter-time Colorado and his struggles to become an American as he envisioned an American to be. *The Road to Los Angeles*, on the other hand, takes the reader to sunny California where the eighteen year old Arturo lives with his mother and sister. His background is thus completely altered, but his Italian heritage and struggles to assimilate still loom large. The following section of this chapter will discuss the character based on the traits the reader is able to infer from the story and events, and also discuss the development of the character throughout the novel.

Whereas Arturo during the story in Colorado struggles greatly to bring balance to the family and keep up the appearance of a normal family life, Arturo Bandini in Wilmington, Los Angeles, struggles greatly to set himself apart from his family. This is straightforwardly shown in the novel's first sentence: "I had a lot of jobs in Los Angeles Harbor because our family was poor and my father was dead" (217). The father, who played a pivotal role in the previous novel, is removed entirely. The denouncement of the father is unsentimental and abrupt, marking Arturo's negative sentiments toward the situation. Furthermore, the inversion of the sentence, making Arturo the syntactic subject, is also indicative of his ability to see himself as the center of attention. The cause and effect here is argued by Ernesto Livorni, who states that Arturo sees it as due to the absence of the father the family is poor, hence Arturo being left to work "a lot of jobs" (97). Consequently, already in the very first sentence, Arturo tells the reader who is the victim in the situation and who the reader should sympathize with. Still, there is room to read the opening sentence as Arturo being a kind provider for his family, a man who has to step up, in the absence of the father, to take care of his kin. However, when reading on this proves to be a misinterpretation.

This type of textual indicator of character is what Rimmon-Kenan labels indirect presentation, where the trait is displayed and exemplified indirectly either through acts, speech, or through the narration, as shown above. However, as Arturo is the protagonist and narrator of the story, the reader should not accept his statements to be true, but look at them with scrutiny and inspection, as Arturo has an interest in what he decides to show and tell. A good example of this is, as the above passage shows, the claim made by Arturo that it is due to the death of his father that he has to work all these jobs.

Indirect presentation is the most frequent type of character indicator in the discourse, and due to the narrator also being the protagonist, the direct definitions of his traits should also be carefully inspected. The only direct definition the reader gets of Arturo is a subjective one – due to Arturo being the one who describes himself. A scene reminiscent of Narcissus staring at his mirrored image in the water describes Arturo’s face:

I stood at the mirror and looked at myself. I loved my own face. I thought I was a very handsome person. I had a good straight nose and a wonderful mouth, with lips redder than a woman’s, for all her paint and whatnot. My eyes were big and clear, my jaw protruded slightly, a strong jaw, a jaw denoting character and self-discipline. Yes, it was a fine face. A man of judgment would have found much in it to interest him. (342)

Interestingly enough, this depiction of himself is in opposition to the depiction of Arturo in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, where he dislikes his looks. This strengthens the reading of Arturo as bursting with self-belief, almost bordering on a delusional image of himself. Rimmon-Kenan rightly asserts that external appearance is a powerful resource in the metonymical relationship with character traits (65). Furthermore, the direct definition is subjective, and the traits specified here are not to be taken for granted, but, still, it is all the reader learns of Arturo’s face. However, “what the character says in a soliloquy is to be taken as sincere, at least within the limits of his own self-knowledge” (Hussey qtd. in Culpeper 169-70). The direct definition is Arturo’s perception of himself, and although the reader might recognize it as faulty, Culpeper stresses that the self-conception is not necessarily correct (170).

Having established that Arturo’s view of the world should not be accepted without further investigation, we can move on with the characterization. The rest of the novel’s first chapter describes Arturo lamenting the various jobs he has had and being ungrateful to his bosses, always trying to show that he is better than them. During the course of these nine pages, the reader is able to infer a few characteristics of Arturo: he is physically weak, being unable to dig a ditch at the same speed as his co-workers; he lies: “‘Boys,’ I said. ‘I’m through. I’ve decided to accept a job with the Harbor Commission’” (217); he is a thief, stealing from his employer the ten dollar bill his Uncle Frank later confronts him with, and also stealing two candy bars from a local diner; he is a racist, telling his boss to “go straight to hell, you Dago fraud!” (221); and also somewhat of a pretentious, know-it-all, pretending to

be better than he is when responding to the owner of the diner, Jim, on how the meat is: “[T]his pabulum is indeed antediluvian.’ Jim asked what I meant [...] ‘The steak,’ I said. ‘It’s archaic, primeval, paleoanthropic, and antique. In short, it is senile and aged’” (223). Whereas, according to Rimmon-Kenan, “[o]ne-time actions tend to evoke the dynamic aspect of the character” (61), habitual actions illustrate a character’s inability to change, often creating a comical effect when he “clings to old habits” (61). Had the traits illustrated above been non-habitual, they would be elements contributing to the dynamic aspect of Arturo, illustrating that he is able to change his ways and to show more sides of himself – being able to surprise the reader. However, as the rest of this character study will show, Arturo does not change his ways, but continues to reaffirm his inability to be likable through his actions.

As mentioned above, Arturo has removed himself from the familial problems he encountered in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* by removing the father, but also his brothers, from the story. They have been replaced by a sister, Mona. The only character who seems to have survived from his childhood is his mother. Although the reader never learns her name in *The Road to Los Angeles*, she is still the symbol of Italy and Arturo’s heritage, religion and church. In his recounting of the events she is given little space, but when she speaks she speaks entirely against Arturo’s ideals and his view of the world. Both Mona and the mother, and also Uncle Frank, come to be the antagonists of the book. Arturo is the hero, who in reality is the antagonist of the family, not contributing much to their finances but his lousy salary from working at the fish cannery. This way, the real heroes in the story are the antagonists working towards providing a better future for the family, whereas Arturo is only concerned with himself.

On the other hand, working at the fish cannery to support the family does seem like a noble thing to do and in that respect it is hard to blame Arturo for not supporting his family. However, as the story illustrates, working at the fish cannery is something Arturo soon turns into a cover-up for his literary ambitions: “The pay is of little consequence. [...] I am a writer. [...] My purpose here is not the gathering of money but the gathering of material for my forthcoming book on California fisheries” (275). When Arturo is finally given the job, he meets his co-workers and quickly asserts his objective at the cannery as superior to theirs, seeing as he is there not because he must work, but because he chooses to. The background for this pretense is argued by Jean Béranger, who claims that in order to maintain his masquerade, Arturo needs to justify his presence at the cannery as necessary to his research (81). However, it should also be stressed that in distancing himself from his fellow workers,

Arturo is able to continue living in the illusion that he does not need to have this job and that he can, if he so chooses, do something else. Lowering himself to this type of work is not worthy of him, but in the guise of a researching writer Arturo reaffirms to himself his social stature.

Being a writer in the cannery, Arturo's inexperience is met with ridicule from the workers. This inexperience is confirmed when he due to the hefty fish odor vomits in front of the boss, Shorty Naylor. Infuriated and swearing his revenge while at the same time killing some flies, Arturo heads toward a Filipino from the labeling crew: "When I saw how dark he was I suddenly knew what to say to him. I could say it to all of them. It would hurt them every time. I knew because a thing like that had hurt me. [...] It used to make me feel so pitiful, so unworthy. And I knew it would hurt the Filipino too"(285). What Arturo is thinking of that will hurt becomes evident when he walks close to the worker: "'Give me a cigarette,' I said. 'You nigger.'" (286). Arturo now feels satisfied with himself, and more confident. He continues his racist remarks by calling the worker a "damn oriental foreigner" (286), and reasserts his own delusive status which he previously mastered so well: "I'm a writer, man! An American writer, man! [...] I was born right here in the good old U.S.A. under the stars and stripes" (287). Béranger argues the significance of Arturo's self-reassuring acts of seeing himself as someone above the workers as a means of comforting and distancing himself from the proletariat (81-82). This might be the effect Arturo achieves in his mind, but the effect this distancing has on the reader is quite the opposite, as we learn that Arturo's derogatory view of his colleagues only distances him from the society he speaks so warmly of: "I am now a worker, [...] I belong to the proletariat. I am a writer-worker" (297). In arguing his adherence to the social class he has just distanced himself from and lashed out racist remarks toward, Arturo underlines his confusion and lack of knowledge. Béranger acknowledges the irony in this, stating that "the aspiring activist author fatally undermines in advance the claim [of belonging to the proletariat]" (82).

The racism and the derogatory remarks in *The Road to Los Angeles* take up considerable space and cannot be ignored in any reading of the novel. Rimmon-Kenan asserts that in terms of speech, style "may be indicative of origin, dwelling place, social class, or profession" (64). In Arturo's case, this is true – at least in his mind. He believes that he does not belong to the lower classes, or even to his family, and constantly envisions himself to be above everyone else, although at the cannery he claims his adherence to the working class.

Upon being told off by his mother as “nothing but a boy who’s read too many books” (227), Arturo rages: “I said, ‘Forget it. No use talking to yokels, clodhoppers and imbeciles. The intelligent man makes certain reservations as to the choice of his listeners’” (227). Receiving no answer, he fixates his anger toward her wedding band: “‘Are you aware of the fact,’ I said, ‘that the 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). To this, his mother reacts by asking “what?” signaling to Arturo his superior knowledge to hers, before swinging a final remark her way: “Never mind. The feminine mind would not grasp it, even if I explained” (227). Based on Rimmon-Kenan’s view of how style may be indicative of social class, this dialogue illustrates Arturo’s desire to distance himself from the lower class he believes his family belongs to. However, the effect he achieves is only to further strengthen the reader’s view of him as unlikable, not to identify him as particularly intelligent or that he belongs to a higher social rank.

In the same vein of distancing himself from the masses, Arturo utilizes his fascination for books and the classic philosophers to make himself stand out in the crowd. During a night of sitting at home because he cannot go out due to the cannery smell of his body, he tells Mona to bring him books from the library: “Bring me books by Nietzsche. Bring me the mighty Spengler. Bring me Auguste Comte and Immanuel Kant. Bring me books the rabble can’t read” (310). Fred Gardaphe argues the reason for Arturo reading such books that he thinks “the rabble can’t read” as a means to set himself apart from the masses (“Left Out” 67). Gardaphe asserts that Arturo attempts to gain superiority over the working class through asserting for himself the status of being a writer and identifying with intellectual European literature, which remind him of his heritage, a past he is trying to escape (“Left Out” 67). Arturo’s Italian heritage does not weigh him down as much as in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, but still the racist remarks, the writer status, and the inclination to read European literature contribute to his gaining superiority over American culture.

However, Arturo only manages to impress the reader a short while before he confesses to most of the books being “very hard to understand, some of them so dull I had to pretend they were fascinating, and others so hateful I had to read them aloud like an actor to get through them” (310). His evening ends with him falling asleep in the bath tub and waking up undressed in his bed, deducing that his mother must have tucked him in. Being coddled by his mother reminds the reader of Uncle Frank’s confrontation with Arturo, which was followed by Arturo’s mother comforting him for crying: “[My eyes] were as dry as ever. My mother

[...] started to pat them with her handkerchief. I thought, what the heck” (255). Both these events characterize Arturo as a child still, dependent on his mother, and make the reader recognize Arturo as still a child that needs to be cared for.

In his misguided existence, Arturo attempts to gain status as an American through denying other minorities their social status and their possibility of achieving the same American identity. Vivid depictions of him being racist toward his co-workers flourish, but one encounter with three Mexican girls stands out. Arturo recognizes them as Mexican, but decides to refer to them as Filipino girls when he confronts them: “‘Well well well,’ I said. ‘Greetings to the three pretty Filipino girls!’ They weren’t Filipinos at all, not in the least, and I knew it and they knew I knew it” (289). Being snubbed by all three of them as they sing-along toward Arturo and his ethnic confusion, calling him “Filipino! Filipino! Filipino” (290), Arturo waits a while for them to get a distance away. He then shouts: “‘I beg your pardon!’ I yelled. ‘Excuse me for making a mistake! I’m awfully sorry! I thought you were Filipinos. But you’re not. You’re a lot worse! You’re Mexicans! You’re Greasers! You’re spick sluts! Spick sluts! Spick sluts!’” For Arturo, racism becomes a tool of derogatory remarks that he utilizes in order to claim a position in a higher social class. Supportive of this argument is Gardaphe, who argues that Arturo fashions his American identity through denying other immigrants the opportunity to become an American: in order to become American, Arturo needs to “identify the un-American and separate [himself] from it” (“Left Out” 67). This way, the reader needs to see the racism as an ironic device Fante employs for his protagonist to display his ethnic superiority. Stefano Luconi sums up the racist intentions succinctly, stating that Arturo’s “professed ethnic superiority in front of an Asian or a Mexican allows Arturo to show off his own American-ness” (60). Consequently, Arturo’s racism is a means for Arturo’s misguided way of achieving American identity.

Where the Arturo Bandini of *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* was a God-fearing Catholic boy who looked for the approval of God in most of his actions, the Arturo of *The Road to Los Angeles* denounces the hypothesis of God (234). His mother and sister symbolize religion in the novel. Mona being the strongest symbol and the one Arturo fixates his rage towards most often: “My own sister reduced to the superstition of prayer! My own flesh and blood. A nun, a god-lover! What barbarism!” (227). When Mona returns from the church, Arturo greets her in a rhetorical manner only he can take pride in: “How’s Jehovah tonight? What does He think of the quantum theory?” (233). Asserting himself as the enlightened figure in the family, Arturo seeks to impress his mother and sister. But more importantly, he tries to keep them

down and assert himself as an adherent of science in the eternal struggle with religion. Regardless of Arturo's admiration for science and loathing of religion, Mona proves to be a strong adversary for him, proving that he cannot cow her. When she ignores his question, Arturo continues his rant: "Oh Holy Ghost, Oh holy inflated triple ego, get us out of the Depression" (235). Arturo seeks only to infuriate and to annoy his family, but achieves nothing but having his mother chase him with a broom. However, in rejecting religion, Arturo is reassuring himself that he makes smarter choices than the cowed masses and that he is a thinking human being: "Religion is the opium of the people!" (234). Bandini's gods, however, are the great writers and philosophers in history. Comparing Arturo to Achilles, Collins argues Arturo's imitation of Spengler, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer as symbolic of Arturo's religion of philosophy and literature (109). Arturo finds his sword and shield in the great writers whose books he reads and recites to himself. Consequently, being a master of the scornful, derogatory, offensive and racist remarks is Arturo's way of expressing his belief in his own gods.

Unlike Achilles, who is vulnerable only at his heel, "Arturo is a heel and vulnerable all over (Collins 109). Seen this way, the mocking tirades he produces are preemptive strikes from Arturo, asserting himself as superior and not attackable – the slightest provocation sending him into "a prayer to recite his favorite dead writer or a curse against his mother and sister or employer (Collins 110). Illustrative of this is the scene where Arturo relishes in the completion of his magnum opus, *Love Everlasting or The Woman A Man Loves or Omnia Vincit Amor* (365). Finding that Mona and his mother have read his manuscript one day when he is at work, Arturo instantly asks if they find it gripping. Being no worse an orator than her brother, Mona states that it is "[p]lain silly. It doesn't grip me. It gripes me" (378). This provocation toward his life's work and his greatest achievement in distancing himself from his co-workers, the ethnic minorities and his family, infuriates Arturo, who nearly exceeds his own ability to be disdainful when he attacks Mona: "You sanctimonious, retch-provoking she-nun of a bitch-infested nausea-provoking nun of a vile boobish baboon of a brummagem Catholic heritage" (379). After supper the fight is rekindled with Arturo punching his sister in the mouth: "So you laughed at it, did you? You sneered! At the work of a genius. You! At Arturo Bandini! Now Bandini strikes back. He strikes in the name of liberty!" (393). This event marks the end of Arturo's life at Wilmington as he packs his bags and heads for the train to take him to Los Angeles. Collins reads the event as a culmination of Arturo never having experienced recognition by anyone he knows (111), which manifests itself in having

Arturo resort to physical violence toward his sister. This ironically underlines the fact that in Arturo's case the sword is mightier than the pen. Believing that being an author is his destiny and the only thing he is good at, Arturo finds his talent rejected by his closest family and leaves for good. This is the final blow for Arturo, but also for the reader who interprets Arturo as one who wants to be accepted and loved by others, in spite of him being unaccepting of them.

Nevertheless, Arturo favors his own imagination over the drudgery of a reality he has to face every day. One of the most memorable events in the novel is of Arturo's day at the harbor, where he finds a colony of crabs and decides to murder every single one, imagining them "a nation of revolting crabs" where he is "Dictator Bandini, Ironman of Crabland (246). The scene is horrible, having Arturo kill, according to himself, over five hundred crabs and wounding about twice that number (246). For Arturo, the event can be read as an outlet for Arturo's frustrations and shortcomings, but his demented state and the language employed by Fante suggests that there can be more at work. Béranger supports this, as she claims that the inventive role Arturo assumes, the Superman-Führer-Dictator, "epitomizes the fascist nightmare of the thirties, symbolizing the political problems raised by interpretations of Nietzsche made to serve Hitlerian deviations" (79-80). No matter how horrible the crab genocide is, the political interpretation performed by Béranger is perhaps most apt in an analysis with focus on Fante. As this thesis asserts, Arturo's character should be regarded without the comparison to his creator. Consequently, the massacre is best interpreted as an encounter with an intensely frustrated and confused character whose acts do not always follow a logical sense.

The event might also be transposed to Arturo's relationship to Rosa in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, where he pictures himself conquering the baseball pitch and winning her love. As illustrated by Melissa Ryan's argument in Chapter Two of this thesis, Arturo's imaginative self helps him escape reality and assert for himself an American identity through heroic acts such as on the battlefield with the crabs. This way, conquering Rosa and the nation of crabs is Arturo's way of escaping reality and becoming American through conquest (Ryan 187-88).

Catherine Kordich, on the other hand, interprets the event as one of many where Arturo sees himself as "living in a fantasy world where he is loved, admired, and sometimes feared by others" (59). This view of the event is most indicative of Arturo's character and reveals him to the reader as a daydreamer, but also as a narcissist, stopping at nothing to

prove his superiority. Leaving the scene of the massacre, Arturo sees himself as the Führer of the harbor: “Goodbye, dear enemies. You were brave in fighting and braver in death, and Führer Bandini has not forgotten. He overtly praises, even in death” (248).

In another fantasy, Arturo locks himself inside what he calls his study, the clothes closet in the apartment, and animates the pin-up girl he finds in his copies of *Artists and Models* (228). In the closet, Arturo is able to dream his way into another world, where he takes the various models on dates to distant places, envisioning himself as their man. Arturo’s speeches of seduction to the girls in his closet are performed in anachronistic English: “Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep on Mount Gilead, and thy cheeks are comely. I am thy humble servant, and I bringeth love everlasting” (228). This, Kordich argues, produces a humorous effect on the reader, and the anachronistic style suggests that Arturo is reciting the style of the King James Bible (60), making his stature within his own fantasy world even higher and more pompous.

A third event that marks Arturo’s favoring of fantasy over real life occurs when he finds himself in the rare opportunity of approaching a real woman. Following her down a dark street, Arturo ponders how he should approach her and what to say, before settling on the line “hello, my beloved! And a beautiful night it is; and would you object if I walked a bit with you? I know some fine poetry, like the Song of Solomon and that long one from Nietzsche about voluptuousness – which do you prefer?” (358). However, once he overtakes the woman, he is too shy to open his mouth, and starts running down the street. In his run, Arturo breaks into a sports-commentator narration, picturing himself being an Olympic runner racing “the mighty Dutch champion, Sylvester Gooch” (359). This event is characteristic of Arturo’s inability to deal with the real world, and his pretense for the fantasy life he imagines for himself.

I was none other than Arturo Bandini, the greatest half-miler in the history of the American track and field annals [...] Would I win? The thousands of men and women in the stands wondered – especially the women, for I was known jokingly among the sport scribes as a ‘woman’s runner,’ because I was so tremendously popular among the feminine fans. (359-60)

Furthermore, the great novel Arturo writes deals with his projected image of himself as Arthur Banning, a wealthy oil-dealer who traverses the world looking for the woman of his dreams and in the process finds many whom he discards. His alter ego is not only a wealthy

globetrotter, but also Arturo's hopes and dreams for himself. Arturo imagines that his greatest literary achievement, a novel he entitles *Colossus of Destiny*, will land him the Nobel Prize, and that it will sit on the book shelves in future libraries "among a few indispensable others, such as the bible and the dictionary" (320). These escapes into fantasy that Arturo imagines will give him fame and a position in society he thinks he deserves, make Arturo come off as a delusional character with irrational and unrealistic hopes and dreams, but first and foremost characterize him as unable to step up to the challenge of taking care of his mother and sister at a time when they need it the most.

Having outlined the character in these two chapters, the name Arturo Bandini is perhaps better explained in light of this novel than in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*. In *The Road to Los Angeles*, eighteen year old Arturo wishes to become an author. His name is reminiscent of the noun "author," at least to English speaking ears, Collins points out (19). Thus, when Arturo finishes his novel he has stayed true to his name, and throughout the rest of the series Arturo will be preoccupied with writing. The last name, though, is trickier, but as Collins argues, the Italian verb "bandire" means to proclaim, publish or cry out (19), something which certainly is characteristic of Arturo, all the time he spends announcing his intelligence and superiority over others. However, the last name "Bandini" is also similar to the noun "bandito," meaning outlaw, or banished from society (19). Many of Fante's characters exist at the fringes of society, and Arturo is no exception. *The Road to Los Angeles* takes the reader deep in to the workings of a mind that is not fit to live by the rules and norms of society. Instead, Arturo focuses solely on his own life and his struggles, never allowing the reader much of a glimpse into the toils of his family, who in the end are the ones who have to endure his tomfooleries. Still, the name Arturo invents for his multi-millionaire yacht-owning, oil-dealer, Arthur Banning, can be easily explained as Arturo's daydream version of an Americanized, wealthy, and Anglo-Saxon self. However, as Kordich rightly points out, the name Banning does have cultural significance in California. Phineas Banning is considered the founder of Wilmington, replacing the former landowners after the region was ceded to the Union (139). One would imagine that Arturo utilized this name to bring more stature and American history into the Americanized version of himself.

The Road to Los Angeles depicts a young man who thinks himself superior and more intelligent than the people around him. This brings the reader to associate Arturo with another classical character: Ludvig Holberg's Erasmus Montanus. Both characters suffer from the same flaws: they do not empathize with anyone, and see only themselves as the center of

attention. Most strikingly are the parallels in their intelligence and shortness of education. Whereas Erasmus Montanus has his brief spell of education from the university in Copenhagen, Arturo is an autodidact who believes he has taught himself the important issues in the world. Both are ready to impose their knowledge on society, not through teaching, but through snobbery and insults. This goes to show the dangers of just a little education, something Collins has noted in his discussion of Arturo: “Arturo is proof that a little education can be a dangerous thing” (117). Although Arturo is not as covert in his verbal attacks and perhaps a little more ill-mannered than his Scandinavian double, the similarities are uncanny. However, where the two characters sever their ties and similarities to each other is toward the ending. Whereas Erasmus Montanus redeems himself through an epiphany toward the end, and comes to realize the errors of his behavior, Arturo does not, and continues to spiral farther into his regressive state: “The thing for you to do is to stop reading all these damned books, stop stealing, make a man out of yourself, and go to work” (253). Upon this comment from Uncle Frank on how Arturo should turn his life around, Arturo reacts furiously: “‘Books!’ I said. ‘And what do *you* know about books! You! An ignoramus, a Boobus Americanus, a donkey, a clod-hopping poltroon with no more sense than a polecat’” (253). Whereas Erasmus Montanus manages to turn his life around for the good of his family and himself, Arturo does not. If a character’s pattern of action is repetitive, Lothe argues, the character will become comic due to the constant confirmation of his madness (83). It is in this vein that both Erasmus Montanus and Arturo Bandini place themselves, but out of the two Arturo is the one who is unable to break the pattern and change his ways. This leads Arturo to take the long road from the society he wanders in and try to make his fortune a short train ride away, in Los Angeles. Consequently, Rimmon-Kenan’s argument about habitual actions revealing the static aspect of a character comes to apply to Arturo, as he does not have the same epiphany as Holberg’s character (61). In Béranger’s words, “[a]lthough [Arturo] tries to mature and become free, he is too much the victim of his education, too sentimental, too weak and too self-centered to succeed” (87).

Arturo as a character who develops is easily dismissed due to the reasons gathered in this chapter. However, as Rimmon-Kenan and Culpeper point out, the distinction between flat and round seems to be too black and white (Rimmon-Kenan 40-41; Culpeper 56-57). Rimmon-Kenan argues that flatness might also mean roundness in terms of a character’s inner life. She is supportive of Joseph Ewen’s distinction of characters as a continuum, not as a black or white division. The continuum allows characters who at first may seem static to

undergo a development throughout the narrative: “The term ‘flat’ suggests something two-dimensional, devoid of depth and ‘life’, while in fact many flat characters [...] create the impression of depth” (Rimmon-Kenan 40). As stated in the introduction, she believes that characters may be spread along a continuum of flat/round into categories of *complexity*, *development*, and *penetration* into the inner life (41). These distinctions serve to illustrate the degree to which one character may be described as round or flat. Into this continuum, Arturo’s roundness becomes apparent in the latter category, penetration into the inner life. In this category, the character’s “consciousness is presented from within” (Rimmon-Kenan 42), leaving the reader with an impression of the character’s development throughout the story.

Literary critic Fred Misurella reads Arturo as a static character, not changing even throughout the course of the novel series: “Arturo does not develop, for better or worse, in any dramatic way as the story progresses. [Throughout the novels] Arturo Bandini remains a static, ineffective character even when circumstances evolve in his favor” (107). However, it is on the story plane, taking only action into consideration, that Arturo does not develop. The roundness of character as Rimmon-Kenan and Ewen argues, will make Arturo a character who does not develop too much, but still does not merit the classification of being flat. Arturo believes he has had a great epiphany in being released from his familial prison, where his mother and sister ultimately reject his greatest achievement, the novel. In recognizing this release, Arturo is able to leave the family once and for all and finally focus only on himself and his ambitions – without interference of family and heritage.

As illustrated by this chapter, there is little development of the Arturo character based on his actions and speech, which would make him a flat character. Contrastingly, in his mind the change is great, as he recognizes his true calling of becoming an author and moving away from a society he has spent too much time in. Perhaps most illustrative of Arturo’s regression into a total belief in himself is the scene where he tries to comfort himself through prayer. This scene has been preceded by an onset of frustration from Arturo, utterly confused about his role in the family: He tears up his sister’s dresses and even bites his own thumb, tasting the blood, alluding to the protagonist of *Hunger*, who tried to sate his hunger by eating his own finger. When he cools off with a few pathetic attempts at praying to Nietzsche, Spengler and the pin-up girls, he discovers the answer right in front of him: “I should not pray to God or others, but to myself” (341). This marks Arturo’s grip on reality as failing, and reminds the reader of Arturo’s stints of daydreaming where he imagines himself as the supreme leader and the God of the crab people: “If they wrote history I would get a lot of space in their records

[...] Some day I would become a legend in their world [...] They would make me a god” (250). These events break Arturo’s belief in his books and the great author’s as his gods. Now he is the ultimate creature, having replaced his previous religion of European literature, and the library shelves housing the books he reads will soon be filled with the books of “Arturo Bandini, the greatest writer the world had ever known” (343).

Chapter Four: Conclusion

There are many aspects of the character of Arturo Bandini that have not been explored here. Especially, the subject of Catholicism could have been discussed more thoroughly in relation to Arturo's adversity toward religion. Moreover, an analysis of the significance of the female characters in the novels could also prove important in an interpretation of Arturo. The significance and the meaning of having Arturo's background changed slightly throughout the series may also merit a study. However, a thesis does not allow for unlimited focus, meaning that some aspects of the character's life would have to be shortened or removed altogether. But still, it has been the aim of this thesis to conduct a character study of Arturo Bandini and prove that he is a well-developed and interesting character. Within the limitations of the thesis, this character study has aimed to be as descriptive as possible of Arturo.

When Arturo boards the train to take him to Los Angeles, the series rarely looks back on the subjects of family and religion. Of the four novels in the series, the two written last come to describe and follow the aspiring writer and the successful screenwriter, Arturo Bandini. Having his last novel, *Dreams From Bunker Hill*, dictated to his wife, Joyce Fante, due to blindness from diabetes, John Fante depicted his adult life of screenwriting and luck with both money and women – a life hard to imagine for twelve or fourteen year old Arturo sitting at the dinner table in Rocklin, with Svevo Bandini engaging in egg yolk smearing of his own face.

This leaves *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* and *The Road to Los Angeles* as the two novels that describe Arturo's troublesome upbringing, his religious background and his impulses of emotion and love. They also show the first signs of a struggling artist. But perhaps more importantly, both novels come to characterize a person's struggle to see himself as a member of a society he feels estranged from. As this thesis has shown, Arturo's methods for asserting himself as an American reflect his refracted view of the American Dream and display an immigrant's journey towards integration. Arturo's feelings of inferiority, his troubles with his family and his inability to connect with women – the troubles he has faced through his childhood – come to find their release in the symbolic picture of having him board the train that will take him to the heart of American 1930s popular culture, Los Angeles. This event marks the beginning of the end of Arturo's struggle with blending in in American society.

As stated in the introduction, this thesis aimed to provide a character study of Arturo Bandini through the two novels, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* and *The Road to Los Angeles*. In

doing so, the thesis showed that Arturo is a multifaceted character with innate interest beyond the comparison to his creator, Fante. Theory on characterization was adopted mainly from Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Seymour Chatman and Jonathan Culpeper. In order to complete the character study, narrative theory was incorporated into the thesis to illustrate how narrative technique can be used to shape the reader's understanding of the character. Theorists used here were mainly Rimmon-Kenan, Gérard Genette and Chatman. Consequently, a two-fold approach to the character study was adopted, with theory on characterization on the one hand and narrative technique on the other. However, as this thesis has shown, both combine toward making the character study complete and thus enable the reader to better grasp the character of Arturo Bandini.

In the analysis of narration, this thesis has illustrated how the narrative technique employed by Fante has been an active participant in the reader's interpretation of the character. In analyzing point of view, this thesis has shown how the discourse is able to guide the reader in his interpretation of the character.

In *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* the chapters are divided by focalizers, alternating between Svevo and Arturo in order to show their struggles. These struggles combine together in the final chapter, when both characters face each other in a final stage of their adapting to American ideals. Svevo has toiled his way through the bricklaying business, and is finding it hard to choose between a wealthy WASP widow and his familial obligations to his wife and sons. In the other corner is Arturo, who, through rejection in love and failure to support the family, interrupts Svevo's pursuing of American society. Underlining an immigrant's thin line of acceptance and rejection into a strange society is the final chapter's focalizer, Arturo, when he receives his inauguration into Americanness from his father: "That boy's an American. He is no foreigner" (213). Consequently, narrating with variable focalizers in this novel enables the father-son conflict to grow. The narrative focuses on both characters' struggles separately and finally sees them face each other in the final chapter, ultimately making both characters protagonists, where only one reaches his personal goal of acceptance into society.

In *The Road to Los Angeles*, the narrative is no longer told by a heterodiegetic narrator. The narrator in this novel is the protagonist himself, Arturo. Fante's first attempt of establishing the character of Arturo Bandini was thus a homodiegetic narrative, with the narrator narrating his own story. What is interesting about this type of narration is the level of skepticism the reader should display toward the narrator. In narrating his own life, one must acknowledge the possibility of the narrator not being entirely truthful in the relaying of the

events. As Culpeper rightly asserts, characters say what they believe (169), making it the reader's job to distinguish objectivity from subjectivity. Further, in the case of Arturo Bandini, this thesis has illustrated that he is active in relaying the information that would suit him best, underlining the fact that his family does not understand him and that he is intellectually above them. The scene with Uncle Frank confronting eighteen year old Arturo with his responsibilities and avoidance of duty, illustrates this. With Arturo relaying the conversation in a way that makes him come out of on top, is achieved only through the first-person narration. As the thesis has illustrated, an objective third-person reporter of events would be likely to narrate the scene differently – showing how Arturo shirks his responsibilities and crumbles when being confronted by an authority: “‘You look like you’ve been crying. [...] You’re embarrassed. I understand. Mother understands everything.’ ‘But I’m not crying!’” (254-55).

This scene occurs fairly early in the discourse and sets the premises for the story: Arturo should take care of his family, but shirks only to pursue his own interests. The novel's buildup of the character puts strong emphasis on the character's regression into a delusional state where he becomes extremely self-absorbed. This narcissistic tendency and drive towards madness is indicated through Fante's use of free direct discourse, where Arturo will spin out of control, imagining greatness for himself. The regression is also illustrated in the narrative, perhaps more vividly, with Arturo lapsing into third-person narratives about how the world's memory of him will be and how he will succeed at anything he tries to succeed in. Perhaps most illustrative of this is Arturo's chance to strike up a conversation with a woman on the street, but where he evades the opportunity only to discover that he is “Arturo Bandini, the greatest half-miler in the history of the American track and field annals” (359). These lapses occur more frequently toward the end of the story, signifying Arturo's distance from the real world events and his obligations to his family. These obligations he dismisses, which comes to characterize him as selfish.

This inner journey of Arturo's mind is illustrated by the opening part of the novel, where Arturo rightly states that he has held many jobs in order to support his family, only to follow up the statement by lying to his fellow workers about his next job: “‘Boys,’ I said, ‘I’m through. I’ve decided to accept a job with the Harbor Commission’” (217). This event reads as a prolepsis of the Arturo character. Whereas he understands that he needs to support his mother and sister financially through working, he is not cut out to perform the tasks available to him, so he succumbs to a daydreaming view of himself where he is granted more

importance than he really has. Arturo's daydreaming becomes a way for him to escape the drudgery, but he takes it too far, only to lose his grip on reality. The fictional character he develops for himself, Arthur Banning, is symbolic of how deeply immersed Arturo has become in the dream-world he has imagined for himself. Perhaps most symbolic of his escape from real life obligations is his so-called study, the clothes closet, where he disappears into wild fantasies about the pin-up girls in his magazines – a place with “brief passions spent on the floor” (229).

Taking into consideration the time in which *The Road to Los Angeles* was attempted published, the 1930s, the novel's subjects of racism, sex, violence and unrestricted self-indulgence with a heavy focus on the character's inner feelings was perhaps too provocative for its time, asserts Catherine Kordich (68-69). However, according to her, it is in the failure to redeem Arturo that Fante “doomed the book's publishing prospects” (68). Moreover, at the time when *The Road to Los Angeles* was written it would have been up against such titles as *Gone With the Wind* had it been published. In light of this, Richard Collins rightly asserts that “one wonders how Fante could have the audacity to imagine that anyone [sic] in America could appreciate Arturo Bandini, Fuhrer of Crabland” (112).

However hard it is to make sense of Arturo's actions and thoughts, it is in the analysis of the character that the reader is able to understand why he does the things he does. Through this character study, it becomes evident that most of Arturo's actions have no deeper intention or ulterior motive than being driven by his own impulses. Especially the theft of his mother's cameo is an act which completely disregards anything but Arturo's feelings towards Rosa, and thus his way of slipping into American mainstream culture. In Kordich's words, “Arturo's strategies follow only the logic of emotion” (27), a description of Arturo that is hard to avoid in any attempt to define his character.

Much of this thesis has analyzed the character in terms of behavior, speech, manner and thoughts. In doing so, Rimmon-Kenan's terminology of character inferring has been applied. In distinguishing between direct definition and indirect presentation of character, the thesis illustrates the Arturo character vividly. Especially in *The Road to Los Angeles*, where Arturo is the narrator, the direct definition of him becomes a subject of scrutiny for the reader, as he needs to differentiate between how the narrating Arturo regards himself and how the reader ought to regard him. The direct definition in this novel stems from Arturo's own perceptions, and it is therefore important that a characterization of him is able to distinguish between his subjectivity and an objective focus on the character. The objective renderings of

him are hard to detect in *The Road to Los Angeles*, but through the narration Arturo's flaws and his unlikability shine through.

In *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, Arturo and Svevo are the novel's focalizers, with the story being narrated through a third-person reporter of events with them as focal points. Alternating between the focalizers, each chapter gives valid information about how other characters interpret the two characters. Information about Arturo that the reader can gather from other characters and his acts, is the strongest of the two character inferences. In this, a character's traits are indirectly exemplified through act and information coming from other characters. In both novels, Arturo's actions form the basis of how the reader perceives his character. In *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, Arturo's acts are characterized by more or less pathetic attempts at restoring the family and bringing Svevo home. His actions mainly stem from his idealized view of a mainstream American family living happily together: "The Morey's next door – you never heard a peep out of them, never; quiet, American people. But his father wasn't satisfied with being an Italian, he had to be a noisy Italian" (25). In this novel, Arturo's actions follow only the logic of his Americanized view of the ideal, and this explains heavily the choices he makes and his feelings of inferiority and displacement within Italian tradition. In *The Road to Los Angeles*, however, Arturo's actions are distanced from the familial view. He now seeks only to pursue his own happiness in a misguided view of the American Dream. He disregards his family, especially his sister, and tries his best to establish a life for himself while not taking into consideration the family's interests, symbolically shown in his leaving them: "I grabbed my jacket and left. Back there my mother was babbling. Mona was moaning. The feeling was that I would never see them again. And I was glad" (393).

However, the necessary limitations on length of this thesis have allowed this character study to rely only on parts of the series about Arturo Bandini. The two novels discussed here deal only with parts of the character's life, not engaging in a discussion about his adult life and his time spent in Los Angeles, which the two final books in the series deal with. The limitations of the thesis have limited the possible subjects of Arturo Bandini that could have been discussed in a more thorough character study. On the whole, a complete character study of Arturo Bandini, taking all four novels in the series into consideration, has yet to be completed. Such a study would surely include the two final novels in the series. For instance, published in 1939, the next novel in the series, *Ask the Dust*, deals with the aspiring writer genius as he tries to make it in Los Angeles. Regarded by critics as Fante's finest, this novel

epitomizes the American Dream, but at the same time discusses Arturo's insecurity while continuing the racial and derogatory slurs of *The Road to Los Angeles*. It is only when Arturo hears from his self-proclaimed mentor, J. C. Hackmuth, that confidence is restored and the struggling artist is once more the center of attention, finally being given the credit he believes he deserves. J. C. Hackmuth, alluding to the well-known literary critic, H. L. Mencken, whom Fante adored: "I would have done anything to get the praise of H. L. Mencken" (qtd. in Cooper 74). Consequently, it is in this novel that Arturo fulfills his obligations to become a writer, and finally manages to live, in the vaguest definition of that word, off his writer's income.

Furthermore, the final novel in the series of Arturo Bandini, the abovementioned *Dreams From Bunker Hill*, depicts the aspiring writer genius being drafted into the lucrative but dull business of screenwriting. This novel is perhaps the most allegorical in the series, sarcastically depicting the writer's way up from a low-paid job at a deli to being a well-paid screenwriter in Hollywood. However, fame and wealth is about the only thing this job provides, as it dulls Arturo's mind, making him unable to focus on his novel writing, thus working against his literary ambitions. Upon being paid his salary, Arturo reacts in frustration: "Three hundred dollars a week for doing nothing! [...] I'm going crazy. Give me something to write" (648). In the introduction to *The Bandini Quartet*, Dan Fante, John Fante's son, sums up his father's career: "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" (xi). One might argue then that in trying to fit into American society, both Bandini and Fante found themselves, ironically, too heavily influenced by American ideals of making it in terms of materialist wealth.

The introduction to the thesis stated the importance of a new focus in Fante studies. Fante's novels have been regarded and analyzed in light of the author's life, looking at the stories as a way for interpreting the author. This has given his characters, especially Arturo Bandini, an allegorical meaning. With this thesis, focus has been put mainly on the character and the establishing of him through the narrative. Biographical details about Fante's life have been kept to a minimum, and only provided as anecdotal references where necessary. In keeping the author separate from the character, the character Arturo Bandini has been discussed and brought into the limelight as a complete character worthy of a character study within the story. This discussion has put much focus on the author's establishing of the

character through narrative technique, and shown how he comes across to the reader as an interesting character, able to stand on his own two feet.

Furthermore, Fante's recurring presence in the scholarly interpretations of Arturo and the series of which he is a part, seeks only to interpret the author's life and the reasons for his marginalization in literary history. Regarding Arturo, then, as a means for understanding Fante's struggles and his toils with assimilation, deprives Arturo of his status as an interesting character that justifies academic attention. Whether or not this character is worthy of a study and a place in academic writing, is another debate, but in shifting the focus from Fante's life and literary career toward the characterological aspects of his authorship, scholarly interpretations of Arturo Bandini and Fante will progress to illustrate the merits in both author and character.

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