

The Nature of Human Reality in Paul Auster's *The Brooklyn Follies* in Light of Sartre's "For-Itself-For-Others"

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Abstract

The existential aspect of the social nature of human reality, defined as "for-itself-for-others" in Sartre's philosophy, determines humankind in terms of communal contributions for the establishment of an ideal society of interpersonal relations and collaborations. Such community requires one's selfhood shaped in accordance with the well-being of others, best manifested in the Sartrean concept of "for-itself-for-others". In Auster's *The Brooklyn Follies*, in existential terms, Nathan Glass, the protagonist, leads an authentic life both on personal and social levels towards Sartre's principle. In this light, Nathan represents the human potency to organize the chaotic network of interpersonal associations when an individual is conscious of human freedom of choice and social responsibilities and tries to help others acquire the same level of awareness. As such, he is a portrait of the concept of "for-itself-for-others" in managing the network of his relationships with other community members. This paper, highlighting Nathan's role as the architect of Auster's urban utopia, shows how the Sartrean concept above can realistically manifest itself within a chaotic society on the edge of collapse around the turn of the century in the USA.

Keywords: Auster, Existentialism, Sartre, the Brooklyn Follies.

Introduction

Among the philosophical schools concerned with human existence at their core, it is Existentialism that attempts to give concrete answers to the problem of human existence, either through philosophy or literature, mostly regardless of humankind's divine or biological origins. Critics argue that Existentialism is not generally held to be a philosophical movement "but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy". Many of the living "existentialists" in the 1950s denied this title, and not all namely "existentialist" writers have actually affirmed their contribution to this way of thinking (Kaufmann 1960, 11). There are even arguments about the true "existentialist canon" in philosophy, as the word Existentialism was not used until the 1940s. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche "predated the coinage" of the term, and Camus and Heidegger did not announce that they were existentialists. Moreover, many

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thinkers and philosophers who were existentialists had never heard of the word (Guignon 2004, 2). However, the first stage of explicit Existentialism appeared after World War I in Germany, when an original “philosophy of existence” was developed by Jaspers and Heidegger in the 1920s and 1930s. A parallel development appeared in the religious thought of the Jewish Martin Buber and by the Protestant theologians Rudolph Bultmann and Paul Tillich. The second phase of Existentialism, under the present principles, happened in the French philosophy of the 1930s and 1940s, with the centrality of Sartre. In 1945, Sartre was known as the “leader” of a newly labeled “existentialist movement.” In October of the same year, he established *Les Temps modernes*, a journal that became “the public platform for Sartrean existentialism”, with de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty. Camus, who was already known as a novelist and the editor of the popular newspaper *Combat*, was linked to the movement for a while (Michelman 2008, 2). The French Catholic philosopher Gabriel Marcel, one of Sartre’s harshest critics and the one who coined the term “existentialist” and applied it to Sartre’s philosophy (Flynn 2006, 89), claimed that it was he himself who was “the first French philosopher of existence” and was Sartre’s antithesis regarding his own Catholicism. Kierkegaard, Jaspers, and Marcel thus represent the “religious or theistic [E]xistentialism,” while Nietzsche’s radicalism, Heidegger’s ontological approach, and Sartre’s acclaimed “atheism” represent the non-religious Existentialism. In Spain, in the 1930s and 1940s, an existentialist philosophical movement similar to Sartre’s was developed by José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955). There also developed in Italy, in the 1940s and 1950s, a branch of Existentialism by Nicola Abbagnano (1901-1990). Existentialism reached the United States in the 1950s and then moved around the world (Michelman 2008, 2-3).

In discussing the nature of human reality in social terms, not being conscious of one's existence and freedom, as in non-human objects and creatures, stands for what Sartre calls “Being-in-itself,” while being conscious of existence is “Being-for-itself”, which is exclusive to humans (Sartre 1956, lxvii). The being of “in-itself” is “being what it is,” being the same at all times, while the being of “for-itself” is “being what it is not and not being what it is” (lxv). In other words, humans as “for-itself” are never stagnant in their being and are always free to choose to be what they are not, regarding human possibilities of being. In this light, the present state of human beings is not pre-established and is susceptible to change until death. Sartre’s humanism holds that human beings are free to choose, following their free will away from earthly limitations. Since for the “for-itself” the world presents itself as possibilities, the one who has not activated one's consciousness of personal possibilities cannot recognize them (7). Human beings without possibilities of action, in other words, have not ever lived the world as human beings. This further requires associations with the outside world, other people included.

Human existence is simultaneously “being-for-self, being-with-others, and being-in-the-world” in Sartrean terms (Michelman 2008, 2). Part of the realization of the “for-itself” as possibilities comes from its relationship with others. Sartre believes that a single human being “is essentially that which is known by the Other”. This makes each human being or “for-itself” a “being-for-others”. Sartre describes such a

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relation between an individual and others, or "the being of human reality", as "for-itself-for-others" (1956, 218), since an individual exists both as an entity for itself and as an entity belonging to the body of the community. Whether an individual can become aware of the inherent feature of "for-itself-for-others" in human nature is a matter of possibilities that he/she allows him/herself to experience to fulfill social and communal ideals.

Considering the fact that human beings are social creatures, life in isolation is possible but not essential. That is because no human being is born and lives in vacuum, and that human beings require each other symbiotically, concerning their physiological and psychological needs. When the well-being of the individual along with that of others is concerned, the utmost possibility of collaboration between individuals can contribute to the establishment of authentic communities and utopian societies in which egalitarianism and mutual respect between members are guaranteed.

In this light, in literature, it is impossible to limit existentialist fiction to the works of a few whose Existentialism is their main feature - Dostoevsky, Kafka, Camus, Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Kundera, among others – since the problem of human existence and essence has always been a tough concern in philosophical fiction. In Existentialist fiction, just as in the philosophy, the central claim is that humankind exists "without justification" or "absurdly" in a world into which he/she is "thrown" among others and is condemned to assume full responsibility for his/her actions and the values based on which he/she acts (McBride 1999, 298). Therefore, the belief in the "freedom of human beings" is the most basic principle of Existentialism (Bunnin and Yu 2004, 239). Existentialism still runs through the 21st-century literature, as in the novels of Paul Auster whose existential metafiction builds upon his predecessors in the genre. What makes Auster's endeavor more striking is that absorbed in the postmodern world of signs and illusions, one might think that human essence and existence have been left for good in favor of alternative (hyper)realities, while Auster's realism at the heart of the postmodern world still reserves a place for what constitutes human existence in the midst of the wasteland of the disintegrating postmodern world. In particular, Auster's familiarity with French Existentialism, being the subject of several studies (see Shiloh 2002; Oberman 2004; D'Urso 2006; Theobald 2010), primarily reveals itself in Auster's own interest in Sartre, including his translation of his *Life/Situations* (1977). Beside this translation, one can consider Auster's four-year stay in France in the 1970s and his acquaintance with the French culture influential on his formation of the concept of the community. His fiction from *Squeeze Play* (1984) to *Baumgartner* (2023) shows his concern with the concept of 'existence' or 'human existence' as it unfolds privately and publicly. Auster's novels in general emphasize "the existential course of individual lives," ruminate the "moments of decision and transitional moments" in humans' lives, and highlight the role such moments play in human existence (Kelley 2013, 56). He depicts individuals, entangled in personal and/or social problems, who are to deal with a sense of existential loss from which they struggle to save themselves. In fact, Auster's characters oscillate between

the boundaries of existence and non-existence, a fact simultaneously pointing to their existential crises in life and their attempts at expressing their existence. Among these characters, some succeed in overcoming their crises and manage their lives authentically, while others fail and end up in suicide or madness. Accordingly, Auster's attention to issues such as freedom, choice, responsibility, authenticity, survival, and death have given his fiction an existential color, an issue inciting readers to investigate his vision more precisely.

As a case in point, in *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005), henceforward *BF*, Auster recounts the life story of Nathan Glass and the circle of his family and friends in Brooklyn in his early sixties. The novel is actually a long episode of Nathan's life written in retrospective in a contemplative manner, not only highlighting how he developed a significantly positive change of worldview in Brooklyn but also how this change lead others to experience a better life as well. Auster revealed in an interview in 2005 that *BF* is "a book about a collapsing society" (as cited in Hutchisson 2013, 165). It is within this society that Nathan appears not only to deal with his own problems but also to help others out of their existential crises. His teleoogy and attitude towards life, rarely reflected in a few studies on the novel since its publication, is beyond his cosmopolitanism and a happy-go-lucky pursuit of life. For some critics, Auster's imagination of Brooklyn announces a white and middle-class cosmopolitanism of the American Dream to the exclusion of other ethnicities from the mainstream culture (see Schaub 2011). For others, "*The Brooklyn Follies* seems to be a good example of that concern in which life and finding life is a major attribute" (Kamel 2017, 129). However, the socio-cultural diversity at work within the novel, filtered through a white middle-class narrator, conversely reveals a tolerant Brooklyn for all ethnicities and genders. In fact, characters in *BF* have a change of attitude to life from pessimistic worldviews to optimistic ones within the same society that might initially appear hostile to them (see Pramanik and Modak 2017). This journey includes, in details, moving from existential frustration to pleasant social existence, from pessimism to optimism, from self-absorbed life to family life, and from existential emptiness to survival wish.

An existential investigation into what happens to Nathan in Brooklyn, where his personal concerns and social duties converge with the well-being of others, reveals how he concretizes the Sartrean concept of "for-itself-for-others" based on which optimum human relations are attained. In this regard, this paper explores Nathan's development of character and his interpersonal relations throughout the novel to elaborate on the existential fact that human beings cannot authentically live in isolation away from the community. Auster's existential rendering of what seems to be a very simple human network of interactions in *BF* can accordingly be discussed to present the novel as a manifesto of how to existentially live in a community and help it socially prosper.

Review of Literature

Reading Paul Auster through the lens of Existentialism is tempting, particularly in light of Sartre whose *Life/Situation* Auster translated into English in 1977 when the philosopher was still alive.

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Accordingly, Oberman (2004) makes connections between Auster and French Existentialism, just as Donovan (2005) highlights the influence of "French poetry and existentialist writing" on Auster's writing (3). Moreover, Theobald (2010) traces Auster's tribute to such French thinkers as Sartre, Camus, Blanchot and Merleau-Ponty, as McKean (2010) refers to Auster's connections with French philosophy. Pramanik and Modak (2017) follow a psychoanalytic approach to argue that characters in *BF* move from "noogenic neuroses to amiable social existence, from dark pessimism to bright optimism, from solipsistic life to family life, and from existential vacuum to richness of survival" (212). In general, what links Auster to Existentialism is his "philosophical meanderings on the nature of identity and being" (Parini 2003, 37), or "more than just occasional twitches of existential angst" (McKean 2010, 101), issues that the deceased writer pursued throughout his career in different manners. However, the existential readings of his fiction lack any investigation into the narrative under study in this paper.

Developing the Consciousness of Authentic Life as Sartre's "For-Itself-For-Others"

BF tells the story of Nathan Glass, recently cured of his lung cancer, who moves from Worcester to Brooklyn to spend his early sixties and retirement in quietude. He was a life insurance agent and had to retire due to his illness, meanwhile going through divorce. On his wife's death, he regrets that he was not a good husband to her, and has neither been a good father to his only daughter who is struggling with an unroyal husband during her first pregnancy. Nevertheless, Nathan has decided to change his manners by following a healthier life and writing a book entitled *The Book of Human Folly* about people's wrongdoings and foibles. Nevertheless, Brooklyn turns out to be a purgatory for him rather than the heaven of solitude he was seeking as life has much to teach him in order to acquire an authentic selfhood. In Brooklyn, Nathan confronts not only family members but also strangers who struggle with different financial and psychological problems. His treatment of each character, contrary to what is expected of him as a regretful man seeking solitude, is pure care and kindness in such a way that even his own daughter decides to form a good relationship with him afterwards. Although minor plot lines unfold throughout the novel in each character's private world, *BF* mostly revolves around Nathan and his central role as the architect of a civil utopia to help every citizen with a better sense of life and communal well-being.

BF begins and ends with Nathan as he reflects upon a span of his life in Brooklyn. It begins with his death wish – "I was looking for a quiet place to die" – and ends with a death scene, 9/11. As the novel opens, Nathan has just been cured of cancer to live once again for "a silent end" to his "sad and ridiculous life" (Auster 2008, 1). And it ends with his recovery from a stroke to live on with his family "as happy as any man who had ever lived" (Auster 2008, 304). This sense of death lurking through life, considering Nathan's former job as a life insurance agent, has more dimensions than a mere picture of contingent death that overshadows human everydayness.

After his divorce and struggles with cancer, Nathan is back to life at the beginning of the novel, following his daughter's advice. He succumbs to the whims of life once more at the age of sixty and starts a new life in Brooklyn with his pension. In his own words, "As long as I was alive, I had to figure out a way to start living again ... than just sit around and wait for the end" (Auster 2008, 4). His spiritual decision is thus to write a book, namely *The Book of Human Folly*, to speculate about his own life achievements and failures as well as those of others: "When I couldn't think of stories to tell about myself, I would write down things that had happened to people ... recording the follies of my fellow human beings" (5-6). Nathan's motivation in writing a book of such nature is not just to report human follies or success but to clarify whether life has been existentially authentic enough for humanity. Since he has spent the major part of his working life "in the business of death" (8), "the prospect of death" directs his thoughts in the book toward "the gravest metaphysical questions" such as "What is the point of life? How much longer will I live? How can I protect the people I love after I'm gone?" (8-9). The purpose of life, its longevity, and others' lives are respectively what baffle Nathan in these questions and make his approach to life existential enough. In other words, the raw materials of Nathan's book are pages of others' lives. In this sense, Nathan's attention to social and communal life serves his existential understanding of human relations.

Nathan's interactions with others is best explained via Sartrean Existentialism, based on which an individual requires "the existence of the Other" to "fully realize" all the elements of his/her being. This understanding is constituted of certain "modes of consciousness" that can only be realized when the Other is present and his/her viewpoint has the power to address and affect the individual. In this sense, being conscious of such feelings as shamefulness, embarrassment, pride, and even love, need others for complete fulfillment. For example, no one can feel ashamed when no body else is around. Calling this feature of humanity as "being-for-others", Sartre holds that it equips a person with a set of possibilities that can only be realized before others. In this light, he characterizes "being-for-others" as the core of "interpersonal relations" within society (Cox 2008, 29). For Cox, "The Other only has to look at him [for-itself] to take possession of at least a part of what he is" (2009, 137). It is to say that the human reality, which is called "for-itself" in its individualized state of being, must necessarily be "for-itself and for-others" at the same time since the "for-itself" cannot exist in isolation – no one is born in vacuum. Consequently, the human being who is revealed to us in our reflections upon the world is "for-itself-for-others" as well (Sartre 1956, 282), a fact presupposing "facticity" in the world with and among others. One's "facticity" stands for his/her "necessary connection" with his/her past, the world and others. It is what allows one to say that he/she "is or exists" (630). Therefore, we find ourselves situated within a world not willfully chosen by us. But since "we also have transcendence" beyond our "facticity", we can always assume "possibilities" to alter what is before us as future. Our "two very different aspects" that constitute our human reality are, consequently, "the facts that are true of us" and "our ability to choose, to aspire" (Solomon 2006, 134). In fact, the "for-itself" has a variety of attitudes in a world filled with

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him/herself and others. So every individual relation looks forward to a "bilateral relation" or "for-itself-for-others" in its own particular way (Sartre 1956, 361).

Nathan initially finds himself in his "facticity" and what he thinks as his social isolation away from the body of the society. Nevertheless, he gradually comes to recognize what life can offer, thereby trying to transcend toward life possibilities so long as he is alive, not only for the sake of his individual authenticity but also for that of the society in fulfilling the concept of "for-itself-for-others". He finds a real field of practicing his new role in Brooklyn, an ideal place wherein he witnesses a diversity of ethnicities and genders struggling for a stable life. Consequently, he experiences a network of human relationships through which his life gradually changes for good and his initial death wish fades away as he recognizes the merit of a happy life among others. In Sartrean terms, Nathan initially seems to have overcome his "bad faith" – which Sartre takes for all human excuses away from our essential freedom and infinite range of possibilities (Sartre 1956, 44) – by having authentically decided to begin a new life in Brooklyn. For Sartre, considering life as a set of predetermined rules to cope with is to hold unto "bad faith" against the essential freedom of choices we have in life. Meanwhile, what happens to Nathan highlights the fact that human authenticity away from "bad faith" is an ideal worth pursuing. Nathan should come to terms with both himself and others to recognize the essential relationship that exists between an individual and others to establish an authentic network of human relations. Since, in Sartre's philosophy, "for-itself" and "for-others" are mutually complementary for a human being to have an existentially free and authentic life, Nathan needs to fulfill his authentic self among others. As Auster says, *BF* is about "a group of ordinary people in a Brooklyn neighborhood, the struggles of being alive, the forming of new friendships, new alliances, new loves, an ensemble work dealing with several characters at once" (Auster and Siegmundfeldt 2017, 232). This point further highlights the communal salvation of human beings rather than individual achievements. In so doing, Nathan successfully passes several quests that incorporate his dealings with family and neighbors.

Nathan Glass's Authenticity versus Others' "Bad Faith"

The first step for an authentic portrait of himself as an existentially conscious individual is for Nathan to help Tom, his late sister's son. After seven years of separation, Nathan reunites with Tom who is already struggling with a severe existential crisis in Brooklyn. Although Nathan always wished the best to happen for Tom, he finds him "working as an underling" at the counter in a bookstore (Auster 2008, 19). Unable to finish his doctorate and find a teaching position, out of depression and dejection, Tom became a cab driver several years earlier to earn a living. However, being a taxi driver instead of a professor did not discourage him to find a meaning for his life: "perhaps this job would do him some good, that if he paid attention to what he was doing and why he was doing it, the cab would teach him lessons that couldn't be learned anywhere else" (24). Leaving all his ambitions behind, Tom took refuge in a cabbie's life, as if it would do him good. He knew that he had been in "bad faith" back then, having

lost the purpose of his life. In Sartre's Existentialism, commitment to something is "bad faith" and thinking that one has overcome "bad faith" and has become "authentic" is "bad faith" as well. Authenticity is "a deliberate and sustained project" through which an individual should affirm his "freedom" and take "full responsibility without regret for his past, for his present situation and for his actions in that situation" (Cox 2008, 15). Authenticity is a never-ending project; the "for-itself" is always "what it is not" and is yet to come (Sartre 1956, 70). Humankind should thus recognize and value the fact that he/she "must continually choose" to be other than what he/she is (Cox 2008, 15). In this light, for Nathan in *BF*, Tom was not sorry for himself as "He had found a method to atone for his stupidity, and if he could survive the experience without completely losing heart, then perhaps there was some hope for him after all". Tom was not struggling "to make the best of a bad situation" via cab driving; he was actually pursuing a way "to make things happen" in order to "release himself from his bondage" (Auster 2008, 24-25). Limiting himself to his bondage prohibits Tom from resolving his existential crisis; however, he tries to escape his dejection towards a utopian existence, although he knows that in essence he may fail. So it is meaningful that his thesis back in college was titled "Imaginary Edens: The Life of the Mind in Pre-Civil War America", elaborating on Poe's and Thoreau's versions of an ideal place of living (Auster 2008, 14), which is Auster's subject of interest throughout *BF*. According to Tom, "in their own wildly idiosyncratic ways", Poe and Thoreau wanted "to be free" by reinventing America since "America had gone to hell" in those years. Tom's concern was also about freedom at those times: "as long as a man had the courage to reject what society told him to do, he could live life on his own terms" (Auster 2008, 16). He believes that Poe and Thoreau made their best choice during the political turmoil before the Civil War to live their own spheres of being. However, in Sartrean terms, seeking ideals for the sake of ultimate peace is essentially being in "bad faith" as far as humanity is essentially free and open to numerous possibilities.

Although Tom knows that it is possible to change his living condition, it is Nathan who speaks for him: "I never doubted that Tom would flourish in the world," Nathan holds, declaring that Tom is "too solid a character to be thrown off course by the unpredictable winds of sorrow and bad luck" (Auster 2008, 18). Tom gradually recognizes that authenticity is not a life without challenges, an idea that befalls him throughout the time he was busy as a cab driver that helped him with developing "theories about the ontological value of the cabbie's life": "Every destination is arbitrary, every decision is governed by chance. ... you have no will of your own. The only reason you're there is to serve the whims of other people" (Auster 2008, 29). Serving other people's whims directly associates taxi driving with Sartre's "for-itself-for-others". "Within one and the same upsurge," Sartre says, "the being of human reality must be for-itself-for-others" (Sartre 1956, 218). In other words, the "human reality" is to be simultaneously "for-itself and for-others" (282). This relationship is mutual: I am subject to the Other's gaze and judgment just as the Other is subject to those mine; I serve the Other's whims just as the Other serves those of mine. "Being-for-others" incorporates all my possibilities in the face of others, that is, I am yet to

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happen since I am the manifestation of possibilities that others have imagined for me. For example, the Other's look "reduces a person to an object" which has no possibilities of being or essential characteristics other than those given to it by others (Cox 2008, 29). Although Tom comes to understand that life is arbitrary and that chance dominates life, he is still far behind recognizing the fact that his relationship with others should be modified for an authentic change. It is only after his taxi driving experience that he thinks he is "ready for a change" (Auster 2008, 31). This change coincides with a chain of events in which Nathan arrives in Brooklyn and accelerates Tom's course of change for the better.

Harry Dunkel, the owner of the bookstore in which Tom works, is the next person highlighting Nathan's centrality in the novel as the manifestation of "for-itself-for-others". Nathan tells us that no one is sure about Harry's origins, "and when a man can produce an air of mystery about himself, he always has the upper hand when dealing with the public" (Auster 2008, 39). Harry has tried to escape others' judgments by counterfeiting his life story. Although he is blameworthy for some misdeed in his past, he is a subject of Nathan's praise. Being penniless a decade earlier, "Dunkel had done rather nicely for himself," Nathan informs us (57). Nathan praises Harry's "eternal greatness" in that he tries his best to embrace all chances of success (280). In Harry's own viewpoint, "The world stinks ... But we do our best to avoid it" (99). Moreover, although Harry has a secret affair with his cashier Rufus, whose gender is never clearly revealed to the reader except for a vague glimpse in Harry's funeral, Nathan's treatment of them is never disrespectful. He is also supportive of Rufus's decision, after Harry's death, to reduce his share of Harry's money as far as his medical expenses allow.

Aurora, Tom's sister, whom Nathan brings back to life almost out of death, is another character illuminating the pivotal role of Nathan in the novel. After her mother's death, Aurora was not regularly seen around her family, pursuing a libertine life with two musicians, just to return with "an out-of-wedlock child (a girl named Lucy)" (Auster 2008, 19). It was June, her other, who brought Lucy up, as Aurora did not want her and disappeared soon after her birth. However, Aurora appeared in June's funeral to reclaim her child and disappear once again, this time with Lucy. She then began working as a model for adult magazines, ending up in the porn industry and suffering from gang rape by a porn crew, eventually taking refuge to drugs. Having spent some time in a rehab center, she married a cult fanatic with strange beliefs whose house was a place of domestic violence. She used to think that "she would never find joy or fulfillment unless the eyes of the world were looking at her" (73), an opinion she finally deplores. On reuniting with Nathan and Tom after a terrible episode of her married life, she confesses to Nathan that her marriage was a fault; she knew what was going to happen, but she was too weak to defend herself against it. Her case initially resembles the coquette who is flirting with a man in a café in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. Although the coquette knows what her behavior in allowing a man to touch her hand on their first date means to him, she ignores the implications of the situation. Sartre considers this woman to be in "bad faith" since she applies various procedures to justify her self-

deceptive manner: "She has disarmed the actions of her companion by reducing them to being only what they are" (Sartre 1956, 56). The coquette treats her hand as if it is not hers but "an object for which she is not responsible" (Cox 2008, 83). Likewise, by leaving her mother's house and leading her life into false beliefs, Aurora ignores the very essence of free will and the possibility of choosing well in order to live peacefully with her mother or even Tom. She ultimately decides to rebuild herself through Nathan who is deeply worried about "only one thing: to hunt down Rory [Aurora] and bring her back to New York" (Auster 2008, 244). Nathan becomes Aurora's existential therapist in some way, offering her "to pay for regular sessions with a therapist if she thought they would help". However, she only wants to talk to him, "Nathan the Unwise ... now transformed into a confidant and counselor" (284).

Tom is the next in line, once more, to further bring to light Nathan's figure as a Sartrean hero. Having acquired his share of the bookstore after Harry's death, Tom can settle his life now and think about marrying Honey, a like-minded teacher. Recognizing that Honey is pregnant, Tom asks Nathan to be the godfather to their child because of his "outstanding courage in the heat of battle", in "risking life and limb" to rescue his "wounded comrade under intense fire", in "prodding that same comrade to stand on his feet again and enter into this conjugal union" (Auster 2008, 280). Meanwhile, Nathan's daughter Rachel is pregnant again after her first miscarriage. "I'm going to make you a grandfather," she blesses her father after Tom's model (281). These blessings have Nathan reflect on his achievement as such: "I adored every person who lived in that house" (282).

Nathan Glass's Existentialist Manifestos for Humanity in Life and Death

Nathan's rules of living can essentially function as his principles of a happy life. He prescribes them to an elderly woman of his age called Joyce Mazzucchelli, whom he later marries, to convince her that her daughter's love affair with Aurora can help both girls out of their former hardships – the former being a victim under an unfaithful husband and the latter having suffered sexual and domestic abuse:

Keep your chin up. Don't take any wooden nickels. Vote Democrat in every election. Ride your bike in the park. ... Take your vitamins. Drink eight glasses of water a day. ... Watch a lot of movies. Don't work too hard at your job. ... Brush your teeth after every meal. Don't cross the street on a red light. Defend the little guy. Stick up for yourself. Remember how beautiful you are. ... Drink one Scotch on the rocks every day. Breathe deeply. Keep your eyes open. Stay away from fatty foods. Sleep the sleep of the just. (Auster 2008, 293-294)

In an interview with Mary Morris in 2005, Auster holds that "In essence, I think of *The Brooklyn Follies* as a hymn to the ordinary, a hymn to the beauty of everyday life. The mystery and joy of being alive" (as cited in Hutchisson 2013, 165). For Nathan, it is "a pity that we aren't allowed to go on living forever" (Auster 2008, 179). He regrets that he has not been able to "believe in life" (53), to fulfill "the instinct for survival" and "the will to live" (54). Such regrets prompt him to write a book about human follies to underscore the fact that life can be more enjoyable. In Auster's words, *BF* is not merely about

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Nathan but also everyone else in his life. His story is "a kind of resurrection story: he goes through divorce, cancer, a phase of bitter disgust, and a general feeling that his life is over". Gradually, he discovers a new way of living, new friends and new love, generally "a way of rejoining the human circus" (Auster and Siegmundfeldt 2017, 230). Auster thus questions individuals' attempts at selfhood away from their social roles just because they are born into a society and their existence is not defined merely on the personal level. In fact, Auster questions the "staging of the individual in the midst of society" or "the place of one's subjectivity in the multitudinous, often urban, contemporary experience" (Dupont 2009). Sartre's "for-itself-for-others" stands for this state of human beings within the world:

it is in its effort to choose itself as a personal self that the for-itself sustains in existence certain social and abstract characteristics which make of it a man (or a woman); and the necessary connections which accompany the essential elements of man appear only on the foundation of a free choice; in this sense each for-itself is responsible in its being for the existence of a human race. (Sartre 1956, 520)

The consciousness of the "for-itself," as it experiences the world, points to a social "ethical imperative". That is to say, one's consciousness must secure both its own "practical freedom" and that of others in order for one to be authentic (Rae 2011, 87). The existential recommendation to respect others is an organic outgrowth of embracing one's social identity and basic freedom of action. This project, as part of human "authenticity", acknowledges one's and others' freedom at the same time, as far as "self-awareness, lucidity and understanding" stand for existential virtues (Heter 2006, 156). In other words, individual authenticity requires others to exist authentically as well, a condition that happens when one is conscious of the fact that others are also conscious of their possibilities. In this light, Nathan gradually develops this kind of consciousness not only to enhance his own humanity but also to help others with their sense of living for the sake of optimum interpersonal relations.

Nathan's social mission, under his existentialist concerns, is to write the biographies of those people whose lives have been forgotten after their deaths, biographies that reveal the follies they had gone through and the chances for authentic living they had missed. Consequently, he tries to "reread and rewrite life to create order and meaning from the nonsensical and chaotic" (Bollinger 2014, 501). That is part of his reason to write another book, *Bios Unlimited*, to commemorate "most lives" whose traces gradually disappear after death, without anything or anyone to keep their memories alive (Auster 2008, 301). Nathan's book of fictional biography, as it would be more fictional than factual, commemorates the majority of people who die with nothing left for remembrance. Accordingly, he wants to give all people "not home insurance or life insurance" as he used to give "but biography insurance" (Auster 2008, 301), "something that would outlive them" (Auster 2008, 302), something that reveals their contribution to the well-being of themselves and their societies.

According to Bollinger, "Nathan's belief in the power of language to memorialize a life is beyond idealistic" as biographies do not replace and precisely match the people they describe (2014, 501). For Sartre, when the "for-itself" dies, it is no longer able to resist the Other's look (1956, 348). To put it differently, the deceased are subject to the living's judgment, and death stands for the loss of "all possibility of revealing oneself as subject to the Other" (297), thereby making the Other "the guardian" of the deceased. This means that the reconstruction of the deceased's personality and memories, just as Nathan wants to perform, is one of "the possible attitudes of the Other in relation to the dead life". Consequently, a resurrected life in words is "a particular destiny" that limits the ungraspable image of the once-living "for-itself" within a death-frame. The lives of the dead are, therefore, defined "in terms of the Other" (Sartre 1956, 541), and "to die is to exist only through the Other" (544). So even death, as the annihilation of the "for-itself", cannot be grasped but through another "for-itself". To die, specifically when one is forgotten, is "to lose one's personal existence in order to be constituted with others in a collective existence" (542). Auster similarly argues that while living human beings are synonymous with their bodies, they are different entities in death. "This is the body of X," Auster says, "as if this body, which had once been the man himself ... were suddenly of no importance." A human being and his/her dead body are "two things instead of one," suggesting that the dead body "continues to exist, but only as an idea, a cluster of images and memories in the minds of other people" (Auster 2005, 10-11). In this light, Nathan's endeavor to document dead people's lives is to engulf them within a framework filtered through his consciousness, a fact depriving them of their essential being just because they are dead and have no claim over who they were and what they did in their lifetime. Although Nathan idolizes such people in a way they were not in reality, his version of their reality contributes to the existentialist plan he wants to run: providing a sketch of the network of human relations and their contributions to their societies. Remolding dead people accordingly pulls them out of their "for-itself" into the "for-itself-for-others" as their involvement in and influence on their societies come to light.

It is true that Sartre prefers to consider human relations as a "conflict" than any attempt at communal contributions to the well-being of the society (Howells 2009, 19). For Sartre, rather all human interactions are "domination and subjugation of one party by another" (Anderson 1993, 27). That is why in every interaction there is a subject and an object, one finally overcoming the other. "Conflict," Sartre holds, "is the original meaning of being-for-others" (1956, 364), best expressed in a famous line in *No Exit*: "Hell is – other people" (Sartre 1989, 45), a famous Sartrean cathphrase that Zuraikat and Mashreqi interpret as "fear from others" (2020, 128). However, Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* provides the Other with some positive features when certain potentials of the "for-itself" are taken into consideration:

the Other has not only revealed to me what I was; he has established me in a new type of being which can support new qualifications. This being was not in me potentially before the appearance of the Other, for it could not have found any place in the For-itself. (1956, 222)

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In this light, Nathan helps others to find their sense of themselves, just as others do the same for him. However, since it is Nathan who initially becomes conscious of the human innate power to change for the better on both personal and interpersonal grounds, he is the one to be awarded the Sartrean code of honor.

With his newly acquired worldview, Nathan seems to have made it clear that he is now ready for what comes next in life, even if it is the fear of imminent death. At the end of the novel, when he is hospitalized for a heart attack, he is still hopeful and maintains his good spirits until his discharge on September 11, 2001, less than an hour before the notorious attacks against World Trade Center. Remaining hopeful in the face of annihilation is what Nathan eventually comes to acknowledge:

It was ... eight o'clock on the morning of September 11, 2001—just forty-six minutes before the first plane crashed into the North Tower ... Just two hours after that, the smoke of three thousand incinerated bodies would drift over toward Brooklyn ... But for now it was still eight ... and as I walked along the avenue under that brilliant blue sky, I was ... as happy as any man who had ever lived. (Auster 2008, 303-304)

Knowing that death is contingent, Nathan overcomes the "tangle of distressing family problems" through "pragmatism and good intentions" (Bollinger 2014, 490). He does not impose any ultimate solution on the unexpectedness of life and the contingency of disaster and death. He retains his sense of life in the face of possible death, represented by the heart attack and 9/11 as chance events. To put it in Sartrean terms, the "for-itself" is a manifestation of freedom of choice among possibilities. As Zuraikat and Mashreqi (2022) interpret "for-itself", it is most fully "conscious of what it is, what it is not, and what others are" (123). Therefore, there is no objective for a human being to become one with his/herself as a complete being. In addition, until death reveals itself, the "for-itself" is free and runs its business. Sartre believes that "Our life is only a long waiting", "a waiting for the realization of our ends" during "a waiting for ourselves" to become our possibilities (1956, 537-538). Although it recalls the matter of waiting as explored in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953), Sartre gives 'waiting' a more optimistic intonation than what Beckett implies. Sartre's Existentialism, for Zuraikat and Mashreqi (2020), is "an optimistic, rather than pessimistic, approach" to the problem of human reality (1). Sartre thus refuses to allow death to form an integral part of human living.

Auster's reference to 9/11 expands the meaning of "trauma" from "the quiet tragedies of a family quarrel, an unhappy marriage, or an illness" to "mass trauma" engulfing New York and even the world. It is as if, using "a cinematic metaphor", Nathan's field of vision "pans out" from his whereabouts to "a wider field of vision" over the two planes approaching the World Trade Center (Bollinger 2014, 492). This cinematic technique belittles Nathan's personal problems to overemphasize the ones that lie in ambush against humanity, represented by 9/11. Since Nathan's fate in this scene is tied to that of others, the end of the novel suggests that mass issues address individuals and communities on similar grounds.

For Sartre, as mentioned earlier, “each for-itself is responsible in its being for the existence of a human race” (1956, 520). In this light, Nathan’s happiness at the end of the novel follows his speculation about his past and the meaning he has bestowed his life with so far in order to guide his future interactions more authentically. “No matter how I live or evaluate my past,” Sartre reflects, “I can do so only in the light of a project of myself toward the future. Thus the order of my choices of the future is going to determine an order of my past” (1956, 499). Even in the face of such catastrophe as 9/11, “To be free is to have one’s freedom perpetually on trial”, as a Sartrean formula, makes sense (502). There is “a certain margin of indetermination” in our project of being “for the unpredictable,” and this is because of the nature of our project of being as “for-itself.” Thus, it can be said that “human reality is surprised by nothing”. As far as we are our possibilities, nothing astonishes and surprises us in the world (507).

As the novel ends, Nathan is happy that he is back to life again and that he is going to continue his life and acknowledge his possibilities of being, regardless of the margins of indeterminacy that unexpectedly shatter his state of peace. It is through such worldview, accepting the unexpected and managing life possibilities beside trying to acknowledge one’s and others’ freedom and authenticity, that all the events in the novel go easy on Nathan and he is able to influence others to tolerate not only each other but also life in general. As people die here and there with no certain biography about them, Nathan decides “to form a company that would publish books about the forgotten ones, to rescue the stories and facts and documents before they disappeared—and shape them into a continuous narrative, the narrative of a life” (Auster 2008, 301).

Conclusion

Sartre’s Existentialism might sound impractical regarding the practical dimension of human relations since people are too busy to be conscious of what they are doing and authentically master their lives and possibilities of being. Being conscious of the fact that each human being is, in Sartrean terms, “for-itself-for-others” is beyond common sense and, therefore, making it practical seems even more difficult. However, the interpersonal relationships human beings have already established within their societies point to the fact that we are conscious species who think about the world around us; that we are not alone, as we are situated in a world with others who turn our individualistic “for-itself” into the communal “for-others”, and hence the “for-itself-for-others”. Being inauthentic and in “bad faith” thus stands for ignorance of the existential fact that social well-being owes its essence to authentic interpersonal relations.

Although Auster initially introduces Nathan Glass as a broken man in pursuit of peace in his old age, he turns out to be the most beneficial person for his family and friends, even his society. He approaches each individual he meets with affection, helping them to reconsider their lives and settle down, meanwhile sympathizing with them, adoring their courage, and eventually speculating how and what each life story can contribute to the cosmic web of human life. He accompanies Tom throughout his problems, helping him with his bookstore, arranging for his marriage. He regains his daughter’s love during her

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husband's unfaithful absence and her pregnancy, advising her not to divorce. He fathers Aurora's daughter after her arrival in Brooklyn and saves Aurora herself from domestic violence by financially supporting her. He marries an elderly woman out of her loneliness and has her heartily ignore Aurora's affair with her daughter. He admires Harry's talent in business, encouraging him to move forward, never criticizing his deviance, just as he admires his transgender cashier and their intimacy. Nathan's specific approach to life, which is to live and allow others to live or help them with their lives, still remains intact in the face of 9/11 and its death toll.

So long as Nathan is alive, he authentically wills his own life and helps others will theirs in the same manner. Once an unfaithful husband and a neglectful father, he chooses to change himself for the better by authentically leading his life on both personal and social levels. He is somehow the architect of Auster's urban utopia for the benefit of every member of his community in Brooklyn. While others are lost in their ignorance of the nature of human reality as "for-itself-for-others" by resisting change, Nathan puts to action the Sartrean concept not only to reveal that humankind is "for-itself" and open to self-made changes but also "for-others" to cause good changes to happen for all. Whether Nathan is a reliable narrator or not, regarding his first-person narration, his version of reality is simultaneously optimistic and realistic. In this sense, the Sartrean concept attains recognition as presented to in Nathan's life as a guideline.

طبيعة الواقع الإنساني في (حماقات بروكلين) لبول أوستر في ضوء فلسفة سارتر "لنفسه وللآخرين"

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الملخص

إن الجانب الوجودي للطبيعة الاجتماعية للواقع الإنساني، الذي عرّف على أنه "لنفسه وللآخرين" في فلسفة سارتر، يحدد النوع البشري من حيث المساهمات الجماعية لإنشاء مجتمع مثالي من العلاقات والتعاون بين الأشخاص، إذ يتطلب مثل هذا المجتمع تشكيل هوية الفرد وفقاً لرفاهية الآخرين، وهو ما يتجلى تجلياً أفضل في المفهوم السارترى المتمثل في "لنفسه وللآخرين". في رواية أوستر (حماقات بروكلين)، فمن الناحية الوجودية، يعيش بطل الرواية ناثان جلاس حياة أصيلة على المستويين الشخصي والاجتماعي تجاه مبدأ سارتر، وفي ضوء ذلك، يمثل ناثان القدرة البشرية على تنظيم الشبكة الفوضوية من الارتباطات بين الأشخاص عندما يكون الفرد واعياً بحرية الاختيار الإنسانية والمسؤوليات الاجتماعية ويحاول مساعدة الآخرين على اكتساب نفس المستوى من الوعي. وعلى هذا النحو، فهو صورة لمفهوم "لنفسه وللآخرين" في إدارة شبكة علاقاته مع أفراد المجتمع الآخرين. وتسلط هذه الورقة الضوء على دور ناثان على أنه مهندس للمدينة الفاضلة الحضرية لأوستر، وتناقش كيف يمكن للمفهوم السارترى أعلاه أن يظهر نفسه إظهاراً واقعياً داخل مجتمع فوضوي على حافة الانهيار في مطلع القرن في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أوستر، الحماقات بروكلين، موجدية، سارتر.

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