Cracking the codes:
a textual and editorial examination of John Fante's literature

By Christopher McCormack

McGill University, Montreal
October 2001

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts, English Literature.

Abstract

After many years of neglect, American novelist and short-story writer John Fante is beginning to attract scholarly attention. In the current critical field there is an absence of textual and editorial criticism that needs to be redressed. It is important for Fante criticism to acknowledge the fact that Black Sparrow Press has not only republished Fante, but has re-invented him. Following the example of textual and editorial critics such as Lawrence S. Rainey, Jerome McGann, and George Bornstein, I address Black Sparrow's influence on the institutional, bibliographic, and linguistic codes of the Black Sparrow editions of Fante's work. By focussing on textual and editorial issues, I open up new areas of critical assessment—such as Black Sparrow's influence on critical and popular receptions of Fante. This critical approach allows for a more precise and complete critical understanding of Fante's work.

Longtemps négligé par la critique et les spécialistes de littérature, le romancier et auteur de nouvelles américain John Fante commence finalement à s'attirer l'attention du milieu universitaire. Dans l'actuel domaine des études littéraires, une lacune au niveau de la critique dite textuelle et éditoriale persiste --lacune qu'il est hautement important de combler. Il est donc crucial pour les specialistes de Fante de reconnaître que les éditions Black Sparrow (Black Sparrow Press) ont non seulement rééditer l'oeuvre de Fante, mais qu'elles ont également réinventer l'auteur. M'inspirant des exemples de critique textuelle et éditoriale de Lawrence S. Rainey, Jerome McGann et George Bornstein, je me penche sur l'influence de Black Sparrow Press dans les codes institutionnels, bibliographiques et linguistiques de leurs éditions des ouvrages de Fante. En me concentrant ainsi sur des problématiques textuelles et éditoriales, je révèle de nouveaux domaines d'interprétation critique –telle que l'influence de Black Sparrow Press sur la réception de l'oeuvre de Fante, tant au niveau de la critique universitaire que du lectorat en général.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Miranda B. Hickman, for her invaluable guidance and support. I would also like to give special thanks to Venus Bivar, David Bourgeois, Megan Chellew, Matthew Kavanagh, Jason Polly, and David Wright for their generosity, advice, and editorial contributions. *Mérci* to Marie-Hélen Séguin for generously volunteering to translate my abstract into French. I owe many thanks to Professor Stephen Cooper for responding to my inquiries, and for welcoming me into the community of Fante scholars. Finally, I would not be here without the love and encouragement of my family, and Jessica Marion Barr. Thanks especially to my father, Phil McCormack, and to Jessica Marion Barr for assisting with research. I dedicate this work to my mother, Dianne Acey, in grateful acknowledgment of her unwavering support and faith in me.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Section One: Institutional and Bibliographic Codes and the Interpretation of Texts 17

Section Two: Editing Fante's Linguistic Code 40

Conclusion 69

Works Cited 71

Introduction

After many years of neglect, American novelist and short-story writer John Fante (1909-1983) is beginning to attract scholarly attention. With important contributions made in the 1990s and 2000, the quantity and quality of Fante scholarship is steadily increasing. Nevertheless, Fante scholarship is still in its infancy and lacks the perspicacity and diversity of the scholarly work on Fante's more famous contemporaries, such as William Faulkner and John Steinbeck. The extraordinary posthumous career of Fante can be compared to that of H.D. and Gerard Manley Hopkins, authors whose oeuvres and reputations changed dramatically after their deaths. The reputations of these authors, however, have been fostered by the academy, and thus subjected to an extensive critical debate, whereas Fante's "resurrection" has been ignored by all but a handful of critics. Fante's posthumous career has been remarkable in its scope and energy. It has had a profound impact on conceptions of Fante's work, and yet little has been written about the implications for interpretation of Fante's second/posthumous career. Over the last twenty years Fante's books have been published very rapidly and, recently, Fante criticism has begun gaining pace. It is time to examine the new materials that have become available, and to ground the activity of literary criticism in a solid base of textual criticism.

The recent increase in scholarly attention has resulted in a spate of excellent articles that have explored a number of issues of importance to Fante studies: Who is John Fante? What is his work about? Is it good? Should he be included in the canon of American literature? These questions have served well as the basis for the burgeoning body of Fante criticism, but there is a significant absence of textual criticism in this body of work. The Fante with whom most of today's critics are familiar is the Fante of the Black Sparrow

Press publications of the 1980s and 1990s, but critics have yet to treat the fact that Black Sparrow has not only re-published Fante, but has re-invented him. It is important that this be recognized and that a full knowledge of its implications for Fante studies be embedded in future scholarship.

The two most obvious ways in which Black Sparrow has influenced Fante studies are, one, by simply re-publishing out-of-print material they have exposed new generations of readers to works that would otherwise have been unavailable to them, and, two, they have posthumously published enough "new" Fante material to significantly change the shape of the Fante canon. These two basic facts of Black Sparrow's influence have been generally acknowledged by critics—they are difficult to ignore—but no one has examined their critical implications. Also absent from the critical debate is mention of the more subtle implications of Black Sparrow's editions of Fante's work. Apart from one brief comment by Donald Weber (71), Fante critics have yet to comment on the interpretative implications of the bibliographic codes of Black Sparrow editions of Fante's work, and nobody has commented on their institutional code.[1] Nor has anybody questioned the integrity of the linguistic code of the editions of Fante's posthumously published work. Who edited these books? What was their editorial policy? What was the condition of the manuscripts? The editors of Fante's posthumously published works have not provided answers to these questions. It is time for scholars to begin addressing this lack of editorial explication.

In order to effectively critique Fante we must develop a more sophisticated understanding of the textual condition of the materials we are studying. Unfortunately, Fante's work has not been properly catalogued or collected (the bulk of Fante's papers are

[1] My use of the term "institutional code," which refers to the meaning with which texts are imbued by publishing houses, magazines, journals, etc., is explained in detail on pp. 3-5.

currently located in a commercial Los Angeles storage facility despite several universities' interest in acquiring them) and, therefore, in this essay I will not be making a detailed critical comparison between the Black Sparrow publications and the manuscripts and earlier editions of Fante's work. With the materials at my disposal, however, I will explore the implications for interpretation of the institutional, bibliographic, and linguistic codes of the Black Sparrow editions of Fante's novels and short-story collections. By focussing on textual and editorial issues, I will open up new areas of critical assessment—such as Black Sparrow's influence on critical and popular receptions of Fante—that will help develop a more precise and complete critical understanding of Fante's work.

My concept of "institutional code" is based on the work of editorial and textual theorists—such as Lawrence S. Rainey, Jerome McGann and George Bornstein—who are concerned with the "dialectic between work and form, text and context, history and theory" (Rainey, *Monument* 7). I have coined the term "institutional code" to suggest that there is a feature of textuality that is distinct, even, from the distinctions which Jerome McGann has previously identified between texts' "linguistic" and "bibliographic" codes. As a new term used to categorize concepts that have been developed by several editorial and textual theorists, "institutional code" requires definition. Before defining it in detail, however, I will first outline the context within which it is intended to operate.

McGann coined the terms "linguistic code" and "bibliographical code"[2] in order to identify for the purposes of interpretation two distinct, but interwoven, textual elements of literary works:

> [W]e must carefully distinguish the linguistic from the bibliographical text.

---

[2] Although McGann uses the form "bibliographic*al*," the form "bibliographic" which I use throughout the essay is also accepted usage.

> [...] [B]oth linguistic and bibliographical texts are symbolic and signifying mechanisms. Each generates meaning, and while the bibliographical text typically functions in a subordinate relation to the linguistic text, 'meaning' in literary works results from the interactive agency of these two semiotic mechanisms operating together ("What Is Critical Editing?" 27).

"Linguistic code" refers to the language of the text—"what older theorists used to call the 'poem as such'" (*Textual Condition* 13)—and "bibliographic code" refers to anything from cover design, page format, book prices, bindings, and typefaces to titles, prefaces, dedications, footnotes, illustrations, and so forth. (In this essay, discussion of bibliographic code is limited to an examination of cover designs, titles, illustrations, and prefaces.) The bibliographic or material elements of literary works have largely been ignored by traditional literary scholars, but their relevance to literary interpretation has been demonstrated by a number of critics—such as McGann, Bornstein, and Rainey—who are at the forefront of recent developments in textual and editorial theory. McGann's terminology has been accepted by, and incorporated into, this field of critical studies. Working from this perspective, and within this critical context, I suggest that the "institutional code" of literary works should also be recognized as a "signifying mechanism" that influences interpretation of a text's linguistic code.

"Institutional code" is used here to refer to the meaning imbued in texts by publishing houses, magazines, journals, etc. (i.e. institutions of transmission).[3] For example,

---

[3] My use of the word "institution" follows that of Rainey in *Institutions of Modernism*: "For sociologist, institutions are the structures that interpose themselves between the individual and society; they are both social subdivisions of human beings and the regulative principles that organize various zones of activity and behavior. That sense predominates in this study [...]" (6). In this essay, publishing houses, magazines, journals, etc., are defined as "intervenient institutions that connect works to readerships, or readerships to particular social structures" (*Institutions* 4).

McGann writes: "It makes a difference if the poem we read is printed in the *New Yorker*, the *New York Review of Books*, or the *New Republic*" (*Beauty* 80). It makes a difference not only because the bibliographic code of the poem changes with each new publication, but because each institution of transmission has its own ideologies, politics, history, and reputation that influence our understanding of the poem (i.e. each institution of transmission imbues the poem with a different "institutional code" that influences interpretation of the poem's linguistic code). In other words, a poem (or any literary work) that is published in a magazine, or by a press, that has a reputation for being conservative will garner a kind of conservative credibility, whereas a poem published in a magazine, or by a press, that has a reputation for being avant-garde will garner a certain avant-garde credibility (which, I argue, is the case with Fante and Black Sparrow Press).

My definition, and understanding, of "institutional code" is particularly indebted to the critical approach expounded by Rainey in *Institutions of Modernism*:

> To focus on [the] institutions [of modernism] [...] is to view modernism as more than a series of texts or ideas that found expression in them. It becomes a social reality, a configuration of agents and practices that converge in the production, marketing, and publicization of an idiom, a shareable language in the family of twentieth century tongues. To trace the institutional profile of modernism in the social spaces and staging venue where it operated can teach us a great deal about the relations between modernism and popular culture, the fate of aesthetic autonomy, authorial self-construction in advancing modernity, and the troublesome place of literary elites in pubic culture. (5)

Following Rainey's example, I focus part of my discussion on the institutions that have been responsible for the dissemination of Fante's work. I trace the "institutional profile" of Fante's work and focus particular attention on the way in which Black Sparrow has mediated between Fante's texts and Fante's readership. Under the auspices of Black Sparrow, Fante's literature has come to occupy a "social space" different from that which it occupied in its previous incarnation. By marketing Fante as the neglected forefather of avant-garde writer Charles Bukowski, Black Sparrow has instituted a new "Fante," shaped by both the institutional code of Black Sparrow, and by a history of neglect and rediscovery. Fante has become a Black Sparrow phenomenon, a kind of "socioliterary event" with which readers engage when reading Fante.

Working from the perspective of modern editorial theory, including McGann's "socialized concept of authorship and literary authority" (*Critique* 8), I argue that the Fante novels that are being produced and disseminated today are particularly striking examples of "collaborative" works of art for which textual authority is shared among author, editor, publisher, and even preface writer. The "collaborative" nature of the Black Sparrow editions is most obvious in the posthumous publications wherein editors' decisions concerning the linguistic codes of literary works that were never prepared for publication necessarily influence the final meaning of the texts. However, Black Sparrow's influence on the institutional and bibliographic codes of Fante's work also constitutes a kind of "collaboration" that affects the meaning of the texts. As Catherine Kordich suggests in *John Fante: His Novel and Novellas*, Fante's fame in the 1980s "so outweighed the earlier attention paid to his literary output that interest in his work was less a renaissance than a birth" (16-17). One of the reasons Fante's second/posthumous career can be described as a

"birth" and not simply a "re-birth" is because of the unique implications that Black Sparrow has for Fante's oeuvre and reputation. Without the influence of Black Sparrow, Fante's work would still be lost among the dusty editions of a Los Angeles library where Bukowski originally discovered it—it would not be in print and it would not benefit from the "Bukowskiesque" aura of avant-garde radicalness that it currently enjoys.

The remainder of the introduction provides a brief biography of Fante and outlines the important events in both his early and late/posthumous careers. Section one explores the relationship between Black Sparrow and Fante and investigates the interpretive implications of the institutional and bibliographic codes of the Black Sparrow editions of Fante's work in comparison with earlier editions. Section two considers the linguistic codes of a select number of Black Sparrow editions and investigates the editorial decisions resulting in the texts we know and study today.

Fante's Life and Career

Some people say that to know John Fante's literature one must know John Fante: the man, his family, and his history. Others say that to know John Fante's literature *is* to know John Fante. But most people simply say, "Who's John Fante?" Fante's life and fiction intersect in complex and confusing ways. In this essay I do not pursue literary meaning down the paths of personal history, but do attempt to decipher some meaning from the history of Fante's literature and literary production. However, by way of introduction to this literary history, and to this essay, I will provide some essential details of Fante's life that will present a necessary background to this investigation.

In a 1932 letter to H.L. Mencken in which he was supplying information for his first ever literary biography, Fante once wrote:

> I was born in Denver, Colorado, in 1911, in a macaroni factory, which is just about the right place for a man of my genealogy to get his first slap, for my people were from the peasantry of Italy. My mother was born in Chicago, so that makes me just enough of an American as is necessary. My father was very happy at my birth. He was so happy that he got drunk and stayed that way for a week. On and off for the last twenty-one years he has continued to celebrate my coming. (*Fante/Mencken* 29)

This passage is typical of Fante because it is witty, irreverent, and not entirely true. Fante was indeed born in Denver, Colorado to a first generation Italian-American mother and an Italian immigrant father, but he was not born in a macaroni factory nor was he born in 1911. In fact, Fante was born in 1909. His mother, Mary, was a first-generation Italian-American raised in Chicago's insular Italian community. His father, Nick, was a hard-drinking, hard-gambling (though apparently still charming), brick-laying Abruzzian who was at once staunchly Italian and, after gaining citizenship, self-assuredly American. Fante spent most of his childhood living in Boulder, Colorado, where he would eventually attend Regis High School and College, a Jesuit-run institution that at least one critic has suggested was responsible for influencing Fante's "meditative" style of writing (Jay Martin 24).

After graduating from Regis High School, Fante registered at the University of Colorado (marking his birth-year as 1910) in the fall of 1927 but only managed to maintain his studies until March 1929 (Cooper, *Full* 44-47). Sometime in 1928 or 1929 Fante's father left the family and ran away with another woman. Soon afterwards, Fante himself left

Mary and the children to fend for themselves and hitch-hiked west to Wilmington, California. This first grasp at independence was short lived, however, as Mary and the two youngest children joined Fante a few months later. In Wilmington, Fante worked at a variety of menial jobs, eking out a living and supporting his family until his parents' reconciliation (about a year later) and removal north to Roseville, California. Fante was then finally free to begin the next stage of his life.

Despite the Depression, the 1930's were prodigious years for Fante. Although he began the decade poor, unknown, and unpublished, he ended it as the author of fifteen published short stories, two novels, and one screenplay. If not rich, he was at least no longer poor, and he was successful. When his first published short story, "Altar Boy," appeared in the August 1932 issue of *The American Mercury*, Fante was only twenty-three years old. In the early '30s, Fante was young and naïve, but he was also ambitious. In 1930, he began writing to H.L. Mencken, one of America's most influential men of letters and the editor of *The American Mercury*, which at the time was one of America's most prestigious magazines. It was to this man that Fante sent his early stories, and communicated his youthful optimism:

> It is my plan to edit The American Mercury some day. By forty or thereabouts I think I shall be qualified. This means a lot of hard work, so I am going about it very systematically, and barring death or blindness a man can get whole warehouses of work done in twenty years, and I know no earthly reason why the job should not be mine at the end of that time. (*Fante/Mencken* 25-26)

Despite this optimism, Fante's career never lived up to his own expectations and the promise of the 1930s.

After his early success, Fante's publications were few and far between. *Full of Life*, the first book to appear after *Dago Red* (his 1940 short-story collection), was published in 1953. Although this book was Fante's greatest commercial success, and succeeded in garnering many lucrative screenplay deals, it is not considered the artistic success of the earlier works and did little to further his career as a novelist. It took twenty-four years for Fante's next book, *The Brotherhood of the Grape*, to appear. By the time this novel was published in 1977, Fante's earlier success was already a distant memory. He had made a good living writing screenplays in Hollywood and abroad—though many never made it to production—but his books were either out of print or unpublished (Cooper 293). The publication of *The Brotherhood of the Grape*, however, helped trigger a renewed interest in Fante and marked the beginning of what can be described as his "second career."

Fante's second career would eventually outshine his first, but, unfortunately, Fante's greatest success came after he died. In 1977, *The Brotherhood of the Grape* attracted the attention of Robert Towne, who discovered Fante while researching 1930's Los Angeles for the movie *Chinatown*. Towne introduced the book, and Fante, to Francis Ford Coppola who became interested in producing a movie version of the work. Unfortunately for Fante, this project, like so many in the past, never came to fruition (although Coppola did serialized the novel in his magazine *City* [Cooper 307]). After this false start, in 1978 Fante's career finally received the boost it needed: "By far the most consequential show of appreciation for Fante during this time almost went unnoticed [...], a throwaway line of dialogue in a novel entitled *Women* by renegade Los Angeles writer Charles Bukowski" (Cooper 307).

Bukowski's reference to Fante caught the attention of Bukowski's publisher, John Martin of Black Sparrow Press, and the future of Fante's literature was born.

After reading a photocopy of the Los Angeles Public Library's edition of *Ask the Dust*, Martin joined Bukowski in his enthusiasm for Fante's work, and quickly initiated Fante into the Black Sparrow fold (Cooper 309). After years of being out of print and languishing in obscurity, *Ask the Dusk* was re-published by Black Sparrow Press in 1980. And then, in 1982, a year and a half before his death, Black Sparrow published Fante's last novel, *Dreams from Bunker Hill*. After his death, Black Sparrow began publishing Fante in earnest. All five previously published books, plus two novels and two novellas that had never before seen print, were published in the 1980s; and, in 2000 Black Sparrow published *The Big Hunger*, a collection of previously uncollected or unpublished short stories.

With these publications, Fante began gaining international recognition. He has been published in many languages and has become popular in France and Germany. Along with this rapid publication in the 1980s, there also appeared a number of articles about Fante's life and work. However, despite this attention and the rapid growth of a popular readership, Fante has been largely ignored by the academy. With only very few exceptions, most of what was written on Fante before and during the 1980s was limited to newspaper and magazine reviews, author profiles, and (in the 1980s) articles relating to the phenomenon of Fante's popular rediscovery. It is only since the 1990s that any discernibly critical or academic scholarship on Fante (buoyed, perhaps, by Black Sparrow's 1989 publication of *John Fante & H.L. Menken: A Personal Correspondence 1930-1952*) began to appear—and then only slowly. A few scholarly articles appeared in disparate journals in the early 1990s, hinting at the growing interest in the academy, and then in 1995 Fante scholars from around

the world were brought together by Stephen Cooper and David Fine to participate in the first ever conference on Fante, hosted by California State University, Long Beach. Although when Cooper and Fine announced the conference they had know idea who, if anyone, would attend, it proved a great success:

> Soon after releasing our conference notice and call for papers, we discovered that we were not alone in thinking that recognition for John Fante was overdue. Proposals began arriving from all over the United States and from as far away as France, Italy and Romania. It was as if people had been waiting for the chance to share their private enthusiasms for Fante in a public forum. [...] [T]he list of participants and attendees numbered over two hundred, and included literary and film scholars, journalists, screenwriters, filmmakers, students, interested members of the community, and all surviving members of John Fante's immediate family. (*Critical Gathering* 9-10).

Since 1995, the available work on Fante—including the 1999 collection of essays from the conference, *John Fante: A Critical Gathering*—has grown exponentially. Indeed, in 2000 alone three books devoted solely to Fante were published.[4]

It is remarkable that the academy failed to take notice of Fante during the publishing and popularity frenzy of the 1980s not only because Fante is a worthy writer who deserves attention, but also because the 1980s witnessed a canon debate that eventually saw the academy opening the canon, however reluctantly at times, to a slew of writers who, like Fante, had previously been neglected. The politicization of art and culture, and the

---

[4] The three books are: *Full of Life: A Biography of John Fante*, by Stephen Cooper; *John Fante: A Literary Portrait*, by Richard Collins; and *John Fante: His Novels and Novellas*, by Catherine J. Korditch.

"renewed attention to issues of sociohistorical context that fueled the interest in New Historicism" (Rainey, "The Case of H.D." 100), that gained speed in the 1980s created a critical culture that should have quickly embraced Fante, but for the most part he was left to the growing interest of a popular readership.

It is only since the 1990s, after the height of the canon debate, that critics have finally begun to recognize that Fante has a place in American literature, but even now critical opinion differs on what that place is. For example, critics such as George Guida, Stefano Luconi, Donald Weber, and Fred L. Gardaphé tend to characterize Fante primarily as an "ethnic" or Italian-American writer. Jay Martin, on the other hand, describes Fante as a major meditative writer and second-generation modernist, insisting that Fante did not "make, as others did, the rendition of region, race, or ethnicity his central subject" (18). Moreover, others place him in the context of 1930s, Los Angeles, and even sports, literature. Determining Fante's place in American literature is difficult because he straddles so many different genres and styles, and because Fante's work has come down to us through the process of a particularly nuanced history of transmission, shaped in radically different ways by the many editors and publishers that have had a hand in his work.

Our understanding of Fante today is particularly subject to the politics and agendas of editors and publisher because so much of Fante's oeuvre was published posthumously and thus the final form of much of his work has necessarily been shaped by someone other than Fante himself. This is similarly true of the work of other authors whose oeuvres grew rapidly after their deaths. A well known example of this phenomenon is the case of H.D. and her dramatic transformation in the forty years since her death. By examining the example of H.D., and considering the kinds of arguments about the influence of editors,

publishers, and critics on this other "re-discovered" author, we can gain insight into the kinds of issues that Fante critics should be addressing.

In "H.D. Prosed: The Future of an Imagist Poet," Robert Spoo describes H.D.'s posthumous career as being "nothing short of astonishing, rivaling in quantity and quality the works she published during her lifetime" (202), and suggests that "the spate of memoirs and autobiographical novels [that has appeared since her death] has given us a wholly different H.D." (202). Although he celebrates the new work of H.D.'s that has appeared since 1961, Spoo does caution that so "rapidly have these works appeared, so avidly have they been assimilated to the polemical concerns of academic criticism—notably, revisionary feminism—that we stand in need of calm, cool assessment of our new riches" (202). Moreover, Spoo writes:

> As the editor of one of H.D.'s recently released novels, *Asphodel*, I am alarmed by the lack of rigor with which some of these texts have been prepared for publication. H.D.'s particularly subtle *écriture féminine* can only benefit from careful philological work, and the future of H.D. and of her place in literary modernism may depend on the credibility of these forthcoming editions. (202)

Similarly, but with decidedly more negative implications, Lawrence S. Rainey suggests in "Canon, Gender, and Text: The Case of H.D." that scholars and editors, responding both to the availability of previously unknown work by H.D. and to the increasingly politicized canon debate of the 1980s, have effectively created a new "H.D." who has been

> constructed through different legal, textual, and ideological conventions,

> fashioned through a canon of works unlike any that prevailed in the lifetime of the earlier H.D., and forged with the assistance of an apparatus of support literature issued by biographers and scholars offering new evaluations of her work. The identity of this "H.D.," in short, has been textually and culturally constituted by a much more recent array of agents, among them literary scholars, acting at a conjuncture of cultural, ideological and institutional interests—a complex individuality articulated within specific worlds of signification, worlds that are inevitably textual, even editorial, in character. (102)

Although they differ widely in their conclusions about the value and legitimacy of H.D.'s posthumously published work, in these two articles Spoo and Rainey effectively summarize the editorial and textual issues that have become increasingly familiar to H.D. scholars in recent years—issues which should likewise be addressed by Fante scholars.

Spoo's argument that "scholars [...] have not uniformly taken pains to develop coherent policies of editing but, instead, have devoted their energies to providing biographical and critical orientations, sometimes to the neglect of the less spectacular rigors of responsible textual editing" (214-215) applies equally well to Fante's case—as does Rainey's complaint that there is "not a single critical edition of a work by H.D.; little awareness that the texts currently in circulation may differ in important ways from those that prevailed in her lifetime; and scarcely any discussion of the bibliographic codes embodied in the transmissive history of her work" (116). It is time for Fante scholars, editors, and publishers to take their cue from recent developments in H.D. scholarship. We must place a new emphasis on "careful philological work" in order to create editions and

critiques of Fante's work that are sensitive to the implications of the linguistic, bibliographic, and institutional codes of the Black Sparrow editions of Fante's work. In order for Fante scholarship to evolve to a more sophisticated level it is important that scholars be critically aware of the nature of the works that they are studying. The extent of what the majority of scholars know about Fante's work is that all of the previously available books were re-published, and thus rescued from obscurity, by Black Sparrow Press in the 1980s, and that five of the eleven books now available were published posthumously. What is not known, or, perhaps more significantly, what is not treated critically, could fill volumes. It is time to pause and consider the editorial choices that have been made and to analyze their implications for Fante's literature and for Fante scholarship.

Section One:

Institutional and Bibliographic Codes and the Interpretation of Texts

In "Prologue to *Ask the Dust*" (published separately from the novel), Fante suggests that *Ask the Dust* is "the plain tale of a writer who fell in love with a bar girl and was told to go" (144), and, indeed, much of the plot centres around Bandini's tumultuous relationship with Camilla, a Mexican-American waitress who is in love with another man. However, as Cooper suggests, and as recent critical accounts attest, "the novel's plot and prose are both deceptive, for in each case the simplicity that meets the eye belies a rare elegance and depth" (*Full of Life* 175). Indeed, even after the recent spate of good critiques, there are still depths in *Ask the Dust* that are waiting to be plumbed. Although much of the work that still needs to be done will be concerned with the necessary task of exploring *Ask the Dust*'s themes and characters, in this essay I will pursue meaning in a different direction. Fante scholarship is ripe for a comprehensive study of the sociomaterial history of Fante's works, and although it is not possible in this essay to completely satisfy this need for a comprehensive study, I will offer the beginnings of an investigation into these issues by considering the critical significance of the institutional and bibliographic codes of the Black Sparrow editions of *Ask the Dust*, *The Road to Los Angeles*, and *The Wine of Youth/Dago Red*.

All literary works have unique histories of transmission that contribute to the overall meaning of the work whether or not the histories themselves are properly understood. Any criticism that ignores this historical process ignores an integral aspect of the work in question, and is thus necessarily limited in scope. In his introduction to *Ezra Pound and the Monument of Culture*, Rainey argues that "we must become increasingly aware that

literature is generated not in the bloodless abstraction of language, but in the material practice of writing" (7), and writes:

> Literary studies can advance only through a comprehensive engagement with the entire range of graphic culture, from graffiti to train schedules, inscriptions to advertising. At present literary studies have much to learn from exactly those disciplines that have been considered "ancillary" forms of "lower criticism": [...] disciplines engaged with writing as a social practice, not a private encounter with linguistic divinity; disciplines that scrutinize the "extrinsic" features of graphic culture because they assume that written meaning is public meaning, shared meaning, cultural meaning. (7)

In addition, he adds:

> [W]e need to [...] reconsider the place of transmission. Transmission is the sum of processes and forces that have issue in the sociomaterial instances of every work. [...] Transmission is constituted at the intersection of material, institutional, and ideological mediation; it is made up of elements that are juxtaposed rather than integrated and it is driven by conflicting imperatives. [...] [T]ransmission precedes every act of production or reception: writers do not engage with "intertextuality," and readers encounter only works that are presented to them in specific material forms, each presaturated with its own history of transmission. Reconstructing that history demands extended acquaintance with the sociomaterial instance of every work, with each "inscription" of it. (7-8)

Similarly, in *The Beauty of Inflections*, McGann argues that "[t]extual scholars must labour to elucidate the histories of a work's production, reproduction, and reception, and all aspects of these labours bear intimately and directly on the 'critical interpretation of a work'" (78). Moreover, he writes:

> A more comprehensive socio-historical view of texts [...]—for example, a view of texts as books, manuscripts, or otherwise materialized objects—forces us to approach the issues of criticism and interpretation in a very different way. For the language in which texts speak to us is not located merely in the verbal sign-system. Texts comprise elaborate arrangements of different and interrelated sign-systems. It makes a difference if the poem we read is printed in the *New Yorker*, the *New York Review of Books*, or the *New Republic*. Textual and bibliographical criticism generates, in relation to the works we read, a great deal more critical information than a calculus of variants or a record of emendations.
>
> The interpretation of literary works [...] take[s] its ground in textual and bibliographical studies [...] because these studies are the only disciplines which can elucidate that complex network of people, materials, and events which have produced and which continue to reproduce the literary works which history delivers into our hands. (80)

What these arguments by Rainey and McGann suggest for Fante studies is that it is imperative for us to explore the history of transmission of Fante's work—which includes the history of changing institutional and bibliographic codes—so that we may come to recognize new and important details about the works we are studying. For example, it is

important to recognize the fact that, because the meaning of *Ask the Dust* is "not located merely in the verbal sign-system" but also in the institutional and bibliographic code of each of its "sociomaterial instances", the experience of reading the Black Sparrow edition of *Ask the Dust* is fundamentally different from the experience contemporaries had in reading the original version of the novel. Indeed, the confluence of specific ideological, material, and historical mediations that occurs in Black Sparrow editions of *Ask the Dust* has resulted in the edition that we encounter today being a unique sociomaterial event. In order to understand the nature and implications of this "sociomaterial event" we must analyze the nature, and implications, of the interaction between three mediating elements of the text: the institutional/ideological position of Black Sparrow, *Ask the Dust*'s history of publication, and the material, or bibliographic, elements of the Black Sparrow edition.

Black Sparrow Press is distinct among American publishing houses because it has maintained its commitment to an avant-garde aesthetic while also managing to grow and remain profitable without advertising, leverage, press coverage, or a reliance on grants (Gordon "Biography"). Black Sparrow was originally launched in 1966 by John Martin to publish the work of Charles Bukowski (avant-garde poet, novelist, short-story writer and "Los Angeles' legendary rough beast slouching toward serious literature" [qtd. in Kordich, 16]). Before long Martin was publishing a number of American poets who gave "form and expression" to what Martin calls "the new sensibility" (*Cultural Affairs*), but who had otherwise been marginalized by the mainstream literary establishment. Moreover, in addition to the work of contemporary American poets and prose writers, Black Sparrow has also published the work of neglected or controversial writers of the past: including work by

Theodore Dreiser, D.H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, Wright Morris, Alfred Chester, and John Fante.

Martin regards the poets he publishes as "continu[ing] the American tradition that began [...] with Whitman and continued with Pound, Stevens, Williams, and Crane" ("Black Sparrow Press" 19). Similarly, Neil Gordon describes Black Sparrow's list of authors as being as "essential to an understanding of American literature today as were the writers of the distinctive Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française—publishers of Gide, Proust, and Valery—to an understanding of the great modernist literature of France" (Gordon, "Biography"). While the artists that Black Sparrow publishes may be reminiscent of leading figures in literary movements of the past, it is important to note that, as an institution of avant-garde literature, Black Sparrow is itself continuing in the tradition of modernist literary institutions. Indeed, Martin's principle of not deferring to public (i.e. commercial) tastes and conducting business contrary to the practices of mainstream publishing houses has resulted in Black Sparrow achieving a position in contemporary American publishing that is comparable to the position occupied in the early twentieth century by the small presses and "little magazines" that were at the forefront of the early Anglo-American modernist movement.

The similarities between the goals and principles of Black Sparrow and *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, for example, are made evident by a comparison between Martin and Harriet Monroe's "mission statements." In an article that appeared in the Fall 1970 edition of *Cultural Affairs*, Martin writes:

> The Black Sparrow Press grew out of my interest in contemporary American poetry. No other discipline has achieved comparable results in giving form and expression to what might be termed the new sensibility.
>
> We believed in the beginning that the work of a single group or school might prove more valid than the rest. But we've discovered that genuine poetic experience—which is rare—is manifestly plural and follows many paths. There is no one way or principle way, no predominant group. This explains the variety of poets we've published to date.
>
> [...] The principal desire has been to publish seminal and significant work.
>
> [...] Our hope is to develop a genuine poet's press for the poets themselves. Such a program at a commercial house is either unheard of or an insignificant part of a much larger program. Black Sparrow Press is not simply a commercial venture. That the poet makes money from his work—which is the case—is incidental to the art of writing poetry. In some measure the same is true of publishing; we consider the making of books a craft in itself. (19)

This statement has a striking resemblance to the "motive" behind Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*, first published in 1912:

> The present venture is a modest effort to give poetry her own place, her own voice. The popular magazines can afford her scant courtesy [...] because they seek a large public which is not hers, a public which buys them not for their verse but for their stories, pictures, journalism, rarely for their literature, even in prose. Most magazine editors say that there is no public

> for poetry in America [...] and others prove their distrust by printing less verse from year to year, and that rarely beyond page-end length and importance.
>
> [...] We hope to publish in *Poetry* some of the best work now being done in English verse. Within space limitations set at present by the small size of our monthly sheaf, we shall be able to print poems longer, and of more intimate and serious character, than the popular magazines can afford to use. The test, limited by ever-fallible human judgement, is to be quality alone; all forms, whether narrative, dramatic or lyric, will be acceptable. ("The Motive of the Magazine" 27-38)

Just as Monroe's goals and principles helped make *Poetry* an institution of modernism, so too has Martin's mission resulted in Black Sparrow becoming an institution of American avant-garde literature. The importance of this kind of institution, with all its implications and associations, to the dissemination and reception of a literary work was not lost on the modernists themselves, and is now becoming an important subject for modernist studies.

For example, in his introduction to *Representing Modernist Texts*, Bornstein writes:

> Both their astute sense of literary politics and their respect for documentary transition led the major modernists to enmesh themselves in a wide range of editorial activities. They saw clearly that editors set the field of literary study, both by deciding what works came to the public and by determining the form in which those works appeared. Part of the extraordinary success of the modernists in canon formation came from their editorial presentation of new or neglected writers, whether in little magazines (such as *Poetry*, *Little*

> *Review*, or the larger *Dial*) or in books from small presses (Shakespeare and Company, Cuala, or Hogarth) and major publishers [...]. The main target of the modernist's editorial labor was often their own work. Their effort to control the process of textual production involved not only authority over the text itself but also determination of the form in which it appeared to the public and influence over institutions of transmission, whether magazines, anthologies, or entire publishing houses. (1-2)

In *Institutions of Modernism*, Rainey similarly argues for the importance of institutions of transmission to the development of modernism: "Long before textbooks were written about it, popular and critical understanding of modernism had already been configured by the specific dynamics of transmission that characterized modernism's productive processes and grounded its extraordinary success" (78). There was a reciprocal relationship between modernist writers and modernist publications in that a magazine, for example, could gain prestige by publishing a particular poet, and, likewise, a poet could gain recognition and modernist or avant-garde credibility by being published in a particular magazine. As Bornstein and Rainey demonstrate, this relationship was actively pursued by both writers and publishers. Ezra Pound, for example, had "a keen understanding of the nexus between cultural ambitions and their institutional actualization" (*Institutions* 85), and so, as a contributing editor, he endeavored to make a magazine such as *Poetry* "*the voice*" for the best new poetry in order for it to be "taken seriously" (qtd. in Monroe 261), and then, as a poet and a representative of other poets, he endeavored to have the poets he supported published in *Poetry* so their poems, or movements, would themselves be treated "seriously." For example, Pound submitted early Imagist poems to *Poetry* because he felt

"[t]his is the sort of stuff that I can show here and in Paris without its being ridiculed" (qtd. in Monroe, *Poet's Life* 264); and, as Rainey demonstrates, Pound, acting as a "cultural impresario and entrepreneur" (*Institutions* 80), helped T.S. Eliot to not only get *The Wasteland* published, but published in a way that would best compliment the poem and, significantly, further the cause of the modernist movement (77-106).

These modernist examples illustrate the significant "nexus [that exists] between cultural ambitions and their institutional actualization," and demonstrate the extent to which avant-garde institutions of transmission act as legitimizing agents for new and neglected work. Just as Imagist poets gained credibility by being published in *Poetry*, so too has Fante gained credibility, and recognition, by being published by Black Sparrow. In order to understand the extent of the implications of the institutional code of Black Sparrow editions of Fante's literature we must look to the manner in which the work (for our purposes *Ask the Dust*) was originally produced and disseminated.

In two recent essays, *Ask the Dust* has been described as "develop[ing], and fus[ing] [...] two undeveloped streams of modernism" (Martin 18), and as "stand[ing] at the confluence of modernist and Italian-American literary currents" (Guida 142). Although there may indeed be a connection between *Ask the Dust* and the "streams" and themes of modernism, this novel was originally transmitted to audiences in a decidedly unmodernist manner. *Ask the Dusk* was originally published by Stackpole Sons on November 8, 1939. Fante had high hopes for this his second novel, but, although there were some very positive reviews, the critical response did not live up to his expectations: "more often than not [critics'] comparisons of the novel with *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* found *Ask the Dust*'s more outre themes lacking in warmth and simple human interest" (Cooper 171). Moreover,

Fante's hopes were further confounded, and the fate of *Ask the Dust* largely sealed, by the fact that in 1939 Stackpole Sons suffered crippling financial misfortune when they were successfully sued by Adolf Hitler over their unauthorized publication of *Mein Kampf*. This financial loss meant that little money could be diverted to publicity and *Ask the Dust* was left largely on its own and was soon out of print. It remained out print until 1954 when it was reintroduced by Bantam, but this second incarnation was also short-lived, and after 1954 it again went out of print until 1980 when it was republished by Black Sparrow Press.

The 1939 failure of *Ask the Dust*, which is now considered Fante's masterpiece, to achieve the critical and popular success that most of today's critics believe it deserves is a matter of enduring perplexity to Fante scholars and supporters. The most sustained treatment of this subject is the somewhat awkwardly written "Realization and Recognition: The Art and Life of John Fante." In this article, Neil Gordon attempts to discover "why Fante found no audience in his time and why, in turn, his voice never realized its enormous promise" (1-2). In order to resolve this issue, Gordon sought the opinion of a number of people familiar either with Fante personally or with his writing. The answers he received ranged from blaming the anti-Italian and Marxist-Leninist "bents" of the 1930s (7) to blaming the tone and subject matter of Fante's novels:

> It's not so much that he's ethnic, but maybe the world that he wrote about, which is this down and out L.A., unvarnished [...] Mexican waitresses, and poor Filipinos: what might be seen as unsavory types, without the moral uplift that somebody else might have treated it with, that might have seemed just too foreign, dark, and just not tasteful enough for the New York publishing houses" (Frank Spotnitz qtd. in Gordon 8)

After considering the possibility that Fante's failure to reach an audience was the result of "bad publishing and the renowned, mercurial vapidity of film producers" (7), Gordon himself seems to settle on the opinion that Fante failed to achieve recognition because he did not "fit his era, its literary atmospheres, its commercial demands" (8).

There is some truth in all of these responses to the question of why Fante found no audience in his time: racism did exist; Marxist-Leninist sentiment was prominent; and Fante's treatment of certain themes, particularly sex, was commonly considered shocking or offensive (one contemporary review of *Ask the Dust*, for example, although otherwise positive, begins with a warning: "This is a strange novel, one which is most emphatically *not* recommended for reading by the young, or even by the old who dislike sordid pictures of immorality" [Binsse 140]). However, although these realities of publishing in the 1930s did indeed act as obstacles for Fante, they are not the whole story behind why Fante failed to gain an audience for his work. Indeed, these responses are not completely satisfactory answers to our question because they offer reductive views of the literary climate and sensibilities of the 1930s.

Another reason that Fante's work floundered and, ultimately, failed—and one that has yet to be treated in detail—is that Fante himself was not as market savvy, and not as aware of the "nexus between cultural ambitions and their institutional actualization," as modernist writers, such as Pound, who took active control of the dissemination of their work. In his earliest success as a short story writer, Fante benefited from the support of H.L. Mencken and his influential magazine, *American Mercury*. But after Alfred A. Knopf (publisher of *American Mercury*), and other prominent publishers, rejected *The Road to Los Angeles*, Fante was left without institutional support for his career as a novelist. When

Fante eventually found a publisher (Stackpole Sons) for his next two novels (*Wait Until Spring, Bandini* and *Ask the Dust*) the publisher proved unable to provide the kind of mediating presence that Fante's novels required in order for them to effectively reach a responsive audience—as Cooper suggests, Stackpole Sons was an unlikely and inappropriate venue to showcase Fante's talents: "The unlikeliest of firms, this eclectic little house specialized in political and military subjects [...] though it also published works of humor, travel, and outdoorsmanship" (*Full of Life* 148). As Gordon suggests, Fante considered his novels to be suitable for mainstream audiences but, as he would find out, they were, in fact, often too uncompromising, too explicit, and perhaps too "ethnic," for the general public and even for many mainstream critics (12). However, Gordon errs when he suggests that Fante had "no place in the genres of his day" (1).

The fact that an audience for Fante's work did exist, even if it was difficult to reach, is attested to by the fact that *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* and *Ask the Dust* did receive some favourable reviews and, moreover, that these novels attracted considerable interest from Pascal Covici (who was a Viking editor but who, in an earlier incarnation as an independent publisher, had published both Pound and Louis Zukofsky—two writers who have also been published by Black Sparrow). Although Covici would ultimately reject, or at least concur with other editors' decisions to reject, three of Fante's novels—*The Road to Los Angeles, The Little Brothers*, and *The Left-Handed Virgin* (published posthumously as *1933 Was a Bad Year*)—he had a firm belief in Fante's talents and place in American literature based on the evidence of Fante's best work—*Wait Until Spring, Bandini* and *Ask the Dust*—and

was responsible for publishing *Dago Red*, a collection of short stories.[5]

Furthermore, avant-garde institutions of transmission—particularly New Directions, which published such modernist notables as Pound and William Carlos Williams—that could have complimented Fante's work, did exist in the 1930s but were simply not sought out by Fante as an option for his work. Indeed, rather than changing his publishing habits to suit his work, Fante changed his work to suit his publishers—with novels like *Full of Life*, and many of the stories he published in the '40s and '50s, Fante admittedly pandered to the lowest common denominator in order to achieve commercial success. It is understandable that Fante, who was poor and desperate for recognition, would seek publication, and a paycheque, wherever he could find it. However, we must acknowledge that Fante's decision to aim for a mainstream audience, and his failure to be discerning in his choice of publishers, contributed to *Ask the Dust*'s, and his other early novels', failure to achieve the recognition that they have since garnered under the influence of Black Sparrow—recognition that, as Gordon notes, "was not precipitated by [Fante's] own industry" ("Realization" 10).

It took the active mediation of Bukowski and Martin for Fante to finally achieve (relatively) substantial popularity and recognition. This mediation was responsible for launching Fante's second career in 1980 and still has important implications for our understanding of Fante today. Not only has Black Sparrow's position as an avant-garde institution of transmission imbued Fante's work with avant-garde credibility, but

---

[5] Covici's decision not to publish these novels, particularly the two which have since been published by Black Sparrow (*The Road to Los Angeles* and *1933 Was a Bad Year*) may be viewed by some people as an example of the failure of 1930's publishers to recognize Fante's particular genius. However, as I will argue (contrary to much current opinion) about *The Road to Los Angeles*, these novels are not the best examples of Fante's work and their value as published works lies less in their own merit (although they do have some merit) but in their contribution to our understanding of Fante's oeuvre as a whole.

Bukowski's endorsement of Fante has also made a lasting impression on Fante's readers and critics—who often quote Bukowski in their work. Because Black Sparrow does not advertise, because Fante is not readily available in stores, and because Fante has yet to be embraced by universities and colleges, there are two primary ways in which readers discover Fante: through word-of-mouth, or through reading Bukowski. Moreover, because *Ask the Dust* is Fante's best known, and most respected, work, those people who do not discover Fante through Bukowski are still likely to have their first impression of Fante shaped by Bukowski's preface to *Ask the Dust*. Indeed, Bukowski's endorsement of Fante is probably as well known as Fante's work itself. In fact, Bukowski's influence has been so important to Fante's late fame that Black Sparrow even included Bukowski's signature along with Fante's in early collectors' editions of *Ask the Dust*.

Bukowski's first public endorsement of Fante was a passage in his novel *Women* in which the protagonist describes Fante as his favourite author because he wrote with "[t]otal emotion" (200). A year later, he elaborated on this opinion in his now famous preface:

> I was a young man, starving and drinking and trying to be a writer. I did most of my reading at the downtown L.A. Public Library, and nothing that I read related to me or to the streets or to the people about me. It seemed as if everybody was playing word-tricks, that those who said almost nothing at all were considered excellent writers. [...] It was a comfortable contrivance, a very slick and careful Word-Culture. One had to go back to the pre-Revolution writers of Russia to find any gamble, any passion.
>
> [...] I pulled book after book from the shelves. Why didn't anybody say something? Why didn't anybody scream out?

> [...] Then one day I pulled a book down and opened it, and there it was. I stood for a moment, reading. Then like a man who had found gold in the city dump, I carried the book to a table. The lines rolled easily across the page, there was flow. Each line had its own energy and was followed by another like it. The very substance of each line gave the page a form, a feeling of something *carved* into it. And here, at last, was a man who was not afraid of emotion. The humour and the pain were intermixed with a superb simplicity. [...] The book was *Ask the Dust* and the author was John Fante. He was to be a lifetime influence on my writing. I finished *Ask the Dust* and looked for other books of Fante's in the library. I found two: *Dago Red* and *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*. They were of the same order, written of and from the gut and the heart. (Preface, *Ask the Dust* 5-6)

There is no doubt that this is a powerful preface, and it is not surprising that Fante's "second career" received a boost from such a strong endorsement. Unlike academic prefaces that are often included in scholarly editions of canonical writers, this preface does not interpret the text but, rather, challenges the reader to celebrate the qualities of the novel that so moved Bukowski: its style, energy, passion, and emotion. It prepares the reader for an alternative reading experience—one which, Bukowski promises, will be as a great as that of reading Russian writers such as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, and better than that of almost any writer since the Russians. Moreover, Bukowski seems to go so far as to draw a line in the sand and force us to choose between the "word-tricks" and "Word-Culture" of writers "who said almost nothing at all" (read: modernists), who stand on one side of the line, and Fante, the Russians, and Bukowski who stand on the other. Bukowski's challenge

has been taken up my many readers since 1980, and for good reason, but in some instances the celebration of Fante's "total emotion" and the implicit danger of appearing as near sighted as Fante's contemporaries—of choosing "word-tricks" over passion—has led some Fante supporters to be blind in their own manner, to ignore the weaknesses in Fante's novels. The most obvious example of this trend can be observed in some of the recent criticism of Fante's most controversial novel, *The Road to Los Angeles* (Fante's first complete novel but only published after Fante's death).

In *The Road to Los Angeles* we encounter the first incarnation of Arturo Bandini. In all of his incarnations, Bandini is a character dominated by passion, emotion and desire, but in *The Road to Los Angeles* these characteristics are taken to the extreme and translated into behaviour that is excessively erratic, angry, and destructive. Unlike the Bandini of other novels, this Bandini is largely unsympathetic as his frustrations motivate constant and repetitive attacks on everybody and everything around, including his family, his co-workers, religion, and even a colony of crabs and a large tuna. Although recent critics such as Cooper and Seamus Cooney are right to note that there is a definite comic and ironic undertone to much of Bandini's bizarre behaviour that was often missed by Fante's contemporaries, those early commentators *were* correct in their judgements that *The Road to Los Angeles*'s repetitiousness is "boring" (Martha Foley qtd. in Cooper 133), and that this novel is "long on discussion and short on story" (Mencken, *Fante/Mencken* 99).

Moreover, although it is true that some of the early negative reactions to this novel were the results of limited comprehension, the same can also be said about some of the recent positive reviews. For example, Richard Collins' comparison of *The Road to Los Angeles* to *The Iliad*, and "the rage of Achilles [to] the rage of Arturo" (107), is an exercise

in over-interpretation. Collins' argument that the "key to the novel, to its unacceptability, both then and now, is that Fante's candor in this work was ahead of its time" (109) offers a rather reductive and naïve view of the critical capacities of critics, or at least dissenting critics, both then and now. The most striking aspect of Collins' argument, apart from his strained comparison with *The Iliad*, is his vehement, almost personal, attack on another critic who he calls "obtuse" (281) and "pedantic" (296), and about whom he writes:

> Misurella's comparison of Fante with the sprawling novels of Roth and Farrel, his inability to recognize the mock-epic, satiric and picaresque elements of Fante's novel, and his insistence on a formulaic reading of 1930s novels according to social and economic determinants, not to mention his miserable lack of a sense of humor, show perhaps better than anything else why *The Road to Los Angeles* remains Fante's most misunderstood novel among what Arturo calls the reading species *Boobus Americanus*. (109)

In this statement, Collins offers a challenge similar to that offered by Bukowski, although far less subtle and nuanced: either you're with us or you're a *Boobus Americanus*. In his rush to explain away every one of the novel's shortcomings with the language of Homeric criticism, Collins seems blinded to the fact that *The Road to Los Angeles*—a novel that Fante himself claimed to be "badly in need of work" (*Selected Letters* 148)—is a flawed work that at best can be described as a good first effort by an immature author.

After *The Road to Los Angeles* received a series of rejections from a number of publishers, Fante wrote in a letter to Carey McWilliams:

> What embitters me a bit is this—I wrote that book with such fearful honesty. I really sweated out the candor in it, I shall never again write with such unrestraint—all of which goes to prove that it's a poor policy to be honest and that it is much better to be artistic. Of course it may be that the book is simply bad. In that case I have no complaint, except that somebody, including myself, has been kidding me. (*Selected Letters* 130)

The fact is that *The Road to Los Angeles*, except for its first chapter, is not well written and not a good novel. The best evidence that it did not live up to Fante's potential is the example of Fante's later work, particularly *Ask the Dust*. As Cooper suggests, *Ask the Dust* is a "more studied achievement in terms of both its protagonist's evolution and the novel's aesthetics" (*Full of Life* 174) because "[b]y the time he came to write [it] Fante had learned to layer into his writing conscious thematic substructures and allusions which lent palpable depth to his own novel while simultaneously honoring and in some cases improving upon his sources" (174). Despite Fante's petulant claim that "it's a poor policy to be honest and that it is better to be artistic," he learned a great deal from the rejection of *The Road to Los Angeles*: he learned he could be both honest *and* artistic.

Although precise examples of the interpretative implications of a text's institutional code are necessarily difficult to pinpoint, Collins' critique of *The Road to Los Angeles* is characteristic of some recent criticism that has been unduly influenced by the institutional and bibliographic codes of Black Sparrow editions of Fante's work. It is not so much Collins' over-interpretation of the novel that suggests the influence of the institutional and bibliographic codes, but, rather, the fact that this over-interpretation seems to have grown out of Collins' opinion that the "key to the novel, to its unacceptability, both then and now,

is that Fante's candor in this work was ahead of its time." Collins both succumbs, and contributes, to the myth that Fante has been neglected simply because critics and audiences are incapable of understanding, or appreciating, his particular genius:

> Since much of postmodern literature has been defined by an extension of what Bukowski called the 'very slick and careful Word-Culture' of modernism, the taste for Fante might seem a nostalgic throwback to simpler times, less complicated narratives. But Bukowski speaks for the other face of postmodernism when he invokes Fante as his mentor—not the safe abstraction of academic experimentalism influenced by a self-consciousness encouraged by various schools of critical theory [...], nor the minimalist withdrawal inculcated in the creative writing factories throbbing dully from Iowa, the heartland of American corn, but the rude authenticity of an honest voice. (Collins 266)

Collins echoes Bukowski's description of Fante as a "god" (Preface 6), and Fante's literature as "gold," but fails to recognize that *The Road to Los Angeles*, unlike *Ask the Dust*, is more "fools' gold" than "gold." A few of Fante's novels and short stories truly deserve to be considered next to the best literature of the twentieth century, but aggrandizement of the Fante canon by critiques such as Collins'—or by statements such as "[Fante] was *always* the equal, and often the better, of his recognized contemporaries: Fitzgerald, Steinbeck, West, Shulberg" (my italics) (Gordon, "Realization" 1)— serves only to undermine the credibility of Fante criticism. In order for Fante's fiction, and Fante scholarship, to be taken seriously by the academy we must make critical distinctions between Fante's best work and that which is merely mediocre.

In addition to Bukowski's preface, Black Sparrow has contributed other bibliographic elements to *Ask the Dust* and other Fante works that have subtle but real implications for the texts' receptions. For example, the Black Sparrow edition of *Ask the Dust* has a significantly different cover design than those of the two pre-Black Sparrow editions. The first edition, by Stackpole Sons, was published with a "dust-jacket depict[ing] the figures of a man and a woman, obviously together but tensely apart, beside a convertible roadster parked beneath the scant shade of a yucca, all under a sky streaked in burnt shades of desert rose" (Cooper 170). The cover of the second edition, by Bantam, has the caption "He was young, broke and driven by a raging thirst for life," and an illustration depicting a young man—watched from the doorway of a bar by a sultry Mexican waitress—walking the darkened streets of a seedy Los Angeles neighbourhood in a crumpled suit and a downtrodden expression. The Black Sparrow edition, on the other hand, has a cover conforming to the standard simplicity of Black Sparrow publications—it has the title of the book (in bold black letters) separated from the name of the author (in large red letters) by a simple and unobtrusive abstract design. The cover designs of the first two editions offer rather sentimental depictions of Arturo and Camilla and, with the caption of the Bantam edition adding to the effect, trivialize the novel's treatment of love, lust, passion, and poverty. Moreover, by focussing on, and romanticizing, Arturo's poverty and relationship with Camilla, these covers do not reflect the novel's serious, and often disturbing, treatment of racism, religion, and the joys and agonies of writing. The Black Sparrow edition, in contrast, does not attempt to encapsulate the novel's many layered themes with a figurative drawing. But, of course, Black Sparrow's edition includes Bukowski's preface, which acts as a kind of sophisticated alternative to the cover

illustrations of the previous two editions, and serves to shape the reader's expectations of the novel. In all, the bibliographic code of the Black Sparrow edition of *Ask the Dust*, in conjunction with its institutional code, serves to legitimize and emphasize the novel's status as a work of important literature.

Another example of the bibliographic code of a Black Sparrow edition of a Fante work having different implications for interpretation than the bibliographic code of an earlier edition can be observed in the case of *The Wine of Youth*. This work is a collection of short stories that includes thirteen stories originally published in a collection called *Dago Red* plus seven additional stories that appeared in magazines during Fante's lifetime.[6] The Black Sparrow edition does not comment on why Black Sparrow decided to publish a collection that differed from *Dago Red*, or why it is called *The Wine of Youth*, but we know from Cooper that this collection was motivated by a suggestion from Joyce Fante, and that Fante himself proposed the title for the collection that first appeared two years after his death (Cooper, *Full of Life* 320). This new collection is presented in two parts—"Dago Red" and "Later Stories"—and thus the organization and content of the original collection have been preserved, although the contextual code has been altered by the additional stories. Although the presence of the seven later stories does not, in any significant way at least, alter our perception of the individual stories of "Dago Red," the addition of stories such as "The Dreamer" and "Helen, Thy Beauty Is to Me—" (which conclude the collection) does result in *The Wine of Youth* having a different thematic substructure than *Dago Red*.

[6] At this point it must be noted that in 1985 Black Sparrow did publish a version of *Dago Red* that does not include the additional stories, but this version is no longer available and thus my discussion of Black Sparrow's *Dago Red* refers only to its current incarnation as part of *The Wine of Youth*.

As in the case of *Ask the Dust*, the bibliographic code of the Black Sparrow incarnation of *Dago Red* is notably different from the early version of the work because of the absence of illustrations that appeared in the original edition. In the case of *Dago Red*, however, the illustrations in question were not simply on the cover, but elements of the text itself. In "'Oh God, These Italians!': Shame and Self-Hatred in the Early Fiction of John Fante," Donald Weber describes these illustrations and explains their implications for interpretation:

> Like so many "ethnic" texts of the 1930s and 1940s, *Dago Red* contains numerous woodcuts depicting the theme of the story to follow. Valenti Angelo's illustration for the initial tale, "A Kidnapping in the Family," for example, shows a young boy in overalls rummaging through what is evidently his mother's steerage trunk, up in the attic, gazing fondly at what appears to be an earlier portrait of her in fancy attire. In virtually every example of this mode of literary representation (and marketing) I find a profound disjunction between the benign, sentimentalized image of the drawings and the often raw subject matter of the fiction itself. (71)

This disjunction between the illustrations and Fante's "raw subject matter" is similar to the disjunction between the romanticized/sentimentalized cover illustrations on the pre-Black Sparrow editions of *Ask the Dust* and that novel's "raw" treatment of controversial themes. The simple and unillustrated bibliographic code of the Black Sparrow incarnation of *Dago Red* (*The Wine of Youth*) similarly serves to de-sentimentalize the reading experience and legitimizes the stories' status as serious literature.

It is difficult to measure the implications for interpretation of the institutional and bibliographic codes of a text. How does a press legitimize a work? How does an illustration influence our understanding of a character? These questions cannot be answered by any definite means, and yet we are all influenced, in various ways and to differing degrees, by institutional and bibliographic codes. Illustrations are included in, or excluded from, a text because they are "signifying mechanisms" that effect the reader. Similarly, publishers cultivate reputations, and then prominently advertise their names on book covers, in order to influence, and attract, readers. Black Sparrow publications have particularly distinct designs that make them easily recognizable on bookshelves. These designs are intended to attract the interest of potential readers who have preconceived ideas of the kind of literature that Black Sparrow publishes. In many cases (such as Fante's), Black Sparrow's reputation precedes that of its authors, and can itself be a reason for reading a work by an unknown writer. We cannot help but judge a book by its cover. Literature is not a "bloodless abstraction of language," but a sociomaterial, as well as a linguistic, event. We must acknowledge this "sociomateriality" and learn to articulate its implications for literary interpretation.

Section Two:

Editing Fante's Linguistic Code

American painter Jackson Pollock once responded to the question, "How do you know when you're finished [with a painting]?" by saying, "How do you know when you're finished making love?" (Naifeh 541). Although this is an ingenious answer, and may have been true for Pollock, I have quoted this incident because it represents, in a way, a basic misapprehension about artists and the artistic process that is prevalent in literary criticism. Pollock's response represents what McGann describes as a "Romantic conception of literary production" (*Critique* 8); or, what Rainey describes as literary studies' misguided penchant for regarding writing as a "private encounter with linguistic divinity" (7), rather than as a "social practice" (*Monument* 7). Pollock's response suggests that it is the purview of all good artists to know when a work is done. Although this concept of the artist is "Romantically" appealing (i.e. appealing to the "Romantic conception of literary production"), in actuality few artists would likely attest to having mastered this delicate sensibility. Indeed, it is well known that many writers have either continued to tinker with their poems for years without coming to a satisfactory conclusion about whether or not their work was "done" (e.g. Wordsworth, Yeats, Marianne Moore, Pound, etc.), or relied on a trusted editor to make the final, or at least penultimate, decision whether or not a work was finished (T.S. Eliot, for example).

Similarly, Fante often spent years rewriting material and regularly deferred to editors and publishers when determining the final form of his work. Examples of editorial collaboration vary from relatively minor instances such as Mencken changing the title of one of Fante's early published short stories to "Home Sweet Home" (*Fante/Mencken* 27), to

Fante "heeding the advice of his Bantam editor who, citing the successful use of flashbacks in *The Godfather*, had suggested he write more such scenes for *The Brotherhood of the Grape*" (Cooper, *Full of Life* 298), to Fante changing the names of the characters in *Full of Life* to match his and his family's in order to satisfy his publisher's desire to exploit the lucrative non-fiction market (*Fante/Mencken* 137).

In addition, Fante also often engaged in another kind of revision that was more a reworking of old material than a rewriting. For example, Fante made three attempts at fictionalizing the events and themes that comprise the subject of *1933 Was a Bad Year*. The first attempt, written sometime in the 1930s, exists only as an unpublished manuscript of four handwritten pages. In its entirety it is known only to the few archival scholars (perhaps only one) who have gained access to Fante's papers. A passage from the manuscript, however, is quoted in Cooper's biography of Fante. From the passage and from Cooper's description of the piece, we learn that the story centres on the harsh, violent realities of the protagonist's journey to California. It is an immature work, overwritten and melodramatic but benefiting from the "authentic urgency" (Cooper 55) that is characteristic of Fante's early work.

The second attempt is the short story "In the Spring," which was first published in the March 15, 1952 edition of *Collier's* magazine, but has since been republished in *The Wine of Youth*. As Collins suggests, "In the Spring" is one of the "money-getters" (Collins 193) that Fante wrote during the 1940s and 50s (mostly for magazines like *Collier's*, *Woman's Home Companion*, and *Good Housekeeping*), and as such is mediocre and sentimental.

With the third attempt—*1933 Was a Bad Year*—Fante not only re-worked old ideas and themes, he also re-worked old material (certain passages from "In the Spring" are repeated almost verbatim in *1933 Was a Bad Year*), and although he tried to give the new work some much needed edge, he found it difficult to achieve:

> I put in two months thinking, writing, and rewriting the novel we talked about at the Beverley Hills Hotel; story of the boy who runs away to become a big league ballplayer. With regret I must now report that I can't make it come off. The material is attractive in speculation but pretty thin when set down. [...] Later, I'm sure, perhaps next year, the project will have more balls, and I'll be able to go with it. (*Selected Letters* 231)

Fante struggled with this material for another ten years until he eventually abandoned it after receiving a rejection from Covici, his old Viking editor, who thought the story to be "lacking in the poetic spontaneity of [his] earlier works" (qtd. in Cooper 280). After receiving this rejection Fante put the manuscript in a drawer and allowed it to disappear from sight and mind. It was a surprise to everyone involved when the forgotten manuscript of *1933 Was a Bad Year* was discovered after Fante's death because nobody knew it existed (Kordich 39). It was a timely discovery because Joyce Fante and John Martin were already preparing other neglected or forgotten works for posthumous publication, and so it joined *The Road to Los Angeles*, *Dago Red*, and *The Wine of Youth*, as part of 1985's Fante publishing bonanza. Although Martin's decision to publish *1933 Was a Bad Year* is ultimately laudable, the manner in which it was published is problematic. The controversy lies in the fact that Martin published *1933 Was a Bad Year* as a complete, finished novel despite the fact that it is actually an incomplete work. In effect, the combined

decisions of two publishers—one not to publish, the other to publish—has determined the shape and scope of the novel we know today.

I) Black Sparrow and *1933 Was a Bad Year*[7]

1933 Was a Bad Year is the story of Dominic Molise, a seventeen-year old Italian-American from Roper, Colorado who dreams of escaping poverty and his family—represented primarily by his domineering, bricklaying father, sanctimonious mother, and belligerent, America-hating grandmother (all familiar Fante characters)—through his talent as a baseball player. The novel opens with Dominic walking through the snow on a cold winter's night. The cold itself seems to mock Dominic—reminding him that his father is out of work, reminding him of his poverty, reminding him that it will be months before he can play baseball: "Wading home that night through flames of snow, my toes burning, my ears on fire, the snow swirling around me like a flock of angry nuns, I stopped dead in my tracks. The time had come to take stock. Fair weather or foul, certain forces in the world were at work trying to destroy me" (*1933* 7). When he takes stock, Dominic finds that he has few prospects—in six months he will be eighteen and graduating from school with only passable grades and only one recognizable talent, baseball. When he gets home that night Dominic discovers that his father has also been taking stock and has identified one possible future that Dominic has conveniently ignored, bricklaying:

> So there it was. The whole book. The Tragic Life of Dominic Molise, written by his father. Part One: The Thrills of Bricklaying. Part Two: Fun

[7] In order to properly understand the implications of Martin's decision to publish the incomplete manuscript of *1933 Was a Bad Year* as a complete novel it is necessary to have a general understanding of the plot, themes, and characters of the novel as Martin published it. Therefore, in the interest of the reader who has not read this work, I provide a brief summary of the novel before launching into my discussion of the text.

in a Lumber Yard. Part Three: How to Let Your Father Ruin Your Life.

Part Four: Here Lies Dominic Molise, Obedient Son. (31)

Not surprisingly, Dominic is not thrilled about the prospect of becoming a bricklayer like his father (his lifelong poverty has not been good advertising), but his father's admission of debt—"We're in trouble [...] We owe everybody [...]" (30)—leaves him little room for argument, and less chance of familial support to pursue baseball, and so he spends the rest of the novel struggling between his duty to his family, and his desire to be free to be a professional baseball player.

Dominic's best friend, and fellow aspiring ball-player, is Ken Parrish, son of the richest man in Roper. In the face of their increasing frustration at life in Roper, Dominic and Ken hatch a scheme to go to Catalina, California and try out for the Chicago Cubs. The problem, however, is that Dominic and Ken estimate that the trip will cost, at the very least, fifty dollars each. For Ken, this money is a mere trifle but for Dominic it is a seeming impossibility. The problem of raising funds causes continual strife between the two best friends and instigates the ethnic, class, and moral conflicts that erupt throughout the novel.

After his father once again insists that he stay home and help the family by becoming a bricklayer, Dominic decides that the only way he will ever make it to California is to steal his father's concrete mixer—which is lying dormant in the garage for the winter but which is an essential tool for bricklaying—and sell it for bus fare. Desperate and determined, Dominic hooks the mixer to the back of a truck and begins to make his way through the back alleys of the town on his way to the highway. He loses his resolve, however, when he drives through the cemetery and encounters his grandfather's grave marked by a granite tombstone carved by his father:

> Go back, The Arm said, turn this thing around, you fool, before I drop off; turn around and go back and forget Catalina, lay brick with your father, dig ditches, be a bum if you must, but turn away from this wickedness. (115)

Although he decides to abandon the sale of the machine, Dominic must still face his father who is waiting for him upon his return. There is a tense moment when father challenges son, slapping him and yelling, "'If you can steal from me, you can fight me. Come on, hit me!'" (117). But this is a father, although a drinker and a fighter like other Fante fathers, who is tempered with mercy and compassion and so, after hitting Dominic and bloodying his nose, he becomes contrite and thoughtful. The two discuss Dominic's dilemma and his father, surprisingly, decides to support his son and commits to finding some way, anyway, to finance the trip.

When Dominic's father returns home that night, however, Dominic's plans begin to unravel. Although his father has indeed been doing his best to hustle up some money, the most he can muster is twenty-five dollars, half the necessary amount. Dominic is crushed but with the twenty-five dollars in his pocket he decides that he can borrow the rest from Ken. So, with his father's words echoing in his head—"'Remember. Send money home.'" (124)—he goes to Ken's house, confident that their adventures are about to begin. Unfortunately, however, Ken's father, who has gotten wind of the affair, refuses to let Dominic see his son and warns him away from his family forever. Once again, the trip seems doomed:

> [I]n his way Mr. Parrish had made the decision for me. The trip was off. No Kenny, no trip. I was too stupid to make it alone, I might go the wrong

> way, end up in Torricella Peligna, where I belonged. My father was right. I should wait a year. Hell, Roper wasn't such a bad town. At least I could walk around in it without getting lost. I would return the money to my father and wait another year.

Dissatisfied but reconciled to staying in Roper, Dominic begins to walk home, but, in one final twist, he passes Art's Service Station and discovers his father's concrete mixer in parts on the shop floor. His father has sold his machine, the means to his livelihood, for twenty-five dollars. Dominic offers to by back the machine for thirty, forty, and even fifty dollars, but to no avail. With the mixer gone for good Dominic realizes that earning money in California is no longer a dream but a necessity:

> I put my arms around [the concrete mixer] and kissed it with my mouth and cried for my father and all fathers, and sons too, for being alive in that time, for myself, because I had to go to California now, I had no choice, I had to make good. (127)

The novel as we know it, but not the novel that Fante intended, ends.

Although Fante's final intentions for *1933 Was a Bad Year* will always be open to a certain amount of conjecture, the incompleteness of the novel has been well established by Kordich and Cooper. In *John Fante: His Novels and Novellas*, Kordich reports that Joyce Fante has postulated that the text now known as *1933 Was a Bad Year* (1985) is, in fact, only the first half of a larger novel that was never completed after the first half was rejected by publishers (Kordich 39). In his biography of Fante, Cooper—who has perhaps had the most access to Fante's papers of any scholar—provides even more details about the history of the manuscript that Martin published in 1985:

> The protagonist of the early drafts of *The Left-Handed Virgin* is named Arturo Bandini. Fante changed the name in subsequent drafts to Dominic Molise. He also changed the title to *1933 Was a Bad Year*, but he never finished writing the novel as he planned it. The version of the novel published in 1985 by Black Sparrow Press is faithful to Fante's latest draft. But a ten-page "Synopsis of What Follows" indicates that Fante intended to continue the story of Dom's flight from Colorado all the way to California. The projected novel would have included chapters on Dom's hitchhiking, freight-hopping trip west; his employment at the Toyo Fish Company on terminal Island and his friendship with the Filipino coworkers; his failed tryout as a pitcher with the Chicago Cubs at their spring training camp on Catalina Island; and his ultimate return to Colorado and reconciliation with his father. (375)

The evidence that the Black Sparrow edition of *1933 Was a Bad Year* is an "incomplete" novel which has only been made "complete" through editorial intervention is overwhelming. So why, despite the interpretive implications of this information, have so few critics addressed this issue?

The most probable explanation for the lack of critical commentary on this issue is the simple reality that the majority of critics are ignorant of the fact that the copy-text for the Black Sparrow edition is anything but a completely polished and realized work of art. Black Sparrow certainly does not advertise the fact that it is incomplete. The edition itself gives no indication of the editorial issues surrounding the text and, when queried about the history of the text, Michele Filshie (a Black Sparrow representative) claims that the "fact

that John Fante intended to write more is pure speculation" (E-mail), and that "[s]tudying the manuscript there was no reason to believe [it was not complete]. Therefore, the novel can be considered complete" (E-mail). Moreover, not only have the critical works that deal with this subject (Kordich and Cooper) only recently been published, they are also guilty of giving the issue too little consideration: Kordich addresses it at the beginning of her discussion of *1933 Was a Bad Year* but only gives it a couple of paragraphs, and Cooper's informative comments on the text are, unfortunately, relegated to the endnotes (granted his work is a biography and not strictly a work of critical interpretation, and therefore there is little need in his book to address this issue critically).

When examining the textual condition of *1933 Was a Bad Year* there are two basic questions that must be considered: What does it mean to say that *1933 Was a Bad Year* is "incomplete"? And, how does this "incompleteness" affect our understanding of the text? The answer to the first question may at first appear to be quite simple, but the reality is rather more complex. From the evidence presented by Kordich and Cooper, we know that the Black Sparrow edition of *1933 Was a Bad Year* constitutes only half of a novel that Fante had outlined from beginning to end. One possible reaction to this information would be to suggest that *1933 Was a Bad Year* is only half a novel and therefore should not be published. As I will demonstrate, this is a naïve argument which by no means presents a valid impediment to publishing the text. Indeed, the publication of *1933 Was a Bad Year* is a valuable, and valued, contribution to the Fante canon. It is interesting to note, however, that this argument actually corresponds better to Black Sparrow's editorial policy of "realiz[ing] the author's intentions" (Filshie, E-mail) than does their decision to publish the incomplete manuscript. After all, it can scarcely be argued that publishing a manuscript

which the author did not consider complete is an act that corresponds to the author's intentions. Perhaps, that is why, when confronted with the glaring contradiction between their actions and their policies, Filshie has declared, "On further reflection, we decided that *1933 Was a Bad Year* had been completed. Studying the manuscript, there was no reason to believe otherwise. Therefore, the novel can be considered complete" (E-mail). By arguing that the manuscript of *1933 Was a Bad Year* "can be considered complete," Filshie unnecessarily attempts to legitimize Black Sparrow's decision to publish the text, but, by denying the very real existence of important and revealing information about the text she is, in fact, doing a disservice to Fante's literature and to Fante scholarship. By erroneously attempting to adhere to the problematical concept of authorial intention Black Sparrow has created a textual dilemma that should never have existed.

If, contrary to the theories of McGann and other editorial theorists, we subscribe to the theory that an author has complete and autonomous authority over his novel, and therefore that his intentions for the novel must be obeyed by editors, publishers et al., then we are left with two options in regards to the publication of *1933 Was a Bad Year*: the first option, as we have already mentioned, would be to declare that *1933 Was a Bad Year* is only half a novel and therefore conclude that it should not be published; the second option would require, as in the case of Black Sparrow, that we deny the evidence that the novel is incomplete and claim that the decision to publish actually corresponds to the author's intentions. The first option is rather extreme and would clearly be unpalatable to anyone interested in Fante, or even to those who wish to develop a broader appreciation of American literature. Although this may not be reason enough to blatantly dismiss an author's authority, the "unpalatabilty" of the first option is powerful enough to force critics

to attempt option two. The second option, however, in the absence of the discovery of any new evidence that Fante intended to publish the manuscript as it stands, is clearly erroneous. Even if there were adequate evidence that Fante harboured intentions other than those that are outlined in his "Synopsis of What Follows", however, there would still be no clear final authorial intention for an editor to follow—not just because there would be competing intentions but because, as Michael Groden demonstrates, the concept itself is inherently flawed:

> Can or should intentions be extended to expectations about what other people will do to the text, whether the author requests or desires collaboration [...] or, more or less reluctantly, accepts it? [...] [W]hat does "final" mean? Are final intentions simply the last ones, or can they be the fullest or most developed, whether or not they are chronologically last? [...] Is the author always engaged in the "creative process" or only up to a point, after that point becoming more a reviser or editor? Are we concerned with an isolated human being who conceives and writes a work, or the social being who, willingly or reluctantly, collaborates with others [...] to achieve a public text? Can an author [...] be seen as an autonomous, unified subject isolated from other forces (social, economic, historical, psychological)? (264)

If we do not subscribe to the theory of author as autonomous authority it is possible to present a well-founded argument for the posthumous publication of *1933 Was a Bad Year*.

In *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, McGann suggests that the "rule of final authorial intentions, as well as the guidelines determining copy-text, all rest on an

assumption about the location (and the locatability) of literary authority" (81). By locating textual authority solely in the author, traditional literary criticism, McGann suggests, has conceived of literary works in "the most personal and individual way" (81), and, consequently, has obscured "the dynamic social relations which always exist in literary production—the dialectic between the historically located individual author and the historically developing institutions of literary production" (81). To prevent works of literature from being "divorced from the social relationships that gave them their lives" (81), McGann suggests that the "concept of authority has to be conceived in a more broadly social and cultural context" (84) because "[i]n cultural products like literary works the location of authority necessarily becomes dispersed beyond the author" (84). McGann recognizes that the "author's wishes and intentions are obviously matters of importance" (89), but insists that they "must be adverted to and assessed by the textual critic in a more generous social context" (89).

This "social" theory of textual production locates literary authority in the "unwritten but naturally recognizable social contract in which authors, editors, printers, publishers, booksellers, and readers are all caught up in varying degrees of willingness" (Shillingsburg 25). By retrieving the "incomplete" manuscript of *1933 Was a Bad Year* from almost total obscurity, editing it, and finally publishing it as "complete" novel, editors John Martin and Joyce Fante became active collaborators in the process of artistic production. Moreover, the publication of *1933 Was a Bad Year* constitutes a collaborative act even greater than that which occurs in the normal course of publishing. Although Martin and Joyce Fante are by no means co-authors, *1933 Was a Bad Year* should be recognized as a work for which Fante has not been the sole creative force. Moreover, we must also recognize that this

manner of literary production is legitimate and, therefore, that it is not necessary for Filshie to justify Martin's decision to publish the novel by making the disputable claim that its publication, in contrast to the available evidence, conforms to Fante's authorial intentions. Rather, Martin needs simply to claim the authority that is his, as editor, according to the "naturally recognizable social contract."

So, how does all this contribute to our understanding of what is meant when *1933 Was a Bad Year* is described as an "incomplete" novel? Firstly, McGann's social theory of textual production enables us, in good conscience, to reject the suggestion that *1933 Was a Bad Year* should not be published because it is "half a novel." This does not mean, however, that Black Sparrow should publish this novel as if it was a fully realized work of art. Rather, Black Sparrow should include a complete history of the text in a preface to their edition of the novel, including the "Synopsis of What Follows," and allow the reader to determine the significance and implications of this information. In the same preface, however, they could also argue that despite the fact that *1933 Was a Bad Year* never became the novel that Fante intended it to be at the time he composed the "Synopsis of What Follows," the manuscript that was left to us is, in fact, a legitimate work of art in its own right.

Rather than considering *1933 Was a Bad Year* simply as an "incomplete" novel, it is best to regard it as a text with a dual reality. We should regard it as both a published version of a manuscript left incomplete at its author's death and, borrowing a concept from the modern editorial theory of "versioning," as just one version of a hypothetical novel that, as a conceptual entity, has an infinite number of possible versions. By conceiving *1933 Was a Bad Year* as a version of a hypothetical novel we can defend its legitimacy as a valuable

work of art by appealing to version theory, which argues for recognition of the "autonomy and validity of each steady state of the text as it changes in confused, unpredictable ways, through patterns which the author may never have foreseen, let alone 'intended'" (Parrish 349). Both perspectives are necessary for a thorough understanding of the text itself and of Fante's oeuvre as a whole. Regarding *1933 Was a Bad Year* as a draft of a proposed text, allows us to appreciate its quality as a work-in-progress and perhaps come to a better understanding of Fante the artist, or, rather, as Fante the mature artist who struggled to regain the touch of his early years as a writer. Regarding it as complete novel, allows us to give it the appreciation and respect it deserves as a work of art. Critics that do not consider both of these realities necessarily limit the scope and veracity of their critiques.

How do both the novel's "collaborative" status and its "incompleteness" affect our understanding of the text? In response to the information that Fante was too discouraged by the rejection of his manuscript to complete the novel's proposed second half, Kordich has suggested that "[t]his circumstance may be a happy accident, since the book feels complete as is" (39). She is correct to the extent that the Black Sparrow edition of *1933 Was a Bad Year* can, indeed, be read as a complete novel (formalized by the collaborative efforts of Martin and Joyce Fante). Although it is by no means Fante's best novel, *1933 Was a Bad Year* does have an effective ending. By ending at the point where Dominic's boyish fantasies become harsh necessities, the novel leaves us with a profound sense of the meaning of the loss of childhood and forces us to realize, alongside Dominic, that adulthood is not about freedom but about taking responsibility in the face of an unknowable, and possibly unpleasant, future. However, although *1933 Was a Bad Year* makes sense as a complete novel (i.e. it has a coherent plot structure, a recognizable

beginning, middle, end, etc.), we cannot ignore that it has a phantasmal "second half" which asserts an important but ambiguous influence over the "first half." It is difficult, however, to precisely define the implications for interpretation of the absent presence of the "second half" *because* it exists as an absence. With works such as T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," for which earlier manuscript versions have been published, we can study an extant deletion such as "Prufrock's Pervigilium" and debate its relevance and significance to interpretations of the standard edition of the poem. With *1933 Was a Bad Year*, however, there are no extant deletions because the "deletions" were made before they were written. In the absence of a realized version of the second half we must depend on the information available in the "Synopsis of What Follows" to help determine the nature of the implications for interpretation of the otherwise phantasmal second half of the novel.

As mentioned above, the "Synopsis of What Follows" indicates that

> the projected novel would have included chapters on [Dominic's] hitchhiking, freight-hopping trip west; his employment at the Toyo Fish Company on terminal Island and his friendship with the Filipino coworkers; his failed tryout as a pitcher with the Chicago Cubs at their spring training camp on Catalina Island; and his ultimate return to Colorado and reconciliation with his father. (Cooper 375)

The significance of this information is that it reduces the impact of certain elements of the Black Sparrow edition that are given increased thematic importance because of the absence of this material. For example, as we have observed, the Black Sparrow edition of *1933 Was a Bad Year* achieves some of its dramatic power because the fate of Dominic's dreams, and his family's welfare, is left in question at the conclusion of the novel. We are left to

imagine the hardships to come, and the possible successes, but, more important, this open-ended conclusion focusses our attention on Dominic's relationships with his father, his family, his community, and his childhood. Although these relationships would still be important if the novel included the proposed second half, they would be de-emphasized, and the novel's provocative open-endedness would be replaced by the details of Dominic's individual coming-of-age adventures. Moreover, the second half, it seems, would involve more action than the first half and therefore the tension of the Black Sparrow edition, which is created through an atmosphere of delayed action, would be relieved. For example, as Collins suggests, in the Black Sparrow edition "Fante's contribution to the [baseball as American Dream] motif" (207) is achieved "without ever putting his protagonists on the field" (207). In the projected novel, however, the inclusion of Dominic's baseball tryouts in the action of the novel would eliminate the (relatively minor) mystery of Dominic's actual baseball potential, and the baseball motif would cease to be a purely philosophical construct. Ultimately, too much conjecture about the shape of the proposed second half may prove as unproductive as too little, but, as these examples demonstrate, the phantasmal second half does have important implications for interpretation and, therefore, it must be given careful consideration in future critiques of *1933 Was a Bad Year*.

While the fact that *1933 Was a Bad Year* was never completed according to Fante's plans is the most immediately impressive information that has been uncovered concerning the compositional history of this work, we should not forget that Cooper's archival work also revealed that this novel was originally conceived as another installment of the Bandini saga. Although this fact is not as significant a development in our growing understanding of the text, it does have some implications for interpretation. For example, Collins lends

considerable interpretive weight to *1933 Was a Bad Year*'s apparent status—along with *Full of Life*, *My Dog Stupid* and *The Brotherhood of the Grape*—as one of the "Molise quartet." He argues that there is a common theme among the novels of the "Molise quartet" and attempts to define a clear distinction between them and other Fante works:

> In the Toscana stories Fante had explored the conflicts of growing up in a Catholic Italian-American family, and in the Bandini novels he had depicted the artist at odds with all forms of community. Each of the Molise novels tells essentially the same story of fathers and sons in conflict from a different perspective [...].
>
> In each case the protagonist narrator gives up a personal ambition to embrace his responsibility to his family, although it is not easy and never without sacrifice of freedom or compromise of ideals" (168).

Despite Collins' penchant for organizing thematic groupings among Fante's work, however, the so-called "Molise quartet" is merely a group of loosely associated texts that have about as much in common with the "Bandini saga" or the "Toscana stories" as they do with each other. For example, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* is more about the "conflicts of growing up in a Catholic Italian-American family," and the complexities of father-son relationships, than it is about "artists at odds with all forms of community"; and, *1933 Was a Bad Year*, for instance, is more closely connected with *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* and *The Road to Los Angeles* (in terms of chronology and character development) than it is to *The Brotherhood of the Grape*.

In this situation, Collins' critique, although otherwise thoughtful and insightful,

could certainly benefit from the information that the "protagonist of the early drafts of *Left-Handed Virgin* [re-named *1933 Was a bad Year*] is named Arturo Bandini." This information does not necessarily discount Collins' assertions—after all, the name change could be indicative of the fact that Fante chose to take the story in a direction altogether different from his Bandini books—but it does provide an impediment to Collins' somewhat misleading method of classifying Fante's texts and, combined with the other facts we have learned, it creates room for alternative interpretations. Because *1933 Was a Bad Year* seems, in many ways, as if it belongs to the Bandini saga, knowledge of the fact that its protagonist was originally named Arturo Bandini serves to further undermine Collins' insistence on couching meaning in the perceived unity of the "Molise quartet."

II) Editing Fante: Beyond *1933 Was a Bad Year*

I have given so much attention to *1933 Was a Bad Year* because of its unique status among Fante's novels and because it serves as an excellent example of the need for greater textual scholarship in the field of Fante studies. It is by no means, however, the only Fante work (particularly among the posthumously published texts) that will benefit from a rigorous editorial approach. For example, *My Dog Stupid* and *The Orgy*—published together under the title *West of Rome*—and *The Road to Los Angeles* are all works that have been posthumously published by Black Sparrow with hardly a note of editorial explication. The only mention in each of these editions that these works are posthumous publications are brief notations found at the front and back of the books among lists of Fante's other works. There is no mention of the condition of the manuscripts when they were found, what editorial choices were made in the process of preparing them for publication, why *My Dog*

Stupid and *The Orgy* are published in a single edition, or even why that edition is entitled *West of Rome*. It would be beneficial to scholars for Black Sparrow to provide a detailed explication of the histories of these texts. After all, these novels were all posthumously published and that suggests that the manuscripts, to a certain extent, are works-in-progress. We know from Fante's letters (Fante/Menken 97, 102), for example, that *The Road to Los Angeles* went through a series of re-writes during the 1930s while Fante was attempting to publish the novel, and it would be valuable to know whether or not multiple manuscripts exist and, if so, which manuscript was chosen for publication and why. Similarly, Fante spent a considerable amount of effort trying to publish *My Dog Stupid* and, again, it is important to know if this resulted in multiple manuscript versions of the novel. Indeed, it would be a worthwhile critical endeavor to further explore Fante's editors'/publishers' influence on all of his published works, posthumous or not. To do so we need more information about the texts themselves.

Although most Black Sparrow editions of Fante's work do not include editorial notes, there are a few that do and these texts serve as a useful example of the benefits of editorial explication. In only three Black Sparrow editions of Fante's writing—*John Fante & H.L. Mencken: A Personal Correspondence* (1989), *John Fante: Selected Letters 1932-1981* (1991), and *The Big Hunger: Stories 1932-1959* (200)—have editors made some effort to discuss their editorial contributions. In the introduction to the former collection of letters, editor Michael Moreau writes:

> The actual Mencken/Fante correspondence is on file at the New York Public Library under the Enoch Pratt Library's supervision. [...]

> The notes leading into the letters and the endnotes at the back of the book are intended to fill in gaps in time and help explain the context of some of the letters in as inobtrusive [*sic*] a fashion as possible, hopefully explaining some of the events and names obscured by time when important to the content of the letters.
>
> I have not altered the text of the letters except to correct the very infrequent misspellings or typographical errors. Little has been done to change punctuation or unusual stylistic usages. (11)

This is a very simple editorial note but, nevertheless, very effective. It provides most of the important details about the text and the editorial process: the kind of editorial decisions that were made, the reasoning behind editorial commentary, and the information necessary in order for anyone so inclined to check the published versions against their originals. This is a good example of how a little editorial explication goes a long way.

In *John Fante: Selected Letters 1932-1981*, editor Seamus Cooney takes his editorial responsibilities a step further by providing a commendably detailed "Note on the Editing." In this note, Cooney gives us his general philosophy as an editor—"[o]ur only right as readers is to be given as accurate a text as possible" (18)—and provides in-depth detail on how he put this philosophy into practice:

> I have chosen to reprint the letters and parts of letters that either echo the materials of the later fiction [...] or give details of the progress of Fante's career. Of letters on more literary topics, such as those to Albert Halper or Carey McWilliams, I have printed all that's available.

> The format of the letters has been regularized in several respects [...]. The hyphen used as a dash has been replaced by the long dash. [...] Spelling and typing errors have been silently corrected in the very few places it was necessary, (Some examples are "Facism," "allright," "once in awhile," and oddities like "a exacting editor.") Fante generally typed book and magazine titles without underlining, and I have not imposed italics in such case. Punctuation has been regularized in the customary U.S. fashion: periods and commas within quotation marks, and first quotation marks always double. [...] Editorial omissions within letters are indicated by [...]. All other ellipses are Fante's. (17)

Moreover, Cooney also explains why there are more existing letters from some times and people than from others, and details the contribution of Joyce Fante (who supplied "corrective emphases and [...] fill[ed] in relevant missing information about Fante's married years" [17]). With the one exception of not commenting on the current whereabouts/state of the original copies of the letters (which is most likely due to the fact that, unlike the Fante/Mencken letters, they are not housed in any library), Cooney's note surpasses Moreau's because he elucidates his editorial philosophy and, most importantly, because he provides details about his editorial contributions. If he had only stated that he had corrected spelling, typing, and punctuation errors we might have suspected that something of the spontaneity and character of the letters had been lost in publication, but because Cooney gives examples of his alterations we, as general readers and scholars alike, are reassured that this book provides an authentic insight into not only the content but also the flavour of Fante's personal correspondence. This is an excellent example of the kind of

editorial explication that should be included in all of Black Sparrow's editions of Fante's work, or, at the very least, in the editions of his posthumously published works.

The Big Hunger, a collection of largely forgotten or unpublished short stories complied and edited by Stephen Cooper, has the distinction of being the only fictional work of Fante's that includes some editorial commentary. This is the most recent volume of Fante's posthumously published work and we can only hope that it serves as an example for those that follow. In this work, Cooper provides us with information concerning the vast editorial efforts he underwent to produce this collection in both the introduction and, in more detail, in the "Editor's Notes" at the back of the book. In the introduction, Cooper informs us that the stories in this edition were all left by Fante in "[f]our tall black metal file cabinets [...] stuffed with envelopes, letters, folders, notebooks, and ream after ream of typewritten and handwritten manuscripts" (8), and that they were discovered during the years Cooper spent "sifting through the files [...], tracing chronologies, [and] piecing together fragmented manuscripts [...]" (9) in order to compile information for his biography of Fante. In the editor's note Cooper expands upon this information by providing various kinds of insights into each story. For some stories he simply provides the date of original publication, for others he adds information about historical figures or context that might be unknown to the reader, such as the fact that the mention of "Yamamoto" in "Mary Osaka, I Love You" is a reference to "Commander of the Imperial Japanese Fleet, Admiral Yamamoto (1884-1943) [who] masterminded the bombing of Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941" (314). The points of most interest to textual and literary scholars, however, are those instances when Cooper reveals information concerning a story's textual or publication

history and when he discusses certain stories' relationships to other Fante works that are more familiar to readers.

For example, Cooper informs us that "The Sins of the Mother" was originally published as "The Wine of Youth"; he highlights the fact that the "anonymous narrator of 'To Be a Monstrous Clever Fellow' prefigures the Arturo Bandini of *The Road to Los Angeles*" (310); he discusses the fact that *The Big Hunger*'s version of "Prologue to *Ask the Dust*" contains a final page that was missing from Black Sparrow's 1990 published version; and, he notes that "Charge It," which was originally published in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1937, is an "early treatment of what would become the following year Chapter 4 of *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*" (310). These comments and bits of information do not offer any critical insights in themselves (they are not meant to and indeed it is not the place for sustained critical discussion) but they do offer valuable clues for scholars looking to pursue close analysis of Fante's work.

For example, reading "Charge It" against *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* not only demonstrates the way in which Fante was able to tighten-up and improve his prose when given a chance at a re-write (which serves as a reminder that Fante's posthumously published works should be considered as works-in-progress), it also provides us with a new perspective on *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*. Although "Charge It" and chapter 4 of the novel are very similar, "Charge It" has the major distinction of being written in first-person whereas *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* is written in third-person. The first-person perspective of "Charge It" is that of a grown-up Arturo telling the story from the vantage point of maturity which allows him to regard his mother, the story's protagonist, with more empathy than he was able to as a child. In *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, the third-person narration is

largely presented from the viewpoint of Arturo but it swings to that of Svevo Bandini, Arturo's father, who, with Arturo, is the novel's other protagonist.

Although chapter 4 of *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* also presents a sympathetic portrayal of the poor mother's almost daily humiliation of seeking further credit from the neighbouring grocer, this sympathy is not recognizably associated with the feelings of Arturo. Indeed, from Arturo's behaviour we understand that his primary, or initial, response to his mother's dilemma is disdainful: "He knew what she wanted. In disgust he clinched his teeth. He *knew* she wanted him to go to the store. She was a yellow-belly, just plain yellow, passing the buck to him, afraid of Craik" (98). This demeanor, which is often the expressed attitude of Arturo, is one of the primary dilemmas for readers throughout the novel because Arturo's seeming hatred for his mother, who is primarily a sympathetic, or at least pitiable, character, is shockingly contrasted with his near hero-worship of his drunken, violent father. Of course, Svevo is not simply an abusive father and Arturo's feelings for both parents waiver constantly between love and hate, but, nevertheless, the fact that Arturo consistently takes his father's side over his mother's, despite his father's behaviour, is a major impediment to our ability, and often desire, to sympathize with Arturo.

In "Charge It," the young Arturo takes a similarly scornful attitude towards his mother but, because the story is presented from the perspective of the older Arturo, we can better understand that the child's response is primarily caused by his resentment and anger in sharing his mother's poverty and powerlessness. Although this cause of Arturo's behaviour is implied in the novel, it is buried beneath layers of conflicting emotions and is thus not made evident. The different perspective available from "Charge It" allows us to

gain a clearer understanding of Arturo, the often bewilderingly emotional young protagonist of *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*.

By collecting, compiling and editing these stories Cooper has made a considerable contribution both to Fante's oeuvre and to Fante scholarship, just as Martin has by editing and publishing all of Fante's work that has become available in recent years. Without scholars like Cooper, and without the interest and support of Martin and Black Sparrow Press, Fante would still be relegated to the anonymity of a few dusty library shelves, and therefore it is not my intention to undermine the good work that has already been done. What I am doing, however, is suggesting that the growing scholarly interest in Fante creates the need for a new kind of Fante publication. In order for Fante scholarship to develop beyond its initial stages into a more mature body of work, we need scholarly editions of Fante's work, or at least scholarly accounts of the history of transmission and the editorial process which have resulted in the editions that are available to scholars today.

The problem with the Fante editions that exist today is not a problem of sloppy editing, but rather a problem of inadequate editorial explication. For example, despite the relatively detailed editorial note in *The Big Hunger*, there is still opportunity for Cooper to provide more, and more detailed, information—after all, as in the case of *1933 Was a Bad Year*, this is an example of heightened literary "collaboration," and thus scholars would undoubtedly benefit from more editorial explication. In an effort to fully understand the nature of this "collaboration," I contacted Professor Cooper with the hope of discovering important, but unpublished, details about the editorial process involved in producing *The Big Hunger*. His response is informative and serves to demonstrate the potential that a more public discussion of editorial matters has for the future of Fante scholarship.

In his response, Cooper states that rather than having "an explicitly formulated set of rules and regulations governing [his] preparation of *The Big Hunger*," he "depended primarily on [his] own critical judgement" which was grounded in an "intimate knowledge of Fante's career based on years of research and close reading." Moreover, he notes that his final selection of stories was made in consultation with Joyce Fante and John Martin. With regard to the state of the manuscripts and his technique in dealing with fragment texts, Cooper writes:

> Some stories existed in more than one typescript draft, with varying handwritten revisions. In such cases I aimed for a finished story that best reflected what I judged to be representative of Fante at his best. Since not all of [Fante's] manuscripts are dated or even in some cases, strictly speaking, datable, I did not hesitate to use what might be called a composite approach, choosing from among various drafts to produce the version that appears in *The Big Hunger*. Still other stories were ready to be published as they were found.

According to this statement, the two primary obstacles that Cooper faced when preparing Fante's stories for publication were, one, some of the stories existed in multiple typescript versions (with handwritten revisions) and, two, some of the manuscripts were not dated or even "datable."

The existence of multiple versions of a literary work presents an editor which two basic options: choose a single version to be the copy-text and then collate that text with the others to create what is known as an "eclectic text"; or, decide that each version is autonomous and valid and therefore choose to publish a critical edition that either includes

every extant version in its entirety, or that publishes one version but includes a scholarly apparatus which indicates the variations that exist between the versions, including the handwritten emendations. Although it would appeal to version theorists, the latter option, considering Fante's relatively small popular and academic readership, would, from a commercial and scholarly perspective, be unviable and unnecessary. Cooper, in any case, clearly chose the former option, what he calls a "composite approach."

In general, choosing a copy-text is a difficult and controversial issue: Fredson Bowers, for example, basing his opinion on the theory of final authorial intentions, insists that editors should choose the author's manuscript over the first published edition (qtd. in McGann, *Critique* 20); whereas McGann, on the contrary, rejects the theory of final authorial intentions as the determining factor for choosing a copy-text, and therefore favours the first edition over the manuscript (*Critique* 125). For *The Big Hunger*, however, the manuscript/first-edition controversy is largely moot because the majority of the stories never appeared in print during Fante's lifetime, and, moreover, in the case of stories that are undatable, there is not even the option of choosing the latest version. If there were multiple versions of the stories that had previously been published, however, it would be interesting to know which version Cooper chose as the copy-text, and why he chose that version—details which hopefully will be included in future editions of *The Big Hunger*. With regard to his use of the "composite approach," it is important to note that Cooper does not claim to be fulfilling Fante's authorial intentions. Rather, he recognizes the fact that his versions are necessarily distinct from anything that Fante wrote, and that they are, at most, "representative of Fante at his best." This recognition suggests that Cooper, implicitly at least, concurs with McGann's argument that "editing [...] is more an act of translation than

of reproduction. When we edit we change, and even good editing [...] necessarily involves fundamental departures from 'authorial intention,' however that term is interpreted" (53). Cooper embraces the fact that literary works are fundamentally social and that by editing and compiling these stories he has participated in a collaborative act of literary production (E-mail). Moreover, he expressly states that this kind of writer-editor collaboration is consistent with the mode of production that Fante himself participated in during his lifetime:

> Original intentionalists will naïvely lament the fact that the book was published at all, since [Fante] could not be there in person to oversee the final product. More reasonable readers will be glad for the chance to read "new" Fante stories. [...] [T]hroughout his career Fante actively solicited the assistance of editors, from H.L. Mencken onward, and [...] he was a professional in his general habit of deferring to their suggestions. In John Fante's absence I have done the best job I could in editing his works. I can only hope that he would have approved of what I've done. (E-mail)

Although his editorial practices do not often conform with the tenets of current editorial theory (particularly "version theory"), Cooper's response demonstrates that Fante's posthumously published work has benefited from conscientious editing that is informed by an intimate knowledge of Fante's life and work. Although there would be benefits to producing more editorially radical editions of Fante's work, those kinds of texts are perhaps best left for future consideration. What is needed now is not necessarily better editing, but better editorial explication based on the recognition that Fante scholarship will benefit from the details of the various editorial projects being made public. Following the example of

Cooney, it would be invaluable for Cooper to publish an account of his editorial influence on the linguistic code of Fante's work through detailed examples of the process involved in preparing individual stories for publication.

It is to be hoped that in the future this kind of project will coincide with the cataloguing of Fante's manuscripts in a publicly accessible library so that scholars can, for themselves, sift through Fante's work, comparing manuscripts and analyzing the significance of his individual process of creation. Once we establish the condition of the linguistic code of current editions of Fante's work, literary scholars will have better tools with which to continue the important work that is the focus of more traditional literary criticism.

Conclusion

In *The Beauty of Inflections*, McGann writes:

> [T]he angels of hermeneutics have long feared to tread in the fields of textual/bibliographical studies, which are widely regarded, in fact, as a world well lost. Reciprocally, the bibliographers, editors, and textual critics have largely agreed to assume the bad eminence they have achieved, whence they may hurl defiance at the heavens of the interpreters. (*Beauty* 70)

In an effort to combat this trend, a number of critics—Rainey, Bornstein and McGann among them—have stirred up a lively debate over editorial theory that, in part, calls for editorial/textual theory to become integrated with hermeneutics/literary criticism. In this essay I have added my voice to this chorus by suggesting that textual and editorial criticism should play a fundamental role in Fante scholarship. I have attempted to demonstrate the ways in which a textual/editorial approach will open up new fields of critical assessment and allow for a more complete critical understanding of the Fante canon. The work that I have done is only preliminary to the work that can, and needs to, be done. Fante's papers and manuscripts, for example, are still in storage, but when they become publicly available they will augment the study of Fante and contribute to the shape of Fante's oeuvre.

In the final line of his influential preface to *Ask the Dust*, Bukowski writes, "That's enough. Now this book is yours" (7). This offer has been accepted by a popular readership, and, increasingly, by scholars who are defining Fante's canon in new and interesting ways. Now that recent criticism has demonstrated that Fante is worthy of sustained scholarly attention, it is time to follow the example of H.D. scholars and pay closer attention to textual and editorial areas of critical access. Through the efforts of numerous individuals—

such as Joyce Fante, John Martin, Michael Monroe, Seamus Cooney, and Stephen Cooper—to publish Fante's letters and fiction, Fante has become available to today's public like never before. We must analyze the materials presented to us by these individuals (by way of Black Sparrow Press), and endeavor to contribute to the Fante canon by producing more scholarly editions of Fante's work. As with H.D. (Spoo 202), the future of Fante and of his place in the literary canon may depend on the credibility of forthcoming editions.

That Black Sparrow—and the editors of Black Sparrow editions—have influenced the institutional, bibliographic, and linguistic codes of Fante's works is not something to be deplored (since it is unavoidable), but, rather, something that should be analyzed and understood. Editorial and textual criticism are critical approaches which contribute to the process of literary interpretation, and help clarify the meaning of texts. In certain instances, simple editorial explication will allow for a more complete critical assessment of Fante's work—such is the case with *1933 Was a Bad Year*. This novel is still worth studying, but without the knowledge that it is an unfinished work we cannot hope to accurately understand it and its place in the Fante canon. As access to Fante's manuscripts grows, so too will the need for new and more sophisticated editorial approaches. Through developments, such as those I have suggested, in textual and editorial criticism, we will gain a more complete critical understanding of Fante. With these developments and the continuing work of literary scholars, I have good reason to believe that the literature of John Fante will continue to gain acceptance in the academy, and will eventually reach a larger audience.

Works Cited

Bornstein, George. Introduction. Representing Modernist Texts. Ed. George Bornstein. Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991. 1-16.

Binsse, Harry Lorin. "Ask the Dust, by John Fante." Rev. of Ask the Dust , by John Fante Commonweal Vol. 31 No. 6 (1 December 1939): 140-41.

Bukowski, Charles. Preface. *Ask the Dust.* Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1999.

Bukowski, Charles. Women. Santa Rosa, California: Black Sparrow Press, 1978.

Collins, Richard. John Fante: A Literary Portrait. Toronto: Guernica Editions Inc., 2000.

Cooper, Stephen. Editor's Notes. The Big Hunger: Stories 1932-1959. Ed. Stephen Cooper. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 2000. 309-315.

---. Preface. The Big Hunger: Stories 1932-1959. Ed. Stephen Cooper. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 2000. 7-10.

---. E-mail to the author. 13 September 2001.

Cooper, Stephen. Full of Life: A Biography of John Fante. New York: North Point Press, 2000.

Cooper, Stephen, and David Fine, eds. Introduction. John Fante: A Critical Gathering. Madison, NJ.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999. 9-14.

Fante, John. 1933 Was a Bad Year. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1995.

---. "Charge it." The Big Hunger: Stories 1932-1959. Ed. Stephen Cooper. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 2000. 41-51

---. John Fante & H.L. Mencken: A Personal Correspondence 1930-1952. Ed. Michael Moreau. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989.

Works Cited (Continued)

Fante, John. John Fante: Selected Letters 1932-1981. Ed. Seamus Cooney. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow, 1991.

---. "Prologue to *Ask the Dust*." The Big Hunger: Stories 1932-1959. Ed. Stephen Cooper. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 2000. 143-161.

---. The Road to Los Angeles. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1999.

---. Wait Until Spring, Bandini. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1999.

Filshie, Michelle. "John Fante." E-mail to the author. 13 August 2001.

---. "John Fante." E-mail to the author. 16 August 2001.

Gordon, Neil. "Biography." Black Sparrow Press. 26 September <http://www.blacksparrowpress.com/Bio.html>.

---. "Realization and Recognition: The Art and Life of John Fante." Boston Review (October-November 1993): 24-29. 15 February 2001 <http://www-polisci.mit.edu/BostonReview/BR18.5/realandrecog.html>.

Groden, Michael. "Contemporary Textual and Literary Theory." Ed. George Bornstein. Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991. 259-286.

Guida, George. "In Imagination of the Past: Fante's *Ask the Dust* as Italian-American Modernism." Eds. Stephen Cooper and David Fine. John Fante: A Critical Gathering. Madison, NJ.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999. 133-144.

Kordich, Catherine. John Fante: His Novel and Novellas. New York: Twayne Publishers, 2000.

Works Cited (Continued)

Martin, Jay. "John Fante: The Burden of Modernism and the Life of His Mind." Eds. Stephen Cooper and David Fine. John Fante: A Critical Gathering. Madison, NJ.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999. 17-41.

Martin, John. "Black Sparrow Press." Cultural Affairs 12 (Fall 1970): 19.

McGann, Jerome J. The Beauty of Inflections. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1985.

---. A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

---. The Textual Condition. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991.

---. "What is Critical Editing?" Text: Transactions of the Society for Textual Scholarship. 5 (1991): 15-29.

Monroe, Harriet. "The Motivation of the Magazine." Poetry: A Magazine of Verse Vol. 1 Number 1 (October 1912) 26-28.

---. A Poet's Life: Seventy Years in a Changing World. New York: Macmillan, 1938.

Naifeh, Steven and Gregory White Smith. Jackson Pollock: An America Saga. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991.

Parrish, S.M. "The Whig Interpretation of Literature." Text: Transactions of the Society for Textual Scholarship 4 (1988): 343-50.

Rainey, Lawrence S. "Canon, Gender, and Text: The Case of H.D." Representing Modernist Texts. Ed. George Bornstein. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991. 99-123.

---. Ezra Pound and the Monument of Culture. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

---. Institutions of Modernism. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Works Cited (Continued)

Schillingsburg, Peter. "The Autonomous Author, the Sociology of Texts, and the Polemics of Textual Criticism." Devils and Angels. Ed. Philip Cohen. London: University Press of Virginia, 1991. 22-43.

Spoo, Robert. "H. D. Prosed: The Future of an Imagist Poet." The Future of Modernism. Ed. Hugh Witmeyer. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997. 201-221.

Weber, Donald. "'Oh God, These Italians!': Shame and Self-Hatred in the Early Fiction of John Fante." John Fante: A Critical Gathering. Ed. Stephen Cooper and David Fine. Madison, NJ.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999. 65-75.