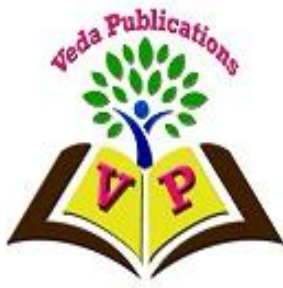




BAD FAITH (MAUVAISE FOI) AND PSEUDO SENTIMENTS: AMIR'S INAUTHENTIC EXISTENCE IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER*

Siva K. Kondragunta

(Ph.D. Research Scholar, Krishna University-A.P.)



ABSTRACT

This article examines Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* that introduced post-colonial Afghanistan to western world in the light of Jean Paul Sartre's notions of 'bad faith' (mauvaise foi) and 'pseudo sentiments'. Drawing upon Sartre's existential philosophy in relation with the concept of 'bad faith' from *Being and Nothingness* (1943/1950) and 'pseudo sentiments or emotions' as outlined in *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory* (1939/1948), this paper discusses how an authentic existence is hindered by these. The bad faith (mauvaise foi) means living a life delineated by one's social, economic, racial class or occupation. Pseudo sentiments and emotions refer to absence of 'true emotion' accompanied by belief. The study focuses on Amir's, the protagonist of the novel, life until and as well the crucial moment he deserts his friend Hasan when he was sexually assaulted by group of teenage bullies. The study proves that Amir lived in bad faith with pseudo emotions and led an inauthentic existence.

Keywords: *Jean Paul Sartre, Bad faith (mauvaise foi), Pseudo sentiments/emotions, Inauthentic existence, Amir, The Kite Runner*

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INTRODUCTION

The Kite Runner is the seminal work of Afghan American Khaled Hosseini, which brought him worldwide reputation as one of the finest living story tellers. Khaled Hosseini was successful in presenting the life of common Afghan who suffered terribly during the last three decades of the 20th century. The common man was affected by external aggressions, internal wars and hostile Taliban regime that tried to thrive on Islamic fundamentalism. The novelist through his novels introduced the war ravaged poverty stricken post-colonial Afghanistan to the western world which had viewed it as just a breeding ground of terrorism, especially after 9/11. After *The Kite Runner*, he wrote another two novels: *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed* depicting the troubled relationships of Afghans by wars and Taliban regime. Hosseini weaves pain, loss of family members and tragedy of human existence through the drama of everyday life that was over cast by harrowing forces like foreign armed troops invading the land and internal tribal war groups propelled by religious fervour and fundamentalism competing for suzerainty over war-torn Afghanistan.

As a writer Khaled Hosseini won critical accolades from literary circles and popular book lover societies. *The Kite Runner* was not only topped best sellers lists but also won awards like Boeke Prize, Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers Award, ALA Notable Book, Alex Award, Borders Original Voices Award, 2003 which demonstrates his writing flair. Charlie B when writing a review on *The Kite Runner* in The Guardian opined, "The message behind the very ending could be interpreted differently by different readers, but personally I feel that it offers a small sense of hope for both the future of its characters, and perhaps for war-torn Afghanistan as well". Hosseini, moved from Afghanistan to US when he was a teenager is now 'American Literary Superstar', says James Walton in his review in The Spectator.

The Kite Runner (2003) falls under bildungsroman variety of novel dealing with a redemption story of Afghan boy Amir. Amir was a son of a well-to-do business man, Baba, and had a delightful and privileged childhood in Afghanistan.

Amir's life as depicted in the novel reflects literary existentialism as he struggles to create an identity for himself and attempts to exercise his choices in the troubled relationships in a world that riddled with class and racial prejudices. He unintentionally lets his friend Hasan to be raped by teenage bullies on an eventful day in his life. In action at the time when his friend needed him, ravages his consciousness and tears him apart forcing him to act in a mode of existential bad faith (*mauvaise foi*).

The position of Amir in the novel regarding his oeuvre is that of complete quest to create or seek identity and love from his close relations. His father, Baba's expectations of Amir puts him in a perpetual emotional conundrum as there was a vast gulf between his personality, as nature, and Baba's code of ideal Afghan. Baba's indifference towards Amir and inclination towards Hasan, servant and friend of Amir, takes a heavy toll on the psyche of this twelve year old boy. The Sartre's essence and existence principle can be seen obviously playing in the life of Amir as he struggles to gain his father's approval which is his defined existence. The life of Amir in relation with his little or unconcerned father and his servant friend Hasan reflects the existential crisis of creating his essence as a 'subject' rather than a mere 'object' in existential sense.

Sartre's stance on human capability to be 'what he is' has its presence in the life of Amir. Fabre when talking about Sartre's influence on Richard Wright's works, mentions "Sartre is quite of my opinion regarding the possibility of human action today, that is up to the individual to do what he can to uphold the concept of what it means to be human" (Fabre, 1978, p.42). This holds absolutely true in the case of Amir. However, the progress from inauthentic to authentic existence is beyond the scope of present study, I state that the change begins from realizing one's bad faith (*mauvaise foi*), which purports to good faith, off course. Amir's entanglement with bad faith intertwined with pseudo emotions traps him into inauthentic existence until he was reminded about his chance to be good again by his uncle Rahim Khan. The locus of study in this article is Amir's entrapment with bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) and pseudo sentiments/emotions.



The philosophy of existentialism has its acute presence during first half of 20th century when stalwarts of that school like Martin Heidegger, Sartre, Albert Camus, Martin Buber and Karl Jaspers were present on the literary and philosophical scene. Though it was known that many of philosophers categorised under this school of thought were never like to be called Existentialists. Though a century apart in their presence, Khaled Hosseini's works reflect sublime presence of Sartre's existentialism. We can apply Sartre's existentialism to his works particularly *The Kite Runner* as it fittingly deals with psyche of human and how it would be destabilised by human facticity.

Amir's psychological predicament and emotional crisis can be seen replete with existential tenets in the novel. The present study delimits itself to the selected incidents in the life of Amir until Hasan, along with his father, left his house soon after few days of Hasan's rape by local teenage bullies. It aims at bringing out the protagonist's emotional state that Sartre speaks as transcendence and his adherence to bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) which ultimately sucks him into deep inauthentic existence. As far as Amir's actions and behaviour in relation with his father, Baba, and his friend Hasan are concerned, my position in the paper clearly envisages the existential bad faith (*mauvaise foi*). Amir's constant pursuit to impress his father for love and regard by competing with Hasan, who is unaware of his friends' apprehensions, takes him into self-deceptive behavioural patterns i.e. bad faith (*mauvaise foi*). The irony of bad faith playing can be seen on the eventful day of his life when he won the Kite fight in Kabul, while trying to prove his worth as Baba's son, he inadvertently stoops to lowest moral ebbs by clinging to treacherous inaction when Hasan was molested in a deserted alley. Regarding Amir's pseudo emotions are concerned, the current study reveals that his consciousness tries to devise few absurd methods to escape from his existential reality. Sartre, in his *Being and Nothingness* (1943/1950), argues that human reality cannot be escaped from unless one schemes some absurd techniques to convince himself that there is no such thing as transcendence. In other words, by resorting to fake or pseudo emotions one tries to escape from human

reality i.e. facticity. However, as Sartre felt, those absurd strategies taken up by Amir, pulls him into abyss of inauthentic existence rather than removing from his facticity.

SARTRE'S VIEWS ON BAD FAITH AND PSEUDO SENTIMENTS: (Conceptual Framework)

In *Being and Nothingness* (1943/1950), Sartre discusses bad faith or *mauvaise foi* in detail. Bad faith means in simple terms self-deception, so involves a lie and the lie should be like any other lie but it's a lie we tell to ourselves. Sartre says, "Only what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth." (p.49). Here, the deceiver becomes oneself with the deceived. The difference between bad faith and an ordinary lie is, in bad faith one hides truth from oneself, and in lie one hides truth from others. To explain the case of bad faith, Sartre uses the example of waiter in a café. The waiter acts the role of being a waiter so impeccably that he and his profession become one and the same. He is what others see him as. There comes a unity of contradictory existence of idea and negation of idea in bad faith. He says, "What unity do we find in these various aspects of bad faith? It is a certain art of forming contradictory concepts which unite in themselves both an idea and the negation of that idea" (p.56).

The waiter by being in bad faith forgets his authentic existence and becomes what Sartre calls as 'being-in-for-others' rather than 'being-for-it'. This projection of waiter of himself as waiter only results into bad faith or *mauvaise foi*. "There must be an original intention and a project of bad faith; this project implies a comprehension of bad faith as such and a pre-reflective apprehension (of) consciousness as affecting itself with bad faith" (p.50), reflects Sartre. The pre-reflective is always directed towards world but not concerned with oneself. Hence, individual becomes what his profession, class or race but an individual.

The facticity or facticity restricts individual freedom and transphenomenal being and consciousness becomes transcendence. When faced with troubles people turn towards unconsciousness to escape from them. Sartre feels "to escape from these difficulties people gladly have recourse to the unconscious." (p.50), which is self-deceptive. Bad



faith or mauvaise foi throws us into our facticity by placing us in complete transcendence, "...bad faith, throws us first into full transcendence in order suddenly to imprison us within the narrow limits of our factual essence" (p.57). Hence, the person in bad faith lives in an unauthentic reality or facticity and fails to create his essence.

According to Sartre, there are two types of consciousness, viz. "Pre-reflective" and "reflective". He discusses these two in his work on emotions, *In Emotions: Outline of a Theory* (1939/1948). The Pre-reflective consciousness oriented towards the world, where as reflective consciousness is related with oneself. Thus saying, he supposes that emotions can be transformed from pre-reflective conscious to reflective and vice versa. Denial of consciousness to one's emotions or sentiments like fear, anger, and joy is nothing but covering one's transcendence and freedom to choose a certain way of feeling and thinking. Sartre believes that emotions or sentiments originate impromptu when consciousness degrades when faced with outside world; "Thus the origin of emotion is a spontaneous and lived degradation of consciousness in the face of the world. What it cannot endure in one way it tries to grasp in another by going to sleep, by approaching the consciousness of sleep, dream, and hysteria." (p.77). Sartre deals about emotive behaviour in clear practical way by pointing out that we experience emotions with an intention to modify the world so that the world may amend its qualities. His perspective on emotive behaviour is crystal clear: "In short, in emotion it is the body which, directed by consciousness, changes its relations with the world in order that the world may change its qualities. If emotion is a joke, it is a joke we believe in" (P.61). He delineates this point by citing a simple example to understand how our emotions aim to change the world. If one wants to pluck grapes from a grape wine which is a way above his reach, he tends to call them 'too green', where the emotion becomes unbearable as the potentiality cannot be reached. This is analogous to the classic Aesop's "Sour Grapes" parable. Failing to realize one's potentiality results into emotive behaviour aiming at changing the world we perceive.

Here, in this context it is appropriate to discuss "pseudo or fake emotions" that Sartre had in

his mind. We have tendency to project certain qualities on real objects but as these are false they disappear the moment our fantasy ceases on the object was lost. These are pseudo sentiments or fake emotions because these are not supported by belief. But he makes it clear about genuine emotions: "True emotion is quite otherwise; it is accompanied by belief. The qualities conferred upon objects are taken as true qualities" (P.73). So, when confronting a disagreeable situation, one tries to change the world, though Sartre believes it as an impossible endeavour. In the above mentioned "too green" grapes Sartre provides us the human tendency to seek out a way out from the uncomfortable situation by that the individual assumes, " will resolve the conflict and eliminate the tension" (p. 61). When one cannot handle things in the world, one escapes into denial of the very presence of them by trying to eliminate them from one's consciousness. Sartre calls it "passive fear". By resorting to pseudo emotions/sentiments one tries eliminate the real emotions or sentiments. Running away from objects that cause fear does not result into fearlessness for fear and object causing fear are intermingled eternally.

Going into details about emotions, Sartre also discusses sadness in binary demarcation; Passive sadness and Active sadness. He elaborates the passive sadness saying that it is generally aims at ascribing a "neutral reality" to the world's structure in order to transform it. "Passive sadness" targets "at eliminating the obligation to seek new ways" (Sartre, p.65). Resorting to pseudo belief that the world does not require anything from us, we shun our subjectivity (an essential quality of humans according to Sartre and other existentialists) by play-acting to be not working in realizing our plans and missions. While passive sadness is associated with indifference, the active sadness is with anger. In this state the individual seeks to replace some problems with other making the world look much more dreadful and hostile and feels as it " demands too much of us" (p.67). One pretends that, in this case, one is eager and resolute to exert one's power upon difficulties and obstacles, but the invincible rival that is the world turns the individual's efforts futile and turns his efforts into a "comedy of impotence" (p.67).



DISCUSSION

APPLICATION OF SARTRE'S VIEWS ON BAD FAITH AND PSEUDO SENTIMENTS TO *THE KITE RUNNER*

In this first part of discussion, I apply Sartre's theories on bad faith or *mauvaise foi* to *The Kite Runner* to unveil Amir's behaviour and choices he made throughout the novel, until the moment his friend Hasan leaves his house. Amir belongs to Pashtun community which is a socially upper class in Afghanistan and his friend and servant Hasan belongs to Hazara community that was despised as impure ethnic group by majority of Afghans. This fact plays crucial role in understanding Amir's ill-treatment of Hasan, in spite he being his bosom friend. Hasan along with his father works in Baba's house and Amir becomes his friend as they are of same age. The proximity and contemporaneous closeness makes them friends but Amir never really feels for his friend. As Amir's social situatedness forces him to fall recourse to self-deception as Sartre puts it, "Here instinct or, if you prefer, original drives and complexes of drives constituted by our individual history, make up reality" (Sartre, 1943/1950 p.50).

The facticity of social disparities between these two friends plays a vital role on the consciousness of Amir. Amir is always aware of the class differences existed between him and his Hazara friend. He is also aware of economic and social gulf between Hasan and him. Being fully conscious of the disapproval by the neighbourhood about their friendship, Amir befriends with Hasan only to serve his purpose. This denotes the bad faith on the part of Amir as he constantly checks about Hasan's loyalty towards him by asking him. This tendency obviously suggests that Amir was seeking psychological assurance of Hasan's friendship as he was internally aware that his friendship was not genuine. A clear case of bad faith as Sartre expounded it in *Being and Nothingness*. He says, "There must be an original intention and a project of bad faith; this project implies a comprehension of bad faith as such and a pre-reflective apprehension (of) consciousness as affecting itself with bad faith" (p.50). Amir's self-doubt about his loyalty towards Hasan forces him to perpetually doubt Hasan, but in reality he was troubled by his consciousness about his unworthiness as a friend.

Another factor that affects the psyche of Amir to resort to bad faith is his reality or facticity of lovelessness in his life. He lost his mother when she was giving birth to him and this inadvertently creates a sense of dejection to his father that consequently makes Baba hate Amir. The lack of love and affection from his father and believing, also, that he was the reason for his mother's death torments Amir deeply. This is another facticity in the life of Amir, as existentialists propose this is the existence he is thrown into.

Adding fuel to fire, his father Baba appears to be predisposed towards Hasan, son of his servant (but Baba was Hasan's biological father, which Amir didn't know it then), who is of same age as Amir. Amir and Hasan are playmates too. Amir experiences sense of alienation as being uncared by his father and burns with jealousy whenever Baba shows affection on Hasan. Amir is consciously aware of the fact that in certain traits like lack of courage and interests like poetry reading and writing Baba despises Amir as Baba's code of conduct for an ideal afghan is being courageous and standing for one's values even in the face of adversity. Baba is disapproval of literary pursuits like reading poetry and writing stories as he believes that they are for women or for feeble minds. But, Amir has a penchant for reading poetry and he also tries his hand at writing short stories which was approved by his uncle, Rahim Khan, only. These contribute to his facticity or existential situatedness. So trying to escape from this kind of uncomfortable situations, he resorts to absurd emotional strategies which results into bad faith. "To escape from these difficulties people gladly have recourse to the unconscious" (Sartre, 1943/1950 p.50).

Amir believes that the love and affection he deserves from his father is enjoyed by Hasan, who is just a servant in their house which projects into jealousy and inferiority complex in Amir. His despise for Hasan is expressed indirectly and in subtle ways. His ill-treatment of Hasan and mocking Hasan for his inability to read are Amir's ways of vengeance on him but he never pulls the cloak of friendship off Hasan's face. Rather, it would be opt to say that Amir falls into bad faith that he never realizes that he made himself an object of his existence. "But bad faith does not wish either to coordinate them (*facticity* and



transcendence) nor to surmount them in a synthesis. Bad faith seeks to affirm their identity while preserving their differences. It must affirm facticity as being transcendence and transcendence as being facticity, in such a way that at the instant when a person apprehends the One, he can find himself abruptly faced with the other" (Sartre,1943/1950 p.56).

The height of bad faith of Amir is seen in the most crucial event in the story that turned everyone's life a topsy-turvy forever. It was on the day of Kite festival in the winter of 1975 when Amir cut the kite of his final opponent in the tournament, Hasan runs for the falling Kite to fetch it for his victorious friend Amir, as fetching the cut Kite adds prestige to the winner.

"I know," he said, breaking our embrace. "_Inshallah_, we'll celebrate later. Right now, I'm going to run that blue kite for you," he said. He dropped the spool and took off running, the hem of his green chapan dragging in the snow behind him. (p.36)

But as bad luck had it, Hasan was cornered in an alley by Assef and his friends who are bullies in their neighbourhood.

"Of course, they've probably caught him by now," the old merchant said, grunting and loading another box on the mule's back. "Who?" "The other boys," he said. "The ones chasing him. They were dressed like you."I turned onto the rutted track and followed the voices. I heard the voices again, louder this time, coming from one of the alleys. I crept close to the mouth of the alley. Held my breath. Peeked around the corner. Hassan was standing at the blind end of the alley in a defiant stance: fists curled, legs slightly apart. Behind him, sitting on piles of scrap and rubble, was the blue kite. My key to Baba's heart.

Blocking Hassan's way out of the alley were three boys, the same three from that day on the hill, the day after Daoud Khan's coup, when Hassan had

saved us with his slingshot. Wali was standing on one side, Kamal on the other, and in the middle, Assef. I felt my body clench up, and something cold rippled up my spine.

Assef knelt behind Hassan, put his hands on Hassan's hips and lifted his bare buttocks. He kept one hand on Hassan's back and undid his own belt buckle with his free hand. He unzipped his jeans. Dropped his underwear. He positioned himself behind Hassan. Hassan didn't struggle. Didn't even whimper. He moved his head slightly and I caught a glimpse of his face. Saw the resignation in it. It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb"(P.42)

This incident left Amir with a choice to act upon and stop Assef and his gang from raping Hasan, but he was stayed back from intervening the rape because he was afraid he would lose the only chance to prove his worthiness as a son of Baba, who glorifies courage and victory over odds. Ironically letting Hasan molested by Assef, Amir did fail his father as he was considered of a weak heart. Amir just stood "I bit on my fist. Shut my eyes" (p.40). Though he thought he was friend of Hasan, indeed he was in existential bad faith or *mauvaise foi* of self-deception where he let himself to be object of his consciousness. The reason behind this indifference towards his friend's plight is his historical facticity or reality. In Sartre's opinion it is, "Here instinct or, if you prefer, original drives and complexes of drives constituted by our individual history, make up reality" (Sartre, 1943/1950, p.50). Amir was aware fully that being an Hazara, Hasan doesn't deserve to be considered as a real friend and it's not worthy on his part to risk his chance of gaining Baba's approval by going home with the kite he had cut in the tournament as trophy. Here, Amir acted being-for-others rather than being-for-itself. This is bad faith in Sartre's existentialism.

Amir clearly lost his chance to be authentic by failing to intervene Hasan's rape for he was apprehensive about his opportunity to be a good son



to a great father. In deed he failed to exercise his responsibility as a friend.

I had one last chance to make a decision. One final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan--the way he'd stood up for me all those times in the past--and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run. In the end, I ran. I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt. That's what I told myself as I turned my back to the alley, to Hassan. That's what I made myself believe. I actually aspired to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he? (p.43)

Amir's consciousness is his transcendence here, he made himself believe that he was a coward fully realizing the truth that Hasan was 'just a Hazara', a class consciousness thwarting one to become from authentic individual. "Only what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth", said Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre, 1943/1950, p. 49). It clearly shows us that Amir was unwilling to risk his interest for a low class Hazara boy. The facticity that of ethnic reality has made Amir act in bad faith forsaking values of independent existent.

In this section, I would like to apply Sartre's theory of fake emotion or pseudo sentiments to Amir's behaviour in *The Kite Runner*. As we already have seen, Sartre classified consciousness as pre-reflective and reflective and emotions get transformed between these two. Amir's behaviour throughout the novel until the moment he sent away Hasan from his house is a clear expression of Sartre's theories on emotions as he wavers among various negative emotions like, jealousy, fear, anger, frustration and grief.

Amir was always in constant fear of losing his father's love as his father's expectation of him is always beyond his reach to rise. Amir's inclination towards literary pursuits was despised by Baba very much for Baba believes they are womanly pursuits. When Amir wrote a story about man whose tears turn into pearls and the greed made him cry and cry to shed more tears. To get more tears he killed his wife, so that he cried more to fetch more pearls. He expected appreciation and fatherly encouragement for his talent but he was disappointed by his father's indifference.

That evening, I climbed the stairs and walked into Baba's smoking room, in my hands the two sheets of paper on which I had scribbled the story. Baba and Rahim Khan were smoking pipes and sipping brandy when I came in. "What is it, Amir?" Baba said, reclining on the sofa and lacing his hands behind his head. Blue smoke swirled around his face. His glare made my throat feel dry. I cleared it and told him I'd written a story. Baba nodded and gave a thin smile that conveyed little more than feigned interest. "Well, that's very good, isn't it?" he said. Then nothing more. He just looked at me through the cloud of smoke. I probably stood there for under a minute, but, to this day, it was one of the longest minutes of my life. Seconds plodded by, each separated from the next by an eternity. Air grew heavy damp, almost solid. I was breathing bricks. Baba went on staring me down, and didn't offer to read (p.17).

His fear of losing love of his father turns into jealousy against Hasan and instead of realizing it, he resorts to humiliating Hasan frequently just make himself comfortable by bringing out his superiority over him like pointing Hasan's inability to read and write and mocking his knowledge as he couldn't read any books at every opportunity.

My favourite part of reading to Hassan was when we came across a big word that he didn't know. I'd tease him, expose his ignorance. (p.15)

In fact, it's Amir's fear that made him feel secure whenever he made fun of Hasan. He was masking his emotions behind teasing Hasan always. As Sartre puts it Amir tries to project his fear on Hasan and desires to make his consciousness to seek alternative ways of avoiding reality. If we observe the



behaviour of Amir when Hasan was assaulted by teenage bullies we can easily see the play of pseudo or fake emotions that by lacking power to handle danger he tried to ignore it.

I had one last chance to make a decision. One final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan--the way he'd stood up for me all those times in the past--and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run. In the end, I ran. (p.42)

Here Amir behaved exactly as Sartre believed about an individual with fake emotions or sentiments, "but, lacking power to avoid the danger by the normal methods and the deterministic links, I denied it" (Sartre 1939/1948 p.62). When it comes to standing for his friend, Amir even exhibits what Sartre class it 'Passive sadness', i.e. he was not expected by the world to do anything to interfere Hasan's rape as Hasan was a Hazara and a low class person doesn't deserve it. Indeed, his jealousy over Hasan's status in Baba's regard made him join, though by not intervening, Assef in raping Hasan. Amir was not a coward, he aspired to be a coward. It's a clear case of pseudo sentiments or emotions playing on psyche.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion that can be drawn here is that every individual irrespective of his race, social status, skin colour and inherited facticity can grow beyond and try an authentic existence, if he tries to turn to good faith from bad faith and lived by true emotions rather than by pseudo sentiments. To relate this to Amir in *The Kite Runner*, he has chosen to act upon bad faith to temporarily avoid the troubling truth and felt soothed by his pseudo sentiments that only kept him in pre-reflective state. He didn't try to overcome the facticity but acted by it. He negated human reality to be authentic by not attempting to be subject of existence. Amir, through bad faith and fake emotions lived, being-for-others and failed realise his freedom to choose being-for-it, an unauthentic life.

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