

THE NECESSARY FINITUDE: THE NIETZSCHEAN
FOUNDATION OF MEANING IN BUFALINO'S THE TALE OF
TIMELESS CASTLE
DIERNA Sarah*

Abstract

This paper investigates the ontological necessity of finitude through a combined literary and philosophical analysis of Gesualdo Bufalino's *The Tale of the Timeless Castle*. Through the difference assessed by Martin Hägglund between the meaning of mortality and the biological event of death, it will be argued as the human finitude represents the foundational condition for existential value, identity, and joy.

The second part of the essay focuses on the role of the Child (Dino) of Bufalino's tale. Drawing on Nietzschean thought – specifically the “Three Metamorphoses” and the “Innocence of Becoming” – the paper interprets the child as the metaphorical embodiment of the Life-Affirmation.

The study aims to show that it is the dissipative becoming of time that invests life with meaning, transforming the “right epilogue” of death into a liberating force that allows life to be experienced in its authentic fullness.

Keywords: Gesualdo Bufalino, Friedrich Nietzsche, Finitude, Time, Existentialism, Mortality.

Introduction

In Plato's *Phaedo* we read that «man who has truly spent his life in philosophy feels confident when about to die»¹. This happens because philosophy has addressed the big questions of human life from the beginning of the thought. One of this question has regarded the issue of death. If we consider the first philosophical written proof, that is the Anaximander's fragment, the theme of mortality – more than that of death – constitute the core of the statement.

**PhD in Scienze dell'Interpretazione presso l'Università di Catania.*

¹ Plato, *Phaedo*, edited by D. Gallop, Oxford University Press, New York 1993, 63e, p. 9.

From the Nietzsche's perspective², what Anaximander tried to do with his idea of the *apeiron* was to explain and to justify the death of all existing beings. Apart from Nietzsche's critics of this *human, too human* explanation, Anaximander describes the end of all existing things through the *Time*. The dissolution of entities – what for humans is called 'dying' – happens according «the order of time»³. It means that the reflection on death entails also the reflection on Time, thus, a reflection on the Life which is subjected to die. In other words, 'the penalty of the end' – to use Anaximander's statement – does not arrive at the end of life, but it involves an entire existence who, existing in the becoming of time, is constantly subjected to transformation, decline, loss before the final end. This is why the inquiry into the *Meaning of Mortality* is not equivalent to the question of the *Meaning of Death*. Finitude characterizes our entire existence, not just its final performance. Although it is inseparable from the meaning of dying, finitude is a concept that does not overlap with death itself.

Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus*⁴ reassures his friend, whom we must imagine to be 'concerned' because of his mortality, with the well-known response that we should not fear death because when death is present, we are not, and as long as we are present, death is not. This is true for death as the *final act* of an organism's life, but the same cannot be said for death as the *condition and form* of what may be defined *being-into-life*.

Mortality – the condition being mortal – profoundly shapes human life. While death, as the act of dying, represents, in some way, the ultimate instant, mortality accompanies the living being from the very first moment. As Italian

² See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic age of the Greeks. Complete works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Delphi Classics, United Kingdom 2015.

³ I refer to the fragment of Anaximander reported by Simplicius in *Aristotle's Physics*: «Anaximander [...] said that the origin and the element of things (beings) is apeiron and he is the first who used this name for the origin (arche). He says that the origin is neither water, nor any other of the so-called elements, but something of different nature, unlimited. From it are generated the skies and the worlds which exist between them. Whence things (beings) have their origin, there their destruction happens as it is ordained. For they give justice and compensation to one another for their injustice according to the ordering of time, as he said in poetic terms. Obviously noticing the mutual changes between the four elements, he did not demand to make one of them a subject, but something else except these. He considers that genesis takes place without any decay of this element, but with the generation of the opposites by his own movement» (DK 12, B1).

⁴ See Epicurus, *The essential Epicurus. Letters, Principal Doctrines, Vatican Sayings, and Fragments*, translated by E. O'Connor, Prometheus Books, New York 1993.

the writer Gesualdo Bufalino, to who I focus my reflection on the Meaning of Mortality, wrote: «He began to live, he began to die»⁵.

It is such finite nature of human life that extensively conditions the existence of the living being who is destined to pass away. For this reason, when reflecting on the theme of finitude in philosophical and literary contexts, it is always life itself that we observe and question. Indeed, one of the propositions of Spinoza's states that «the free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom consists in the contemplation not of death, but of life»⁶. Meditation on mortality profoundly affects the meaning we ascribe to our lives, often conditioning how that life is lived and perceived.

In this paper, I will reflect on the *Meaning of Mortality* from a combined aesthetic/literary and philosophical perspective. I will focus my analysis on the 20th-century Italian writer, Gesualdo Bufalino (1920-1996). Death – as the awareness of being mortal – is central in many of his novels.

The objective of this work is to demonstrate how finitude represents the right epilogue of existence and how the mortal condition invests our life with meaning. Conversely, the lack of an end would deprive life itself of any value and significance.

In the following pages, the paper will analyse Bufalino's short story *The Fable of the Timeless Castle*⁷ by focusing on two interconnected thematic cores, aiming to show that mortality is fundamental to giving meaning, value, and joy to our existence.

The first thematic core will focus on the *Allegory of Immortality*: by describing the condition of the souls in the castle, it will be clarified how the positive meaning we give to our time – the very meaning for which we would wish that time would last and that our lives would not end – is *dependent* precisely on the mortal nature of our existence.

The second part of the essay will concentrate on the role of the child in Bufalino's fable. I shall seek to demonstrate that the child is not merely the subject to which the fable is addressed, but that his presence, in Bufalino's narrative, also carries a metaphorical significance, representing a different way of experiencing time, and investing it with sense and meaning.

⁵ Gesualdo Bufalino, *Calende greche*, Bompiani, Milan 2023, p. 10. Translations from Italian, where there is not an official English version, are always mine.

⁶ B. Spinoza, *Ethics*, edited by C. Carlisle, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2020, Part IV, LXVII, p. 274.

⁷ G. Bufalino, *La favola del castello senza tempo*, Bompiani, Milan 2020. About this tale see also Maria Panetta "Entri pure il tempo, entrino con lui la memoria, la morte": Bufalino e la 'Favola del castello senza tempo', "Diacritica", 35, novembre 2020, pp. 204-215.

The conclusion of this reflection will consist, therefore, in recognizing how mortality does not constitute an existential curse or a punishment – like Nietzsche interprets Anaximander's fragment – but rather the foundational condition for that space of fullness, significance, and value that our lives attempt to carve out day by day.

The Allegory of Immortality

Can a fable addressed to children have death at the centre of its plot? If it is of Gesualdo Bufalino that we are talking about, the answer is 'yes, it can'.

As it is typical of a fable, it does not lack of a *happy end*. This happy end, however, coincides with the liberation of the castle's inhabitants from the slavery of their immortal condition. The moral of the fable lies precisely here: it outlines the *necessity* of living for a finite time to preserve existence from the void of meaning and identity into which it would otherwise inevitably fall.

The metaphysical framework within which the story must be read and interpreted is, as the fable's title suggests, *temporal*. It is impossible to conceive finitude without conceiving time. It is the primacy of the temporal nature, and thus the inevitably finite nature, of the human condition that Bufalino narrates in his works. The human being is aware of its temporal structure. This structure becomes for the human what Alberto Giovanni Biuso defined as «the ever-present possibility of dying and is the awareness of such an intrinsic limit to all that exists»⁸.

The fable is set in an almost dreamlike atmosphere. In a dark forest, a child, Dino, pursues a butterfly which has a skull on its back and belongs to a species that does not exist in science books: such imaginary species is the *Acherontia Atropos*.

This butterfly presents itself to the child as a creature «omnipotent» and «terrible to the entire universe» due to its ability to «suffocate every other breath»⁹. *Acheronte* is the name of the river across which the dead are ferried; *Atropo* is the name of the eldest of the Fates, that who cuts the thread of life and from whom one cannot escape. *Acherontia Atropos* is, in short, another name for saying *death*: omnipotent because nothing is immune to it, and terrible due to the anxiety it arouses in human beings who are aware of their mortal destiny.

In the fable, it is Dino who moves himself in the direction of death. With this image, Bufalino sought to clarify from the very first pages that being

⁸ A. G. Biuso, *History and Time*, in L. Nigro (edited by), *Rosapat – Studies on the Archeology of Palestine and Transjordan*, Arbor Sapientiae, Rome 2025, p. 22.

⁹ G. Bufalino, op. cit., p. 21.

mortal is a condition that accompanies the living being from the beginning of life, and not just at the end, as previously noted: «Death, therefore, is not primarily a biological event - the mere cessation of life - but is that which, linking itself into human being there from the beginning, makes it intrinsically finite. The sense of time is [...] for humans their own radical finitude»¹⁰. It is impossible to conceive death without time, and impossible to conceive human temporality without conceiving death.

Bufalino, however, describes a place – a castle – in which lives the «most ancient men who escaped the great flood»¹¹. Individuals who evade the laws of time and, thus, that of death. These are immortal creatures whom the writer describes as entities that

never age, never decay. Having lived forever, they have already performed every gesture and action; they have experienced the same relationships with the same dialogues; “nor is there anything left for them to do, but, in pairs, interminably win or lose the same game of dice they have won and lost ten, a hundred, a thousand thousands of times in succession”¹².

The inhabitants of the castle endure an anguish more terrible than death: *boredom*. Having lived an unending time has stripped their existence of meaning, causing it to fall into an infinite repetition of actions, gestures, and words that – because of repetition and predictability – have lost their value. The absence of death thus seems to take the form of a *lack of life*, as it has been argued by Martin Hägglund: «to live is to be mortal, which means that the opposite of being mortal – to be immortal – is to be dead. If one can no longer die, one is already dead»¹³.

Indeed, in this state of «ineffable desolation»¹⁴, one of the immortals states: «Now, tell me: can this be enough for us? Can this be called happiness? If only you knew what we would give for a pang of passion, a love, a hatred, a heartache, an illness! And how we wish we could, at least once, discover our likeness in a crystal that would show it to us and teach us who we are...»¹⁵. These individuals simply desire to live.

¹⁰ A. G. Biuso, *History and time*, cit., p. 22.

¹¹ G. Bufalino, op. cit., p. 24.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ M. Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2008, p. 48.

¹⁴ G. Bufalino, op. cit., p. 40.

¹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 46.

«*This is the Right Epilogue*»

Through the words of the immortal inhabitant of the timeless castle, Bufalino highlights several limitations and/or critical issues which are involved in the immortal life – that is, a life outside of time. Passion, love, and even hatred are sentiments that presuppose an openness towards the other. Instead, as Häggglund assesses, immortality «not only [is] unattainable but also undesirable, since it would eliminate the care and passion that animate my life»¹⁶. The love, passion, and even hatred alluded to by Bufalino's character are expressions of a relationship with the other. The force of these sentiments also depends on the temporal horizon in which they occur; love and passion are, in fact, forms of anticipation, while hatred is a form of dwelling on something that has already been and has wounded us. Even illness, as we have seen, becomes desirable because it enables that “self-relation” to which Häggglund refers when he states that «to be alive is necessarily to have a self-relation, and any self-relation consists in the activity of self-maintenance. Non living entities do not have any form of self-relation because they are not doing anything to maintain their own existence»¹⁷.

Perhaps the most significant element accompanying this *life that is not life* is the loss of identity – namely the ‘appearance’ of the self that the existing being wishes to safeguard and protect from the dissipative force of time. Identity is what makes individuals who they are as a singularity (identity of the self) and as a collectivity (identity of a community) within a historical era. If this is true, it appears, then, that immortality does not guarantee the preservation of this existence that we would wish to last forever without suffering its inevitable end.

The immortal who has a conversation with the child confides to him the hope that someone would show them their identity, as they seem unable to recognize or possess one. Indeed, after managing to enter the castle, Dino wanders among its walls and witnesses a singular fact: the images affixed to the walls are all identical because they are timeless images, without a history behind. It seems that time is a demiurge who creates the identity of our person, the history, and the memory that define our existence, the same existence we would want to preserve from the abyssal thought of death.

This paradoxical situation reveals the necessity for time (thus also for death) in life. «Time is an ‘ultratranscendental’ condition from which nothing can be exempt [...] because it is the condition for everything all the way up to

¹⁶ M. Häggglund, *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual*, Pantheon, New York 2019, p. 4.

¹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 182.

and including the ideal itself»¹⁸. In other words, what we wish to protect and keep alive in time is precisely *this life here*, with its stories and memories, its loves and relationships. This life is immersed in time and is time, as Biuso writes:

The sense of being-there as being-in-the-world is the *Zeitlichkeit*, the temporality. The irreducibility of the human to mere present-at-hand substance, its constant existence as an ever-open and never-completed aperture, its “historicity”, in short, its identity as a species, are all founded on the fact that the does not have time, but is living, experienced, open, constitutive temporality¹⁹

and is also destined to end. The other name for time is, in fact, death, which at this point becomes almost a *liberating force*.

Returning to Bufalino’s fable, after having understood the unhappy, void, and inert condition in which these immortals live, Dino manages to get the butterfly/Atropo into the castle, namely, Time: «*Let Time enter, let Memory, let Death enter with him...*»²⁰. At this point, the boy sees at a lyrical scene which reveal the final end of the story: «already the faces of the Immortals were covered with wrinkles and all the scars of the years; their eye sockets had become watery pebbles, their skin an ancient parchment. With changed voices they whispered in chorus: “Thank you, boy, this is the right epilogue!”»²¹. Death becomes a salvation for life not by marking the passage to the afterlife, but by allowing life to be life – full, suffered, finite. To be, in other words, exactly what we are: the life we carry with us. Time, which is our manifest enemy, is in truth a gentle god, to use the words of Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*. Subtraction is a giver of meaning and, for mortals, of life. Put differently, it is the dissipative becoming of time that invests life with a certain meaning.

The fable does not end with the entrance of Atropos – that is, Time, Memory, and Death. It is discovered, in fact, that Dino was dreaming and that the castle and the souls were thus the product of a dreamlike reality. The child has woken up and must rush to school before the bell rings and the custodian

¹⁸ Id., *Radical Atheism*, cit., p. 19.

¹⁹ A. G. Biuso, *Identità e differenze temporali. Su Heidegger e Ricoeur*, in “In circolo. Rivista di filosofia e culture”, n.2, December 2016, p. 4.

²⁰ G. Bufalino, *La favola del castello senza tempo*, cit., p. 46.

²¹ Ivi, p. 53.

locks the gates. In class, he will search to see if the butterfly encountered in his dreams truly exists. How should this conclusion be interpreted?

I would like to dedicate the final part of the paper precisely to the *child*, who is not only the protagonist and the recipient of the fable but also holds a metaphorical meaning. In Bufalino's narrative, the child occupies a particular role that I will attempt to describe through the lens of Nietzschean thought.

The Child and «The Innocence of Becoming»

Bufalino's fable, as noted, does not end with the death of the immortals but with Dino's awakening; he must hurry to get to school before the bell rings. «In the plates of the Science book left open on the table, the first ray of sun sought, but did not find, the butterfly»²². Thus concludes this brief yet significant story. It remains to be understood how to interpret the non-existence of *Acherontia Atropos*, the image of Death. One might argue that death does not yet exist for Dino, as he is only a child and death is still a distant thought.

Bufalino's is not merely the one who liberates these men from the agony of being unable to die. He succeeds in this task because he possesses «three virtues» capable of «drawing the inhabitants out of their miserable slavery»: these are «youth, courage, and innocence»²³. These virtues do not belong to Dino alone but implicitly refer to the way in which human being is called to live his temporal and finite horizon.

Thus spoke Zarathustra represents the work in which Nietzsche's conception of time occupies a more decisive place than elsewhere, culminating in the concept of the eternal recurrence of the same. This thought, far from being an attempt to defend an eternity of human temporality – that weakens existence, as we have seen – instead constitutes the acceptance of eternal becoming, thus of the passing away of life. Those that Häggglund has defined an *infinite finitude*: «an infinite finitude of temporal beings forever dying away and entering the nothingness of the past»²⁴.

In the second *Untimely Observations*, Nietzsche refers to the anguish that time provokes in humans because of the past and future in which it extends, and the human inability to dwell in the present. The source of anguish is referred to that “it was” (*Es war*), which presents itself to life as the

²² *Ivi*, p. 54.

²³ *Ivi*, p. 27.

²⁴ M. Björke, *A World of Innumerable Inactivities. Martin Häggglund and the Economy of Non-Existence*, “STK. Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift”, n.4 (2020), p. 304. (Emphasis added).

«watchword which brings the human being strife, suffering and boredom, so that he is reminded what is existence basically is: a never to be perfected imperfect», that is, a continuous becoming in which existence consumes itself, and «when death finally brings him the much longed for oblivion, it simultaneously also suppresses the present; and with this, existence places its seal on the knowledge that existence itself is nothing but an uninterrupted having-been, something that lives by negating, consuming, and contradicting itself»²⁵. In the Nietzschean interpretation, it is the *past* that represents the properly negative character of human temporality. Passing away implies the non-being, the end of what was before.

This is better understood in *Zarathustra*, where we read that «The now and the past on earth – alas, my friends, that *I* find most unendurable» and again: «‘that which was’ is the name of the stone he cannot move»²⁶. For the human, becoming entails the movement of those that exists in the present into the past.

Nietzsche discusses this in a chapter titled, not by chance, *On Redemption*. The human wants to redeem himself from his temporality; it is against time that he directs his *spirit of revenge*, for time is that before which the human finds himself powerless, before which his will seems incapable of acting. To such a conception of time – also shared by Hägglund in the thesis that «the now must disappear in its very event»²⁷ – some scholars have correlated the *Spirit of Gravity* (*Geist der Schwere*), which, in the prologue of the work, causes the tightrope walker trying to balance on the rope of life to fall. This spirit appears in one of the best-known chapters, *On the Vision and the Riddle*, obstructing Zarathustra’s path. A path that is already arduous, taken on slippery ground and directed upwards, is now hindered by the dwarf’s warning, who constantly reminds Zarathustra that everything that goes up is then destined to fall, meaning to end. Zarathustra cannot endure this presence, which seems to drag him downwards and slow his journey. Nietzsche writes: «Upward – defying the spirit that drew it downward toward the abyss, the spirit of gravity, my devil and archenemy»²⁸. A presence from

²⁵ F. Nietzsche, *On the Utility and Liability of History for Life*; «Unfashionable Observations». *The complete works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 2 [critical Edition of Friedrich Nietzsche *Sämtliche Werke*] translated by Richard T. Gray, Stanford University Press, California 1995, p. 88.

²⁶ Id., *Thus spoke Zarathustra. A book for Non and All*, edited by W. Kaufmann, Penguin Books, United States of America 1985, pp. 137-139.

²⁷ M. Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, cit., p. 19.

²⁸ F. Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, cit., p. 156.

which Zarathustra needs to *free* himself. At this point, the first of the three virtues that made Dino the suitable person to free the immortals from the prison of the timeless castle appears: *Courage*.

The first thing to do is to free oneself from the *Spirit of Gravity*. This does not mean getting rid of time, since, as noted, it constitutes the *ultra-transcendental* structure of the world and of existence, but rather freeing oneself from a *certain way* of living time – that is represented by this spirit of gravity who bothers the path. Zarathustra understands that courage is needed to eliminate such gravity of time and thus to overcome the torment caused by it. «But there is something in me that I call courage; that has so far slain me every discouragement. This courage finally bade me stand still and speak: “Dward! It is you or I!” For courage is the best slayer, courage which *attacks* [...] Courage also slays dizziness at the edge of abysses!»²⁹. The abysses thought is represented by the *Eternal recurrence* which finds its first account in this chapter.

The Spirit of Gravity is incapable of adequately interpreting this thought, which appears to it as a mere circular theory of time. Zarathustra warns us that such an interpretation is only possible for those who take the matter *lightly*. This warning already alludes to not understanding the Nietzschean concept of the eternal recurrence as a simple theory where everything merely returns. Its meaning is deeper and, as Zarathustra tells the dwarf, more abyssal. As Ludovica Boi wrote, the eternal recurrence must be understood as the «truth according to which every single existence must be able to eternize itself in the acceptance of everything that passes»³⁰. Far more than a doctrine about the circularity of time, the eternal recurrence concerns the passing away and the acceptance of this passing away. Following Zarathustra’s apology of courage, the force of this thought is better understood: «Courage is the best slayer: courage slays even pity. But pity is the deepest abyss: as deeply as man sees into life, he also sees into suffering. Courage, however, is the best slayer – courage which attacks: which slays even death itself, for it says, “Was *that* life? Well then! Once more!”»³¹.

The *courageous man* is ready to accept that life begins again exactly in the form in which it was given – that is, in the form of mortality, of the passing away of all things, and of time. Courage does not eliminate death by slaying it; rather, the individual accepts finitude because he has courageously

²⁹ Ivi, p. 157.

³⁰ L. Boi, *Dioniso, ovvero l’Uno diveniente*, in Id., (edited by), *Nietzsche e i Greci. Tra mito e disincanto*, Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici Press, Naples 2020, p. 67.

³¹ F. Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, cit., p. 157.

reconciled himself with his own mortality at a higher level, which is that of becoming, whose *innocence* is now grasped.

The second of the virtues Dino possesses is indeed *Innocence*. For Nietzsche, becoming is innocent. The innocence deprives time, and thus death, «a Becoming and Passing, a building and destroying, without any moral bias, in perpetual innocence is in this world only the play of the artist and of the child»³². The thinker of Röcken adopts the lesson of Heraclitus, whom he considers one of his masters. According to Nietzsche, Heraclitus was the first to deny any form of dualism, any distinction between being and becoming, between the indeterminate and determinate things. Innocence, then, resides in grasping becoming as something that simply happens, of which our mortality is a part.

The child of the story is capable of this. Indeed, to whom belongs the third of Bufalino's three virtues: *Youth*. The child is also the last of the *three metamorphoses* that the Nietzschean man must reach. «But say, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion could not do? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes"»³³. The child is the one who is capable of affirming his 'Yes' to all this. To live in the moment, letting things pass and always opening to the new in order to begin again. He is young because his life is not fear toward what has been, but a renewed openness toward what is. Two capacities belong to him: the first is *forgetting* (oblivion), and the second is *happiness*. The life of the child, too, is becoming and continuous change, but he is able to welcome all this. According to Boi, Nietzsche's child resembles the Heraclitean sage: «Heraclitean intuitions fulfil, towards human beings, an immortalizing function: the human being needs the thought of the single world in becoming, in order to live in a proper sense»³⁴.

It is possible, then, to maintain that Dino was chosen as the protagonist of the fable not only because the child is the addressee *par excellence* of this literary genre, but also because he represents the metaphor of the affirmation of life, and his virtues constitute the qualities that the mortal being must succeed in conquering for himself to live the temporality that he is in an authentic, unguarded, and full way.

³² *Ivi*, p. 172.

³³ *Ivi*, p. 27.

³⁴ Independently from the real significance of it, it is interesting to note that the Nietzsche-Denkmal which has been devised in Naumburg (Saale) represents the philosopher with a young girl who questions him. L. Boi, op. cit., p. 63.

A fourth quality could be added to the three possessed by Dino. The child is also capable of a different eternity, which is not the timeless eternity of the castle's immortals, but rather the eternity of one who lives in the present: in the moment, as learned from one of the most famous propositions of Wittgenstein.

In conclusion, Bufalino's child, read in the light of Nietzsche's philosophy, becomes the incarnation of a will to affirmation – the sacred 'Yes' – that accepts its own temporality as a space for the creation of value. A choice certainly not easy – as Nietzsche himself states from the title that is a book for all and for none – but one that presents itself as the only true antithesis to the boredom and inertia of the inertia of the Timeless Castle.

Conclusion

Bufalino's *Fable of the Timeless Castle* has demonstrated, through the story of its immortal characters, the necessity of finitude in human life. We have seen how the existence of the immortals was far from happy and corresponded much more to a life already dead – one that had precipitated into stasis and boredom. The endless repetition of the same actions stripped both the actions themselves and existence in general of meaning. The immortals lack something more subtle and profound than mere death; they lack life itself – the very thing they desired to preserve by hoping not to die. What we call *life* is thus life precisely because it is mortal and finite, because the events that fill it change and do not repeat, or repeat a finite number of times. This finitude contributes to giving existence a sense of purpose and the desire for unlimited duration.

The fable has thus shown that the meaning of our mortality represents something more stratified than human life itself. It is not reduced to the last instant before dying but marks the significance of an entire existence, thereby confirming the Spinozian proposition from which we began: philosophy is not a discourse on death, but on life.

Through Nietzsche's thought, we attempted to highlight, from a philosophical perspective, the burden that the past (understood as what has been and therefore is no more) places on the human, weighing him down to the point of collapse. Finally, we identified that of Child as the *ultimate metamorphosis* that existence must reach. The child, who is also the protagonist of Bufalino's story, thus represents the ideal of a reconciliation with one's mortal condition.

Ultimately, the journey of Dino and the allegory of Bufalino, read through the Nietzschean lens, teach us that true courage does not lie in the

defeat of Death, but in the joyful *affirmation* of mortal life. It is within the Limit that the human being finds his own value and, finally, his *right epilogue*.

