

Adam Potkay

Narrative Possibilities of Happiness, Unhappiness, and Joy

MY ESSAY HAS THREE PARTS, CORRESPONDING TO THE THREE concepts announced in my title: happiness, joy, and unhappiness. To summarize the argument of each part: first, the word “happiness” does not refer only to a feeling or subjective state, but designates as well an *evaluation* of a life or the narrative of a life. Accordingly, in representing the lives of fictional characters, novelists invite their readers to assess both what happy or flourishing lives might be, and the narrative routes, variously composed of circumstances and choices, by which such lives might be attained.

My second claim concerns joy as something distinct from happiness. Joy is an episodic or dispositional element in an individual’s emotional life, and as such not subject to public evaluation in quite the same way as happiness is. That is to say, while it is possible or even common to know someone who thinks he’s happy but to claim to know better—one needs only the proper intonation to render ironic the phrase “Mr. Blifil *thinks* he’s happy”—the person who experiences joy does so, by contrast, regardless of your assessment or approval. And yet joy, which is arguably with desire and sorrow one of the three fundamental emotions of narrative, can nonetheless be subjected to ethical discipline: the novelist can, and often does, prompt her reader to feel joy and grief at the right things.

Finally, my third section offers a brief mediation on the narrative importance of unhappiness in the novel, especially the Continental

novel. I address in particular the form of unhappiness paradoxically known, in a technical sense of the word derived from the Middle Ages, as “joy”: the “joy” that C. S. Lewis defines as “an unsatisfied desire, which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction” (1955: 18).

HAPPINESS AS COMMUNAL EVALUATION

There is a tendency today to think of happiness as a quality of consciousness, an alterable mood, or a biochemical state. But here’s a thought experiment I have used with students to suggest to them that they retain some at least vestigial sense of happiness as a communal and thus more or less objective assessment of a life. On a crowded city street, you walk by a drunk or drug-addled man sitting on the sidewalk who, despite his filth, tattered clothing, missing teeth, and general disorientation, has a certain euphoric gleam in his eye. Does it seem ironic or not to say, “There’s a happy man?” The degree to which this judgment seems false or ironic is the degree to which we retain a notion of happiness or flourishing that is not equivalent to a subjective state or “feeling good.” But if “there’s a happy man” does not *prima facie* seem to you a false judgment, consider this: Could it withstand a later discovery that the addled man was once a brilliant astrophysicist who, by going off antipsychotic medication, had been reduced to his present condition? Would this narrative information cause you to revise your opinion of the man and his alleged happiness? If it would—and I think that for most of us it would indeed—it is because the concept of happiness encompasses more than experiences of or inferences about mental states or dispositions. The case of the apparently elated addict suggests three things: first, that happiness can be and in some cases must be evaluated from a third-person or communal perspective; second, that judgments about happiness are best made within a narrative, “whole-life” frame of reference; and third, that the judgment of happiness is at heart an ethical one.

Where this ethical notion of happiness comes from will be familiar enough to students of philosophy. It derives from Greek notions of *eudaimonia*, which has traditionally been translated into English

as “happiness,” although scholars now prefer “(human) flourishing.” *Eudaimonia* literally refers to the “good daemon” or “good genius” that was thought to accompany a successful or flourishing person, but Greek philosophy uses the term to refer to the sort of human flourishing that, independent of good demons, depends upon an individual’s reason or choices. Eudaimonism gives reason (or at least reasonableness) pride of place over any and all competing aims and desires found in the psyche or soul; thus happiness is the ability not necessarily to get what you want, but to know what you *should* want, which is the same thing as what you would want were your soul ordered properly.¹ (To quote Mick Jagger on this: “You can’t always get what you want, / But if you try some time you just might find, / You get what you need.”)

Agreeing that happiness is the natural goal of life, moral philosophers after Plato also agreed that the best way to achieve a happy life was through the rational exercise of virtue or the virtues (wisdom, courage, justice, and so forth). Even Epicureans, who construed happiness as pleasure (*hēdonē*), thought of virtue as a requisite means to pleasant living. Aristotelians and Stoics, agreeing that virtuous activity is a constituent of the happy life, disagreed chiefly on what role fortune or accident played in that life. For Aristotle, a virtuous life was made happier by the fortunate accidents of good health, moderate wealth, and an untarnished reputation; the Stoics, by contrast—counterintuitively but with appealing *élan*—contended that virtue was sufficient for the happy life, and that a person was no less happy for being sick or poor, in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes. With evident swagger, Stoics liked to talk about their ability to be happy “on the rack.” But even Stoics spoke of external goods—such as not being on the rack—as “indifferents to be preferred.”

This philosophical *eudaimonia* was, in the early modern period, translated into English as “happiness.” The word’s lineage is made pedantically clear in Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* by the character Lucentio, en route to the university in Padua: Lucentio proclaims, to “that part of philosophy / Will I apply that treats of happiness / By virtue specially to be achieved.” In retrospect, Lucentio’s quest for happi-

ness seems prescient. Locke bequeathed to a subsequent age “the pursuit of happiness,” a phrase from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689); by the 1730s Pope could posit as self-evident that “happiness” is “our being’s end and aim” (*An Essay on Man*); in 1776, Thomas Jefferson enshrined “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” among mankind’s inalienable rights.² In all these instances, happiness bears a neoclassical inflection, the suggestion that human flourishing is inseparable from ethics. The term’s high-minded usage is evident in a compliment paid to David Hume’s *History of England* (1754–62) by the Comtesse de Boufflers: his history, she writes, “illuminates the mind, and in showing true happiness intimately tied to virtue, it discovers by the same light the one and only end of all reasonable beings” (Hume 1932: 2, 366–67).

Yet there is already a rearguard defensiveness about the Comtesse’s remark. As the eighteenth century wore on, asserting the virtue–happiness nexus increasingly seems a nervous response to newer, amoral conceptions of happiness—subjectivist conceptions that turn on the mechanics of desire and gratification—promulgated by materialist philosophy (for example, Hobbes in England, La Mettrie in France); facilitated, in the material world, by a new consumerist ethos; and politicized, in France, as a right of man.³ Addressing happiness in this political sense, Thomas Carlyle quipped, “Happiness our being’s end and aim . . . is at bottom, if we will count well, not yet two centuries old in the world” (Carlyle 1843: 143). Carlyle, to be precise, might have said “in the postclassical world,” but his judgment alerts us to the wider broadcast and more inclusive reach of happiness, or its pursuit, since the Enlightenment, and particularly since its politicization by Rousseau and the French Revolution. Carlyle heartily disapproved this democratic turn. He tartly dismissed the revolutionary ideal of a *Contrat Social* as a “prophesied Lubberland of Happiness,” adding, “Man is not what one calls a happy animal” (1837: 57). Carlyle intends, in effect, to bury an idle conception of happiness that is, as he writes in the 1830s and 1840s, barely 50 years old: the conception the Jacobin leader Armand Saint-Just had in mind when he pronounced in the mid-1790s, “Happiness is a new idea in Europe” (Hudson 1996: 49).

Happiness may or may not have been a new idea or keyword in political discourse. It had, however, long been an end and aim of sages and, at least in story, virtuous lovers. Let us now turn to the novel, where the aim of a happy ending has predominated for much of the past 1,700 years. The teleological happiness of the comic romance or novel is political, but also typically hierarchical, not to mention fantastical. Hero and heroine receive their just acclaim, and are integrated even as they themselves integrate a political or more local form of community; of this, Carlyle would approve. A “happy marriage” reconciles individual desire and communal or political need, with two lovers good fortune deemed a blessing by all the people. So ends the longest and most influential romance or novel of late antiquity, Heliodorus’s *Aithiopika* or *Ethiopian Story* (third-fourth century AD), a story about two lovers acquiring both happiness and social identity through and at the end of a long course of cosmopolitan adventures, erotic adversity, heroic endurance, and, in the end, fortuitous recognition. In the novel’s denouement the foundling and chaste heroine Charikleia, recognized by her parents and her people as the blood princess of Ethiopia, reclaims her birthright and marries her worthy, chaste, and long-suffering suitor Theagenes. The narrative as a whole has an ethical arc, beginning with an unstable initial condition of what is and ought not to be, and moving through a process of exploration and discovery to a final condition in which what ought to be now is.⁴ As the lovers ride at novel’s end to their “wedding ritual,” “by the light of torches, to the melody of flute and pipe,” the people of the Ethiopian metropolis rejoice: they “cheered and clapped and danced,” as earlier they had “cheered and danced for joy where they stood, and there was no discordant voice as young and old, rich and poor, united in jubilation” (1989: 568, 588).

Moving ahead in literary history about 1,400 years, and changing setting from Ethiopia to Somerset, England, we find a narrative trajectory quite similar to Heliodorus’s in Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749): here the foundling Tom, having learned prudential wisdom as well as his true social identity, is rewarded with Sophia, becoming not only a “philosophia-er,” but also happily married and well situated as a member of the upper gentry. Fielding ends his comic novel:

To conclude, as there are not to be found a worthier Man and Woman than this fond Couple, so neither can be imagined more happy. They preserve the purest and tenderest Affection for each other, an Affection daily increased and confirmed by mutual Endearments, and mutual Esteem. Nor is their Conduct towards their Relations and Friends less amiable, than towards one another. And such is their Condescension, their Indulgence, and their Beneficence to those below them, that there is not a Neighbour, a Tenant or a Servant who doth not most gratefully bless the Day when Mr. Jones was married to his Sophia (2005: 874–5).

With its basis in mutual esteem and affection, the marriage Fielding describes might be considered more “companionate” than the one to which Heliodorus brings us no closer than wedding ritual. But this marriage is like Heliodorus’s, set at the axis of a larger sense of community, though in this case one that is parochial and postfeudal rather than royal and metropolitan. Fielding ends with the communal judgment not of “the people,” but, more narrowly, of the neighbors, tenants, and servants whose own happiness is secured or enhanced by that of the propertied Joneses.

The narrative aim of matrimonial and communal happiness persists in the nineteenth-century novel, but with certain differences. Most notably there is a greater assertion of the individual’s own happiness as, if not independent of, at least less dependent on, a familial, parochial, or societal judgment of happiness. Thus the parochial vision of *Tom Jones* might at first seem to end with Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), in which Lady Catherine de Bourgh, earlier described as “a most active magistrate in her own parish” (2002: 194), has her appeals to the good of family and community countered by Elizabeth Bennett’s declaration of independence: “I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to *you*, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me”(2002: 359). Those “unconnected” persons are Elizabeth’s recharacterization

of Lady Catherine's appeals to all those who would allegedly be discommoded by Darcy's marrying a Bennett: "the eye of everybody," as she puts it, or "the opinion of all his [Darcy's] friends" (358–9). There is a political resonance to Elizabeth's pursuit of happiness—a new idea in Europe, as Saint-Just put it, and thus the butt of English anti-Jacobin novelists, as Claudia Johnson has shown us (1988: 73–93). To English ears of Austen's era, "happiness" might conjure, for better or worse, William Godwin's treatise, *Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793), a work that allows for the theoretical, utopian possibility of a perfectly just human society in which "prejudices"—including the belief in rank, entail, primogeniture, and marriage itself—would be eradicated; individuals, under a minimalist government, would conscientiously strive for the public good or "the greatest sum of pleasure or happiness" (1946: 1: xxv, cf. 1:447). Godwin's daughter Mary would, in *Frankenstein*, entertain happiness as an entitlement, and—turning eudaimonism on its head—a prerequisite to virtue. Inverting the ancient formula that virtue is necessary or sufficient for happiness, the creature insists to Victor, his creator, that happiness is necessary for virtue: "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous" (1818: 126).⁵

Of course, here we are getting well ahead of Austen. Elizabeth Bennett's individualist claim to happiness is dramatic and partial, not systematic and comprehensive. The possible negative judgment of the far from perfect society that Lady Catherine persistently if speciously invokes is sidestepped in Austen's epilogue, where only Lady Catherine and the parvenu snob Miss Bingley object to Elizabeth's marriage—and, even then, only temporarily. The marriage does meet with widespread approval, and this circumstance is not unimportant to Austen's worldview, at least until *Persuasion*. Arguably, the public judgment of happiness within the novel retains its importance well into the 1800s, with the parochial vision of Tom Jones persisting at least into *Adam Bede* (1859)—albeit Eliot's novel is set at the turn of the nineteenth century. In describing Adam's wedding to Dinah, Eliot, like Austen, plays a double game, remarking on her titular protagonist's independence

from public judgment, but then lingering on the public judgment in his favor. “His happiness was of a kind that had little reference to men’s opinion of it,” the narrator comments, before providing six paragraphs on the parish’s corroborating opinions (1980: 534–35).

The nineteenth-century’s greatest story of happiness pursued may be Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (1869). Set in Russia before the freeing of the serfs, the novel ends with the happiness of two of its principal characters, Pierre Bezuhov and Nikolay Rostov, confirmed by the judgment not as in England of the parish, but rather of the feudal estate. The key to Nikolay’s successful maintenance of his estate (Bleak Hills), the narrator tells us, is his ethical stance with regard to his workers: “He looked on the peasant, not merely as a tool, but also as an end in himself, and as his critic” (1994: 1304).⁶ In the peasant as an end in himself we may hear an echo of Kantian ethics, but in the peasant as critic we are reminded that our effectiveness, as our flourishing, is subject to third-person evaluation. The character who finally fares best in the eyes of others is Nikolay’s brother-in-law Pierre, himself an intermittent member of the Bleak Hills estate; of one of his homecomings, we are told: “Pierre’s arrival was a joyful and important event, reflected as such in all the circles of the household. The servants, the most infallible judges of their masters, because they judge them, not from their conversation and expression of their feelings, but from their actions and their manner of living, were delighted at Pierre’s return” (1994: 1323).

Pierre is the most delightful character because he has, in the course of Tolstoy’s novel, become a sympathetic Stoic; from the Napoleonic invasion of Russia, he has acquired a joyful wisdom about the individual’s relative freedom amid historical necessity. He had earlier been led astray, repeatedly, by false scents of happiness: an inappropriate first-marriage choice (Tolstoy here echoes the plot of *David Copperfield*), plus the pursuit of happiness amid false “isms” and artificial societies, here nationalism, political millenarianism, and Freemasonry (Tolstoy’s satire of impractical models of happiness recalls *Hard Times*, *Candide*, and *Rasselas*). Pierre’s education in real happiness comes as a French prisoner of war, in keeping with the ancient model of the happy man

as the man of few needs; but it involves an understanding of human freedom in relation not so much to natural as to historical necessity:

In captivity in the shed that had been his prison, Pierre had learned not through his intellect, but through his whole being, through life, that man is created for happiness, that happiness lies in himself, in the satisfaction of natural, human cravings; that all unhappiness is due, not to lack of what is needful, but to superfluity. But now, during the last three weeks of the [prisoner-of-war] march, he had learned another new and consolatory truth—he had learned that there is nothing terrible to be dreaded in the world. He had learned that just as there is no position in the world in which a man can be happy and perfectly free, so too there is no position in which he need be unhappy and in bondage. . . . The harder his lot became, the more terrible his future, the more independent of his present plight were the glad and soothing thoughts, memories, and images that occurred to him (1994: 1206–7).⁷

Pierre's happiness lies in his internal freedom from the collective, unplanned movement of history, a history figured in Pierre's gruesome march westward as a prisoner of war with Napoleon's retreating troops, and later analyzed directly by Tolstoy in the novel's epilogue: "The movement of peoples is not produced by the exercise of power; nor by intellectual activity, nor even by a combination of the two . . . ; but by the activity of *all* the men taking part in the event" (1994: 1369). *War and Peace* remains the most explicit and powerful reflection on the novel's dream of reconciling choice and collective activity, liberty and necessity—as well as individual happiness and a community's opinion of it.⁸

What I hope to have shown so far is that novelists through the nineteenth century treated happiness as something more or less objective, something available for third-person evaluation. An ethical conception of happiness is intimately connected with communal and political evalu-

ations made both within novels, and by the readers of novels. Individual characters make choices and seek fulfillment inside social networks, and with respect to political assumptions and events, that delimit their choices without wholly determining them. All of which is to say that ethics, and happiness understood ethically, cannot be uprooted from history and collective life—a point that bears stressing ever since Fredric Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious*, influentially opposed history and “collective life” to “the purely individualizing categories of ethics” (1981: 116). Jameson argues “that only the [Marxist] dialectic provides a way for ‘decentering’ the subject concretely, and for transcending the ‘ethical’ in the direction of the political and the collective” (1981: 60). Seeing Christian eschatology as a sign or “type” of secular historical process, Jameson imagines an apocalyptic future in which “the collective” will be free from all necessity, be it natural, material, or ethical (1981: 281–99). Yet Jameson’s is an irreducibly ethical vision, oriented toward (as he sees it) a future good; history can no more be uprooted from ethics than ethics can be uprooted from history. Jameson’s student, Vivasvan Soni, in a splendid forthcoming book, *Mourning Happiness*, corrects this stark and finally untenable contrast between politics and ethics by harkening back to ancient Greek culture and its situation of ethics within the values and judgments of the polis or community. Soni, however, mourns the gradual eclipse of this communal notion of happiness, seeing in Richardson’s *Pamela* its final death throes. My own sense is that, on the contrary, happiness as a communal judgment persists in the novel well into the Victorian era, if not beyond.

THE NARRATIVES OF JOY

In narrative terms, joy is related to happiness only insofar as it has as an ethical dimension. One of the framing questions of the novel form is: In what does, or ought, an individual feel joy? Conversely, at what does one, or ought one, feel grief or distress? Teaching people to feel joy and grief correctly, as Aristotle observed, the proper function of education (1339a–1340a), and this pedagogic lesson was not lost on fiction writers from Bunyan to Austen and Eliot to Tolstoy. Thus, third-person

narrators can cast a squint glance at a character's joys precisely for not according with her happiness, properly understood: for example, in Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (1791), the narrator remarks: "poor Matilda's sudden transports of joy, which she termed happiness, were not made for long continuance" (1988: 269). Note the ironic discrepancy here between what Matilda thinks her happiness is and what the narrator would have her reader recognize as true happiness—that is, something stable, tranquil, enduring. Austen follows Inchbald in distinguishing "joy" from "happiness" in a precise way—the precision, in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), with which "Marianne's joy was almost a degree beyond happiness" in leaving for London with Mrs. Jennings (1933: 158). Marianne's joy seems excessive; excrescent to (rational) happiness; linked, perhaps, to pain or the prospect of dejection.

As we see, then, happiness has a meaning distinct from, and at times opposed to, "joy." The difference may first be approached analytically, before we turn to a consideration of the historical discourses in which "joy" has been embedded. In ordinary language, "happiness" refers either to a mental disposition or an ethical evaluation, while "joy" refers either to a mental disposition or a transient mental state. Conceptually, "joy" is a trickier thing to talk about than "happiness" first because it is a responsive state or disposition often defined by category of stimulus—there is, for example, spiritual joy, erotic joy, leaving-for-London joy. Second, while happiness typically admits degree (that is, one's happiness, whether understood subjectively or objectively, can be perfect or imperfect, lesser or greater), joy admits both degree *and*, in writing, a welter of adjectival qualifications: one finds in eighteenth-century verse, for example, "vulgar joy," "ethereal joy," "fatal joy," "unwieldy joy," and "consummate joy." Joy can be modified by seemingly opposed emotions: we find in Thomas Gray's *Eton College* ode "a fearful joy" and in Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, "a heavy and anxious joy (*une joie lourde et anxieuse*)" (1966, chap. 12). In Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* we find joys athwart aesthetic and ethical registers: "rose-coloured joy," "misshapen joy," and the "high indifference of joy" (1988). Joys are modifiable in a way that "happiness," a noun without a plural, is not.

Joy refers, most basically, to an emotional response that ratifies something—often a thing that comes as a surprise—as a good; its opposite is grief or dejection. The novel, trading in surprise occurrences and sudden reversals of fortune, generates many episodes of joy. Such joys are, in the novels of antiquity, conspicuously physical—so vehement that at times they seem indistinguishable from grief. In *Aithiopika*, for example, once the Ethiopian queen recognizes Charikleia as her long-lost daughter, she “could contain herself no longer. Suddenly she leapt from her throne, ran to Charikleia, and threw her arms around her. As she held her tight, she burst into tears, and, unable to control herself for joy, set up a sort of animal howling (for a surfeit of pleasure very often gives rise to mournful wailing) and very nearly bore Charikleia to the ground” (1989: 569). Mourning and joy, when not admixed, are apt to alternate, sometimes quickly, as in *Joseph Andrews* when Parson Adams hears “with the bitterest Agony” news that his son has drowned, and soon thereafter, “to his great Surprize and Joy,” finds him alive: “The Parson’s Joy was now as extravagant as his Grief had been before; he . . . danced about the Room like one frantick” (Fielding 1967: 309–10). Edgar Allan Poe takes this plot device to its limit in the central, shipwreck scenes of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), in which the skeleton crew’s efforts at survival and hopes for deliverance are attended by a rapid, mechanized alternation between “great joy” and, typically within a sentence or two, “inexpressible grief.” Here, for example, is Pym on the sight of a ship that may bring relief:

I turned my head, and shall never forget the ecstatic joy which thrilled through every particle of my frame, when I perceived a large brig bearing down upon us, and not more than a couple of miles off. I sprung to my feet as if a musket ball had suddenly struck me to the heart; and, stretching out my arms in the direction of the vessel, stood in this manner, motionless, and unable to articulate a syllable. [The other crew members] Peters and Parker were equally affected, although in different ways. The former danced about the deck like a madman, uttering the most extrava-

gant rhodomontades, intermingled with howls and imprecations, while the latter burst into tears, and continued for many minutes weeping like a child (1991: 320–22).

After a couple more pages of such joy, the approaching ship comes into full view:

Shall I ever forget the triple horror of that spectacle? Twenty-five or thirty human bodies, among whom were several females, lay scattered about between the counter and the galley, in the last and most loathsome state of putrefaction! We plainly saw that not a soul lived in that fated vessel! Yet we could not help shouting to the dead for help! . . . We were raving with horror and despair—thoroughly mad through the anguish of our grievous disappointment (1991: 320–22).

There follows many more lurid scenes of joyful hope and spectacular dejection; the cumulative effect is, perhaps advertently, ludicrous.

Pym's joys are of the type that an earlier shipwrecked mariner, Robinson Crusoe, categorized as "mere common Flight(s) of Joy"—as distinct from the true joy of Christian assurance Crusoe comes to know later in his island sojourn (Defoe 1972: 89). Crusoe here adverts to the historical use of "joy" as a Christian keyword, a use that colors many instances of joy in the Western tradition—perhaps, parodically, even Pym's dashed expectations of deliverance. "Joy," as Locke defines it, is "a delight of the Mind, from the consideration of the present or assured approaching possession of a Good"—but for the Christian, joy pertains chiefly to the latter cause, the "assured approaching possession of a good" (1979: 231). That good is, in Luke's account of the nativity, the birth of the messiah: as the angel of 2:8 tells the shepherds, "I bring you good news of a great joy" (Greek *chara*, Latin *gaudium*). In the words of Isaac Watt's 1707 congregational hymn: "Joy to the world! the Lord is come: / Let earth receive her King; / Let every heart prepare Him room, / And heaven and nature sing." Yet the joy of Christ's birth lies, finally, in

the promise of his death and resurrection, and their consequences for the believer's own future. The supernal good, the endless life, that lie beyond death are what Christian joy ever anticipates.

Christian joy is the joyful expectation of a telos that arrives outside ordinary time. This telos or aim is pictured, in Luke's parable of the Prodigal son, as a joyous homecoming, in which the erring soul is found, the dead come back to life. Indeed, I would identify the tale of homecoming or recuperation as the archetypal "story of joy," a story accessible to literal as well as spiritual interpretation. Thus their context in Luke's gospel may give the words of the Prodigal's father a supernal ring: "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad [*charēnai*, literally, to rejoice]: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found" (15:11–32). But very similar words—"joy at the return of what had been lost"—find their way into Heliodorus's pagan romance of a daughter restored to her mother's kingdom (1989: 567). The story of joy, as I have argued elsewhere, turns deprivation into a prelude to restoration, frustration into an occasion for fulfillment: it is, in narrative terms, the ultimate triumph over loss, deprivation, and death. As long as we judge loss, limits, and extinction to be evils, we will never, at least in the stories we tell ourselves, be without joy (2007: 236).

Another way to say this is Adam Bede's: "there's a parting at the root of all our joys" (1980: 515). Only with an initial loss or fall can there be the joy of recovery, or resumption at a higher level. Adam refers here to the sublimation of his lost feeling for Hetty into his feeling for Dinah, but the narrator has earlier suggested that behind any first adult love there lies a still earlier, unremembered "joy with which we laid our heads on our mother's bosom . . . in childhood" (Eliot 1980: 221). This recognition of joy's basis in loss, of the presence of death in the gift of more life, is why Adam's joy on his wedding day is admixed with sorrow: "There was a tinge of sadness in his deep joy: Dinah knew it, and did not feel aggrieved" (1980: 534).

But what if, in the spiral of sublimations that make up a life, Dinah were not enough for Adam? What if nothing but God or the infinite would do? Adam's "parting at the root of all our joys" speech, as it contin-

ues, allows for this possibility: “It’s like what I feel about Dinah: I should never ha’ come to know that her love ‘ud be the greatest o’ blessings to me, if what I counted a blessing hadn’t been wrenched and torn away from me, and left me with a greater need, so as I could crave and hunger for a greater and a better comfort” (1980: 515). Adam might in the course of Eliot’s narrative have occupied a different and finally less secular story; the possibility of spiritual desire shadows the text. At the novel’s end, Adam might have taken an Augustinian turn, saying with the author of the *Confessions*: “although my real need was for you, my God, who are the food of the soul, I was not aware of this hunger” (1961: 55).⁹ Or he might have quipped with Blake: “More! is the cry of a mistaken soul; less than All cannot satisfy Man” (“There Is No Natural Religion”). Less buoyantly, he could have turned to Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, where man’s restless spirit, never satisfied with the present, engenders a noble *unhappiness*: “Man’s Unhappiness . . . comes of his Greatness; it is because there is an Infinite in him, which with all his cunning he cannot quite bury under the Finite” (1958: 101). But to follow Carlyle would have required a better education in French and German literature than Adam (as distinct from Eliot) would ever be likely, or want, to have.

ROMANCING UNHAPPINESS

It is sometimes difficult for Anglo-American readers to gauge the attraction to unhappiness found in so many Continental authors—particularly an unhappiness found in love or desire. In contrast to a happiness that involves, by definition, purposive activity and self-control, the unhappy lover is passive, acted upon, tossed between anguish and exaltation, and desirous of an ideal object that would disappear upon possession. In Horace Walpole’s Gothic romance *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Matilda says to her maid of the man who will turn out to be her lover: “Though he said he was unhappy, it does not follow that he must be in love”; the maid counters, “He tells you he is in love, or unhappy, it is the same thing” (1964: 41–43). Or it is, at least, across the Channel. Denis de Rougemont, in his splendid if monomaniacal study, *Love in the Western World* (1940, rev. 1956), claimed *tout court*, “Happy love has no history—in European literature” (1956: 52). Although a better acquaint-

tance with British novels (or Tolstoy) may have led de Rougemont to qualify this claim, it certainly does reflect on Continental novels of the seventeenth through early twentieth century, and help explain some of their thematic *différence* from the novel in English.

In France, from the twelfth century onward, unhappy love has often been known, by a curious etymology, as “joy.” Christian desire, tensed against a future that does not arrive in time, discovers its erotic counterpart in courtly love (*fin’amor*), the other great context for the term “joy” in the Western tradition. Troubadour songs of *fin’amor* concern a male speaker’s ardent desire for an emotionally remote, typically married woman, whose very unavailability is key to her desirability. Whereas most desire seeks satisfaction, the troubadours reflexively desired, at least in part, the state of desire itself. Equating desire and love, the troubadours suggested that the satisfaction that ended desire would also put an end to love. Michel Zink formulates the paradox: “Love thus entails a perpetually unresolvable conflict between desire and the desire to desire, between love and the love of love. This is the explanation for the complex emotion unique to love, a mixture of suffering and pleasure, anguish and exaltation. The troubadours had a word for this complex emotion: they called it *joi*” (1995: 35–36).¹⁰ The yearnings of the troubadour lie behind C. S. Lewis’s use of the term “joy” in his memoir *Surprised by Joy*: it is, he writes, “an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction.” In this technical sense, Lewis adds, the term “must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and from Pleasure” (1955: 17–18).

Joy in this sense, or let us call it by its troubadour original, *joi*, provides the narrative motor for French novels, such as Madame de Lafayette’s *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) and Rousseau’s *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). In both novels (for all their differences), the titular heroine’s unsatisfied desire for her lover proves more desirable than the happiness of married life. In Goethe’s 1774 novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (Werther experiences, we are told, “excessive joy” as well), Charlotte rightly observes to the title character: “I am afraid, very much afraid, that it is only the impossibility of possessing me that attracts you so much” (1971: 7, 138). Flaubert frames *Sentimental Education* (1869)

around Frederic Moreau's idealized love for the married and chaste Madame Arnoux or, more precisely, for the infinite she represents: "even the desire for physical possession gave way to a profounder yearning, a poignant curiosity which knew no bounds" (1964: 18). The literary lineage of Frederic's joy is noted in a bantering way by one of his friends: "Ah, old troubadour, I know what's the matter with you. Heart trouble, eh?" (1964: 79–80) The novel closes with an older Arnoux offering herself to Frederic, and Frederic's refusal, rendered sardonically: "partly out of prudence and partly to avoid degrading his ideal, he turned on his heel and started rolling a cigarette" (1964: 415). Finally, Marcel Proust's multivolume *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–1927) is driven centrally by its narrator's mobile desire, his impossible love for his mother transferred first to the young Gilberte Swann, then to the married Duchesse de Guermantes, and lastly to the sexually ambiguous Albertine, who emerges from the seaside "gang of girls" he had once desired collectively. For Marcel, every transition from imaginative anticipation to actual encounter is a disappointment, an interruption of the desire to desire, which he expresses thus with reference to the seaside girls:

The certainty of being introduced to the girls had made me not only feign indifference towards them, but feel it. The pleasure of their acquaintance, having become inevitable, was compressed and reduced. . . . The joy awaiting me was diminished not only by the imminence, but by the incongruity, of its coming to pass (2004: 435).

In what sense can a joy be "incongruous" with its own realization? Only in the troubadour sense of the term, the unsatisfied desire itself more desirable than satisfaction.

This anticipatory mode is, as I have suggested, fundamentally Christian and eschatological, in opposition to the temporal fullness of happiness, a more or less public judgment revisable in time but referring to being in time. *Joi* is insatiable in time, and if it affords pleasure—for the lover, for the novel reader—that pleasure may best be captured

by an epigram of Lord Henry Wotton's, the resident wit of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. We could say of *joi* what Lord Henry says of cigarettes, in those halcyon days long before any surgeon general's report: "A cigarette is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied. What more can one want?" (1988: 65) The East End actress Sibyl Vane, by contrast, becomes repellent to Dorian as soon as she offers him actual satisfaction, fleshly love, in the here and now. Dorian is frankly uninterested in happiness in its ethical or English novel sense. However, his Faustian wager in favor of pleasure wears on him as Wilde's novel progresses. Let me close with the following tea-party banter between Dorian and the Duchess of Monmouth:

"I always agree with Harry [Lord Henry], Duchess."

"And does his philosophy make you happy?"

"I have never searched for happiness. Who wants happiness? I have searched for pleasure."

"And found it, Mr. Gray?"

"Often. Too often" (1988: 151).

NOTES

1. Nicholas White argues that the central problem for any account of happiness is to show if or how such a concept can be derived from the plurality of our aims and desires, and the conflicts or potential conflicts among them (2006: 3). White is skeptical that all our aims and desires can be properly coordinated in such a way that our well-being or lack of it can be objectively evaluated by a third party according to a specified measure (2006: 13–14, 164, 173).
2. On Hobbes, Locke, and the "pursuit of happiness" as it develops into the eighteenth century, see Potkay (2000: 65–70). I have argued elsewhere that Samuel Johnson pioneered a phenomenological understanding of "happiness" that differed significantly from the service the term did as *eudaimonia*: see Potkay (2002: 148–49).
3. Brian Michael Norton sees eighteenth-century assertions of the virtue-happiness nexus as a response to newer, amoral conceptions of happiness (subjectivist, sensationist, etc.) also arising in the post-

Cartesian period and particularly in the emergent novel: see Norton (2008: 211–233). More broadly, Darrin McMahon contrasts the ancients' assumption of the rarity or god-like quality of happiness with the early modern assumption of its more general availability (2006: 13–14, 214–50).

4. As Geoffrey Galt Harpham writes, “Narrative cannot posit a static is; this function, according to Gerard Genette, is allocated to ‘description,’ which inhabits narrative like a cyst. Nor can it prescribe an unresisted ought: this is the business of sermons. What it can—indeed what it must—do is to figure a process of rejecting disjunction in favor of ultimate union . . . of is and ought” (1999: 36).
5. On (un)happiness in the Jacobin novelists and *Frankenstein*, see my essay “Joy and Happiness” (Potkay 2005: 334–337).
6. Further references to this edition (Tolstoy 1994) appear in the body of the text.
7. Compare Pierre after his physical liberation from the prisoner of war convoy: “The joyful sense of freedom . . . filled Pierre’s soul during his convalescence. He was surprised that this inner freedom, independent as it was of all external circumstances, was now as it were decked out in a luxury, a superfluity, of external freedom.” Pierre’s joyful sense of freedom now includes, again in quasi-Stoic fashion, a sense of the divine determination of events: “To that simple question, what for? he had now always ready in his soul the simple answer: Because there is a God, that God without whom not one hair of a man’s head falls” (Tolstoy 1994: 1257–8).
8. An observation, in need of further development: within the nineteenth-century wedding plot, as a sign that community exceeds and must validate the couple, we often find in the denouement what I call “unmarriageable excess,” characters who end celibate but happily enough as helpmates to the couple and witnesses to their happiness: for example, in *War and Peace*, the poor cousin Sonya, Nikolay’s former love interest; Seth in *Adam Bede*; Tom Pinch in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Such characters are not present in earlier forms of the comic romance, from Heliodorus to Fielding.
9. Compare Pierre’s late meditation in *War and Peace*: “That search for

an object in life had been only a seeking after God” (Tolstoy 1994: 1248).

10. See also Lazar (1995: 61–100) especially, the section “Fin’Amor and Joy” (76–83). I discuss this material further in *The Story of Joy* (Potkay 2007: 50–72).

REFERENCES

- Aristotle. *Politics*. Trans. H. Rackham. Cambridge: Harvard University Press (Loeb Classical Library), 1932.
- Augustine. *Confessions*. Trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961.
- Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*. 3rd ed. Ed. R. W. Chapman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933.
- . *Pride and Prejudice*. Vol. 2. Ed. Robert Irvine. Peterborough: Broadview, 2002.
- Blake, William. “There is No Natural Religion.” *Blake’s Poetry and Designs*. Eds. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: Norton, 1979.
- Carlyle, Thomas. “Past and Present.” *Prose of the Victorian Period*. Ed. William E. Buckler. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958 (1843).
- . “Sartor Resartus.” *Prose of the Victorian Period*. Ed. William E. Buckler. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958.
- . *The French Revolution: A History*. Eds. K. J. Fielding and David Sorensen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989 (1837).
- de Rougemont, Denis. *Love in the Western World*. Trans. Montgomery Belgion. New York: Pantheon, 1956 (1940).
- Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. Ed. J. Donald Crowley. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Eliot, George [Mary Ann Evans]. *Adam Bede*. Ed. Stephen Gill. London: Penguin, 1980.
- Fielding, Henry. *Joseph Andrews*. Ed. Martin C. Battestin. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1967.
- . *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*. Eds. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely. London: Penguin, 2005.

- Flaubert, Gustave. *Sentimental Education*. Trans. Robert Baldick. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964.
- Godwin, William. *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness*. 3 vols. Ed. F. E. L. Priestley. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *The Sorrows of Young Werther and Novella*. Trans. Elizabeth Mayer, Louise Bogan, and W. H. Auden. New York: Random House, 1971.
- Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Heliodoros. "An Ethiopian Story." *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*. Ed. B. P. Reardon. Trans. J. R. Morgan. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Hudson, Deal. *Happiness and the Limits of Satisfaction*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996.
- Hume, David. *The Letters of David Hume*. 2 vols. Ed. J. Y. T. Greig. Oxford: Clarendon, 1932.
- Inchbald, Elizabeth. *A Simple Story*. Ed. J. M. S. Tompkins. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.
- Johnson, Claudia L. *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Lazar, Moshe. "Fin'Amor." *A Handbook of the Troubadours*. Eds. F. R. P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Lewis, C. S. *Surprised by Joy*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955.
- Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon, 1979 (1689).
- McMahon, Darrin. *Happiness: A History*. New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2006.
- Norton, Brian Michael. "After the Summum Bonum: Novels, Treatises, and the Enquiry After Happiness." *Theory and Practice in the Eighteenth Century: Writing Between Philosophy and Literature*. Eds. Alexander Dick and Christina Lupton. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008.

- Poe, Edgar Allen. "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym." *Poe: Selected Tales*. New York: Library of America, 1991.
- Pope, Alexander. "An Essay on Man." *Poetry and Prose of Alexander Pope*. Ed. Aubrey Williams. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969.
- Potkay, Adam. *The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.
- . "Samuel Johnson." *British Writers: Retrospective Supplement I*. Ed. Jay Parini. New York: Scribner's, 2002.
- . "Joy and Happiness." *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture*. Eds. Paula Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.
- . *The Story of Joy from the Bible to Late Romanticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Proust, Marcel. *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower. In Search of Lost Time*. Vol. 2. Trans. James Grieve. New York: Penguin, 2004.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2. Eds. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf. Peterborough: Broadview, 1999 (1818).
- Soni, Vivasvan. *Mourning Happiness*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming 2010.
- Tolstoy, Leo. *War and Peace*. Trans. Constance Garnett. New York: Modern Library, 1994.
- Walpole, Horace. *The Castle of Otranto*. Ed. W. S. Lewis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- White, Nicholas. *A Brief History of Happiness*. London: Blackwell, 2006.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Ed. Donald L. Lawler. New York: Norton, 1988.
- Zink, Michel. *Medieval French Literature: An Introduction*. Trans. Jeff Rider. Binghamton, N.Y.: Pegasus, 1995.
- Zola, Emile. *Thérèse Raquin. Oeuvres Complètes*. Vol. 1 of 15 vols. Ed. Henri Mitterand. Paris: Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1966.