THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS AND THE AMERICAN REGIME

Political Theory in Literature

ELIZABETH S. AMATO

The Pursuit of Happiness and the American Regime

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Chapter One

Understanding the American Pursuit of Happiness

Happiness is now the serious study of human well-being. As the study of happiness becomes more serious and exact, happiness researchers become flush with optimism. They are optimistic that their findings will help individuals and policy makers craft decisions that will contribute to happier results. For all of happiness's gauzy connotations, experts claim, happiness can be analyzed, studied, and pursued rationally as an objective. Happiness demystified can be the sound basis of policies that will actually work to improve people's well-being. In this way, happiness research promises to be a better, surer guide to happiness than classical liberalism.

Liberal theorists, on the other hand, assume that questions concerning the meaning of happiness are subjective and, therefore, should be left to individuals. Thus, the United States, as a classically liberal political order, provides little guidance concerning what happiness is and the ways of its pursuit. Liberal theorists teach that individuals are politically free to pursue happiness by their own lights. Moreover, the attempt of government to define happiness may pose a major threat to liberty. Even well-intentioned policy based on happiness studies risks becoming doctrinaire and manipulative. Happiness researchers, on the contrary, have identified poor guidance concerning happiness as one of the main shortcomings of liberal nations.[1] Individuals do not often make good decisions about what will make them happy.[2]

Liberalism and happiness studies appear to be at an impasse. We seem caught between being free and likely unhappy or being happy and maybe not so free. What we need are guides that are capable of providing insights into the shortcomings of how we understand and pursue happiness, but that are also compatible with liberalism's commitment to protecting the plurality of voices within the United States.

My argument is that we have guides already. Our American novelists have offered us insights about the prospects for happiness in a liberal regime and the difficulties we face in attaining it, and how through their literary works, they have called upon their fellow citizens to engage in this inquiry. Our novelists anticipate many of the criticisms happiness researchers have observed in the liberal pursuit of happiness. Through their literary reflections on the American pursuit of happiness, our novelists supplement happiness research by providing a fuller picture of the pursuit of happiness in American life. In addition, as I shall show, the way in which the novelist engages the reader in reflection of the pursuit of happiness is more compatible with our liberal values than the potentially doctrinaire application of happiness research. The study of American literature, thus, is a fruitful avenue toward self-understanding that complements and deepens other forms of inquiry. I have chosen four American representative novelists—Tom Wolfe, Walker Percy, Edith Wharton, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, moving from the twenty-first century to the early nineteenth—in order to demonstrate how our novelists can engage us in our understanding and pursuit of happiness.

As part of this introduction, I will begin with an overview of happiness research that tells us about the characteristics, causes, correlates, and consequences of happiness—the "what" of happiness—and the potential for happiness studies to shape policy. Secondly, I shall turn to how liberal theory encourages political liberty for the sake of allowing individuals to pursue their varied understandings of happiness. Finally, I shall argue that our American novelists are better guides to the pursuit of happiness than happiness researchers, because our novelists present an approach to understanding the pursuit of happiness that is compatible with liberalism. By reflecting on the pursuit of happiness in their stories, our novelists present alternatives and corrections to the pursuit of happiness that preserve liberty and varied understandings of happiness.

THE PROMISE OF HAPPINESS RESEARCH

Psychologists use the term subjective well-being (SWB) to refer to happiness.[3] Less romantic of a term, to be sure, but SWB captures more accurately what can be measured. SWB describes *self-referential* reports of well-being that includes "people's emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction."[4] Here is how it works. When an interviewer asks an individual if she is happy, it is up to her to evaluate whether or not she is happy. The answer that the individual gives to the interviewer is her opinion of her happiness, or her subjective well-being. The questions, obviously, are often more complicated, but in every instance it is the individual's evaluation of her happiness asked that counts. Self-referential reports of

well-being avoid the sticky predicament of finding a single, universal understanding of happiness. Each individual assesses her well-being *according to her terms and feelings* and not to any set objective standard.

One of the key concepts associated with happiness research is hedonic adaptation. Hedonic adaptation described how an individual's well-being may fluctuate in the short term, but that in the long term the individual adapts to changes in his environment and return to a set-point of well-being.[5] Basically, your day-to-day feelings alter depending on what happens to you, but that, eventually, your disposition returns to normal. You get used to bad and good events alike.[6] Adapting to major life events, especially the bad ones, is considered a healthy and necessary psychological function, because it shields individuals from the potentially harmful consequences of heightened and prolonged emotional states.[7] The downside for happiness is that regardless of what happens to us, we get used to it, which does not leave much room for improving our happiness. Hedonic adaptation does not mean that it is impossible to alter our normal dispositions, but that it is much more difficult than we might think.[8]

Happiness researchers think hedonic adaptation is important, because it means that individuals consistently overestimate the extent to which a thing will bring them happiness—particularly money. We think that something will make us happier, but in reality, once we get it, we will get used to it. As we get used to things, like wealth, a promotion, a new car, they no longer serve to make us as happy as they once did. Richard A. Easterlin, whose writings on happiness and economic growth frame much economic and political happiness research, claims that people are likely to overestimate the importance of money to their happiness.[9] Individuals underestimate the extent to which hedonic adaptation reduces the impact of wealth on their well-being. Consequently, they spend a disproportionate amount of time pursuing wealth to the amount of happiness it provides. Individuals pursue wealth at the expense of other goods that are more likely to contribute to their well-being such as family and health.

The question, of course, is what is to be done? Individual preferences are badly ordered, and, as Easterlin sees it, the only way to get off the "hedonic treadmill" is to consider how individual preferences can be altered through policy.[10] Easterlin realizes that most economists do not consider altering individual preferences an appropriate task for policy. Economists assume that individuals are the best judge of their interests. Yet, as Easterlin argues, the very heart of the problem for human happiness is that individuals are ignorant of the effect that hedonic adaptation has on their pursuit of happiness. Consequently, individuals are not able to make properly informed choices. Easterlin suggests that a more active role should be taken by researchers to discuss how to adjust individual preferences. How individuals should be guided or by what institutions, he does not address.

That studies show that more money does not automatically mean more happiness has sparked much interest among economists and other policy thinkers.[11] The calls for rethinking, nay, restructuring our national and global economic systems have not been timid. Not only have individuals spent too much time pursuing wealth so have nations mistakenly pursued economic growth as a proxy for well-being.[12] British economist and "happiness tsar," Richard Layard heralds the new science of happiness for its potential to inform policy making to make societies happier.[13] Layard claims that we are at a crossroads. Although economic growth can contribute to a nation's well-being, economic growth follows the law of diminishing returns. At some point, increases to a country's GDP cease measurably to increase its happiness. Chasing after an ever greater GDP will not make Western industrialized countries any happier. Progress must be redefined as more than economic growth. Instead it should be "measured by the overall quality of people's lives."[14] Domestic and international economic policy should be restructured to aim for happiness over mere productivity. New metrics, other than GDP, are needed that can better reflect non-market activity (such as caregiving), progress, well-being, sustainability, and for the political leadership to advance a global initiative to shift toward broader well-being metrics.[15] Bhutan is widely admired for instituting Gross National Happiness (GNH) over GDP in which every policy is assessed according to its impact on national well-being.[16]

Deeply impressed with the findings of happiness research, Derek Bok believes it represents the fulfillment of the utilitarian project to measure happiness. Jeremy Bentham's "felicific calculus" may have been an object of bemused philosophic interest for the last two hundred years, but now psychologists have succeeded where Bentham did not.[17] Consequently, happiness researchers can assist policy makers to "decide which legislative programs are most likely to improve the well-being of the citizenry."[18] Bok claims that happiness research will help craft better legislation, reprioritize our goals by locating "sources of persistent unhappiness, such as mental illness and chronic pain," that deserve heightened legislative attention, and even lead to new institutional changes in operation of government.[19]

Bok cheerfully announces that the fruitless debates of philosophers and liberal thinkers have been transferred to more capable hands. Happiness research promises to clarify old philosophic and theological debates by putting their claims aside the findings of happiness researchers. Bok grants that the findings of happiness research may "echo" the insight of a thinker, but that given so much disagreement among thinkers, happiness research can settle (more or less) these tired debates. The great advantage of happiness research is that it is based on empirical research that can yield consensuses among researchers and indicate clearer practical applications.

Not only does happiness research put to bed many old philosophical and theological debates about happiness, it gives us reason to stop fretting about old claims about justice and inequality. Liberal thinkers, such as John Rawls, advocated for redistribution of wealth or other such massive restructuring of society measures. Happiness research suggests that inequality of income does not have much of an effect on well-being and higher incomes do not bring greater happiness. One problem, Bok identifies, with liberal thought is that they still overemphasized the role of money in well-being.[20] Liberal thinkers, he argues, incorrectly base their arguments on differing moral opinions which yield as many ways to allocate resources as there are liberal thinkers.[21] Basing their findings on empirical studies and sharing greater kinship with the behavior sciences, happiness researchers are more likely to reach greater consensus. Consequently, their findings will be more useful to lawmakers and policy makers.

Bok draws two main findings from his survey of happiness research. The first main finding to be gained from happiness research is that "people are often surprisingly bad judges of what will make them happy."[22] The second significant finding is that high incomes do not contribute much to life satisfaction. Consequently, the central political problem is to convince Americans that more money generally does not contribute to happiness. Preoccupation with accumulating wealth causes Americans to neglect the things that do increase happiness like personal relationships, health, and employment. This is unfortunate on an individual level. On the national level, this means that the United States pursues economic growth, which is an imperfect proxy for well-being, over and to the neglect of other goals. Imperfect because economic growth may include harmful goods and services and does not account for other activities that benefit society. For example, the manufacture of cigarettes contributes to productivity under the GDP's measurement, but child-care is not counted at all. Moreover, economic growth has occurred at the expense of environmental sustainability and so threatens the welfare of future generations. Additionally, economic growth has contributed to undesirable phenomena such as urban sprawl, crowded highways, stress, insecurity, and long work hours.

The difficulty remains that most Americans believe economic growth is desirable for improved well-being. The trouble with a democratic society is that little can be done in opposition to public opinion. When public opinion is contrary to what happiness studies indicate, Bok takes up the delicate question of whether lawmakers ought to forgo the wishes of their constituents' opinion for the sake of following happiness experts. Should lawmakers base policy on public opinion or should they follow happiness research and do what will make the public happy? Bok realizes that legislators are unlikely to oppose public opinion on very prominent issues. But there are areas of policy making about which voters have weak preferences and their discretion may

be informed by happiness research. Moreover, since, according to Bok, there are other legitimate instances in which legislators can, in good faith, go against their constituents, following happiness research may qualify as another reason.[23] Bok expects that "[m]ost voters would probably prefer to be happy rather than have their representatives mechanically accept their mistaken impressions of how to reach this goal."[24] The highest voter preference is for happiness and, provided that happiness increases, how it increases matters less than the result.

Ultimately, though, Bok understands that legislative discretion is not the optimal way in which to increase the influence of happiness findings on legislation. Nor does it accomplish the main task to persuade Americans to know better what contributes to happiness. Happiness really is something that requires the individual to be active in making. Since Americans often do not know what will bring them happiness, a sound chance at a happy life begins by being properly educated. Bok argues that the current focus of K–12 education is skewed too heavily toward preparing children to be productive and competitive workers to the neglect of nurturing lifelong interests and beneficial activities. While studies show that employment contributes greatly to satisfaction, it is most often a means to other ends. Studies show that within the span of an ordinary day, the activities Americans enjoy most take place outside the workplace such as socializing with friends and eating meals with family. By fostering many interests and abilities, education should aim for more than mere workplace readiness.

At the collegiate level, however, more can be accomplished to educate young adults about making satisfying life decisions. Bok takes special aim at great books programs and why these programs unhelpfully raise more questions than they answer.[25] Happiness courses taught by behavioral scientists, on the other hand, present empirical findings to students for their consideration. Students can explore and weigh the likely impact different circumstances and decisions have on their lives. It is true that happiness courses cannot tell students how to have a happy life any more than great books courses can. Happiness studies do not present a blueprint for life; individual circumstances vary.[26] But they do students a greater service by putting in their hands real findings not theoretical about what likely increases happiness. The further benefit of educating students in this new way is that students as voters will see the wisdom of using happiness for policy making.

That happiness research could be used to justify policy that would burden individual liberty, Bok downplays the possibility. He points to the Declaration and the Constitution to provide the necessary safeguards against oppressive and unjust legislation. For example, although studies show that people who attend church and engage in community service are happier than those who do not, the government cannot require non-churchgoers to attend a church. That would be a clear violation of the Establishment Clause. Bok

argues that civil rights and basic liberties like free speech "must be upheld whatever the effects on happiness."[27] So it seems that there is a theory of justice and not mere utilitarianism undergirding Bok's teaching. Bok hopes that policy makers will use happiness research to inform policy making and simultaneously he expects that the courts will continue to uphold the rights and liberties protected in the Bill of Rights. Why judges would not draw from happiness studies to inform their opinion is not adequately explained. Bok fails to recognize how constitutional safeguards depend on a liberal understanding of the limits of the state to promote a comprehensive public good. Bok tries to sever ties with liberal thought and its so-called preoccupation with material goods, but takes for granted that constitutional safeguards can survive independent of their theoretical grounding.[28] As I shall argue, liberal theory cannot be so quickly dismissed, because it informs our understanding of how we should collectively and individually pursue happiness. Liberal theorists are mindful of the limits of the state's ability to provide for the happiness of all, because individuals disagree about what happiness is. Since pluralism characterizes human understandings of happiness, liberal theorists advocate a significant measure of political liberty for the sake of encouraging individuals to pursue happiness as they understand it.

LIBERAL THEORY ON HAPPINESS

Bok objects to contemporary liberal theory because it overlooks happiness and is preoccupied with autonomy and justice. Bok is not wrong about that. Yet, liberalism has its roots in deep concern for the prospects for happiness. Early liberals, such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, investigate how political liberty advances the cause of happiness and the pursuit of happiness. The social contract that secures the more useful political liberty over natural liberty enables the individual to pursue her well-being, but leaves the pursuit to the individual's ability. Nowadays liberal theorists prefer to praise liberalism for the promotion of other social goods such as neutrality, pluralism, justice, autonomy, freedom, deliberation, choice, and privacy. Heirs to Rousseau's and Kant's critiques of liberalism, many contemporary theorists regard happiness as an unworthy, lowly goal for political liberty. Consequently, they have traded in happiness for these supposedly higher, nobler goals. Yet, liberal theorists of all stripes recognize the state's essential role in creating the optimal conditions for the individual to realize her highest potential, but also admit that achievement of an individual's highest potential lies outside of the state.

What Hobbes and Locke get right is that we are more than citizens of the state and that our good lies outside the reach of the state to achieve. (The state, however, by trying to push a comprehensive doctrine of the good, can

really damage our prospects.) They point us beyond the state in our search for happiness. Additionally, they confirm that liberty is an essential component of happiness—happiness is happiness because it is freely pursued. On the other hand, Hobbes and Locke's vision of the pursuit of happiness appears to confirm many critics that it is shallow and probably not effective.

With great economy of words, Hobbes describes happiness, or felicity, as he prefers, as "a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the later."[29] Since our desires are in constant motion, once we gain a thing we want, we are already reaching out to another desired thing. For Hobbes, there is no highest good with which felicity can be identified. The significance is that there is no content that makes for happiness. And as if to emphasize the point, he clarifies that "felicity of this life consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied."[30] So for Hobbes it is not happiness that matters as much as its pursuit.

Hobbes blows up the idea of a single, final happiness that can bring peace of mind to all who seek it. He blasts it to pieces so as to create maximum diversity of the ways happiness is pursued so as to justify great political liberty for the pursuit of happiness. There are two reasons why individuals pursue happiness differently. First, individuals have a "diversity of passions" that sparks different desires to be satisfied.[31] The second reason arises "from the difference of the knowledge, or opinions each one has of the causes" that can bring about the things that we desire.[32] Put simply, people have different desires and their knowledge (or opinions) differs on how to satisfy their desires.

Hobbes inserts a big dose of uncertainty in any pursuit. He distinguishes between knowledge and opinion. He is fully aware that people can have wrong opinions about the means needed to achieve their goals. Moreover, he suggests there are even gradations in the quality of knowledge individuals may have. Some individuals will pursue their desired things better or worse given the quality of their knowledge. Continual success at acquiring the means necessary to satisfy our endless succession of desires is not an easy task. Hobbes gives a rather bookish suggestion. The surest way to improve felicity is by increasing our knowledge of the causes of things, particularly desirable things. However, since passions differ among individuals, it may be that some are more easily gratified than others. Some individuals may be saddled with passions that are more challenging to accommodate. Even within Hobbes' liberal state, it seems unlikely that many individuals would be able to use their political liberty so well as to experience felicity frequently. Nevertheless, Hobbes concludes that every individual has his irreducible way of pursuing happiness that cannot be subsumed into any state policy.

The trouble that John Locke sees is that our desires are, more often than not, really sources of unease or of pain. Once one desire or unease has been relieved, another is soon felt. The task of relieving immediate sources of

unease is like playing whack-a-mole. Consequently, we are waylaid from pursuing a greater good (or relieving a greater if less pressing pain).[33] Building on Hobbes' studious suggestion, Locke suggests that individuals suspend the satisfaction of immediate desires and wants for the sake of securing some other future and presumably more desirable good. For Locke, in addition to political liberty, the most meaningful liberty we have is mind's power "to *suspend* the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires" (italics in original).[34] We should pause to reflect on the outcome of satisfying a desire and to judge whether indulging a desire will cause more pain or pleasure so that we might act with our long-term happiness in mind.

Because we must suspend present enjoyment in order to go after long-term satisfactions, Locke removes pleasure for the chain of choices, decisions, and events leading up to these better desires. Moreover, there is the possibility that as we approach the long awaited object of our desires that enjoyment must be further delayed in favor of yet another long-term goal. In this respect, Locke's pursuit of happiness starts to look more like Hobbes' felicity. As Locke says, we "can be at leisure for nothing else, till every uneasiness we feel be perfectly removed: which in the multitude of wants, and desires, we are beset with in this imperfect State, we are not like to be ever freed from in this World."[35] In this respect, a Lockean pursuit of happiness resembles a "joyless quest for joy."[36] So the pursuit of happiness is weirdly not very happy.

Happiness fell out of favor with liberals after the criticisms of Rousseau and Kant that happiness and pleasure are vulgar, low, and do not indicate real inner liberty. The take away lesson for later liberal thinkers is to elevate liberalism toward loftier goals for political liberty.[37] Here are just a few examples. In the 19th century, Benjamin Constant argues that "self-development" not happiness is the true aim of liberalism.[38] Instead of happiness, Constant argues, the better part is to find contentment with the "noble disquiet which pursues and torments us."[39] And in the 20th century, John Rawls's image of a happy life is the carrying out of "successful (more or less) rational life plan."[40] Individual rational life plans will differ.[41] Rawls explicitly distinguishes justice as fairness's conception of happiness from the Declaration's, which is, according to him, hedonistic and primarily concerned with one's welfare without consideration for the welfare of others. The Declaration's ideals are uncomfortably noncommittal with regard to justice as fairness: "To say of someone that he seeks happiness does not, it seems, imply that he is prepared either to violate or to affirm these restrictions"[42] While liberal theorists consistently defend political liberty to protect the many ways in which individuals choose to live, they recognize that political liberty is insufficient for happiness. As we shall see, this may mean that the most thoughtful insights on happiness are to be gained from our

novelists who consider the pursuit of happiness within the American experience.

A LIBERAL REGIME DEVOTED TO THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

The pursuit of happiness is inextricably linked to the United States as a reason for its creation and also as a measure for its success or failure as a regime. The Declaration of Independence clearly asserts that among the "unalienable Rights" endowed to humans are "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" and furthermore claims that security of these rights is both the impetus for establishing government and also the cause for the "consent of the governed." If a government fails to facilitate the pursuit of happiness, then the people have a right to alter, abolish and institute a new government that is hopefully better suited for the task. (In practice, the Declaration advises that this dramatic and revolutionary proposition should be guided by and exercised with prudence.) The Declaration supposes that the reason the people choose a particular form of government is because they believe it will secure their rights. Not all governments perform equally well. The Declaration assumes that not only are the people able to form governments to secure their rights, but that they can evaluate and ought to evaluate their governments. The people have the right to institute whatever form of government that they judge "most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness." Taking the Declaration seriously also means exploring and evaluating how well our regime succeeds in providing for the pursuit of happiness for the sake of our present, continued consent. The Constitution formally sets forth the organization of government by which individual rights are protected. However, the Constitution chooses to leave the pursuit of happiness largely to the individual. Without looking into the American pursuit of happiness, we neglect part of the theoretical justification of our form of government and the political principles that support our continued consent to it.

Liberal theorists are not in agreement on what goal political liberty is meant to serve—whether it is happiness, nobility, or a rational life plan—but they recognize that the possibility of realizing the goal of political liberty belongs, in part, to individual effort and agency. Liberal theorists remain self-aware of the limits of political liberty to promote human well-being. In light of that self-awareness, our political order anticipates its limits and expects individuals to receive guidance on happiness and seek happiness through other resources. Our political order does not leave Americans isolated and without guides, but expects and encourages ongoing discussions concerning the relationship between our government and the pursuit of happiness. As Joseph Cropsey observes, our liberalism makes us a self-reflective nation, not only because it provides the freedom for reflection on our individ-

ual and collective goals as human beings, but also because it itself does not undertake to define those goals for us.[43] The United States is an incomplete regime, or limited political order, that acknowledges and invites criticism for the sake of promoting the highest ends. Americans are guided in their pursuit of happiness not simply by our founding and other public documents—our "parchment regime"—but by a host of ungoverned resources, such as art, science, and religion, that shape and form how we live and pursue happiness.[44] Thus, Americans are continuously and collectively, if not through Congress and other official public avenues, participating in deliberations about the various goods we seek and how well our political order facilitates our pursuit of happiness.

Since Americans find guides for the pursuit of happiness from many sources, any attempt to evaluate how well our liberal regime supports the pursuit of happiness must look at how these sources supplement and critique our liberal political order. We must, as Cropsey claims, look at our regime "in the wide sense that includes not only our great political documents but the important influences on our way of life that emanate from unofficial thought" to understand how Americans live.[45] We need to look at the American regime "in the wide sense"—to arrive at a fuller and more satisfying understanding of happiness.[46]

Although happiness studies and liberal theory both offer significant insights into happiness, they are unable to consider the whole American regime and the individual's experience within it. Happiness studies and liberal theory cannot provide the wide lens needed to evaluate the pursuit of happiness. Happiness studies help us see what happiness consists of and how states may better assess well-being. Even as happiness studies aim to be more encompassing a measure and guide to human well-being, it risks being doctrinaire and manipulative. Liberal theory cautions against holistic, all-encompassing attempts to promote human happiness—especially in large, diverse, and pluralistic societies. Moreover, political liberty is necessary for the pursuit of happiness, but also allows for the possibility that individuals will use their liberty poorly. Consequently, in a liberal society such as the United States, our way of life is only partially shaped by our political order and the other part shaped countervailing sources that both serve to correct the deficiencies within the state and to promote the pursuit of happiness.

We need another way of considering how the American regime affects the pursuit of happiness. As I shall demonstrate, our novelists depict the individual's pursuit within the American regime as a whole—informed both by liberalism and critical voices. Through their deeds, our novelists show us how the unofficial part of our regime contributes to and acts in concert with our official political order to promote the individual's pursuit of happiness. As I shall argue, our novelists offer us constructive criticism concerning the pursuit of happiness that highlights the deficiencies of liberalism and helps

correct those deficiencies by exploring other resources and ways for the pursuit of happiness.

OUR AMERICAN NOVELISTS AS POLITICAL THINKERS

Our American novelists, I argue, offers insights into the pursuit of happiness, because they offer stories about particular individuals trying to find happiness in America. Because our novelists "raise questions about the fundamental assumptions of liberal democracy" in their fiction, we can see our advantages, but also our flaws and limitations.[47] Their imaginative depictions of the conflicts that individuals may encounter (as a result of America's liberal principles) explore the impact liberalism has on the pursuit of happiness.[48] In this way, they anticipate many of the shortcomings observed by happiness researchers, but have also uncovered problems and more subtle complexities that quantitative studies cannot easily reveal.

Novels cannot be read like treatises. Theory teaches by abstraction and generalization. The teaching of a novel is given within a particular context and thus cannot be simply applied to reality. Authors engage not in political theory, but present a "very special or peculiar kind of *political thought*" (italics mine).[49] Edith Wharton is not Thomas Hobbes, but she considers how the individual satisfies her desires in society by imagining a character, Undine Spragg, with unrestrained desires seeking power after power to fulfill them. How then does a novel's contextualized teaching have application beyond the borders of the book? A novel's particularization of character and location is the precise reason why novels excel at exploring political themes. Theory is abstracted unnaturally from the particularity of human experience. Art presents the remedy to theory's defect because it depicts particular persons and places. In this way, our novelists can "'test' theories or general ideas, in effect, by showing what happens to the characters who take these ideas seriously enough to live by them."[50] Novelists thus allow us to see the consequences and effects of theories applied to particular persons and places. Thus, art, or poetry in the broad sense, is the necessary complement, and sometimes correction, to political theory. Moreover, stories are personal. People in books are patterned after people in real life who try to sort out what they ought to do.[51]

I will look at how American novelists explore the political preconditions for happiness, how our political order promotes happiness, and how we may guard against the dangers to happiness arising in our political order. Our novelists' differing diagnoses of the pursuit of happiness illustrates the variety of understandings and ways of pursuing happiness.[52] In chapter 2, beginning in contemporary America, we shall see how in Tom Wolfe's novels economic success and intellectual prowess fail to satisfy our human need for

greatness, distinction, and friendship. Wolfe dramatically depicts the downfall of his characters due to their failure to recognize and pursue satisfying human goods. Wolfe shows us the power of society to shape our lives and goals through rewarding certain activities with high status. Wolfe reveals that Americans do not merely pursue wealth per se, but primarily for the status and power it brings. For example, in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, Sherman McCoy pursues wealth, but he cares most for the sense of mastery and social prestige it brings him. The pursuit of wealth is connected to more than lust for acquisition. (A point happiness studies tend to overlook.) For Wolfe, the greatest threat to the pursuit of happiness is social pressure. Sherman learns that his mastery is illusory and that his social standing depends on the opinion of people who care very little about him. Status and power prove to be an unstable foundation for happiness. Sherman finds the courage to resist political and social forces bent on depriving him of his freedom for the sake of preserving his liberty and eventually reclaiming his family. In *Bonfire* as well as *A Man in Full* and *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, Wolfe stresses the importance of finding the courage to stand up to social pressure for the sake of pursuing happiness.

In chapter 3, taking a Christian existential perspective, Walker Percy suggests alternatives to modern life through the "conventionally" unhappy lives of his alienated and lonely protagonists. Percy faults the pursuit of happiness for defining the object of the pursuit. He replaces the pursuit of happiness with the open-ended search so as to create a freer foundation for inquiry into the highest human aspirations. In *The Moviegoer*, for example, Binx recognizes the superficiality of the materialistic pursuit of happiness that alienates individuals from each other and from realizing the futility of their pursuit. Binx searches for an alternative to his family's aristocratic and fatalistic perspective and liberalism's lowly concern for material well-being that will ennoble and provide meaning to his life. Through his search, Binx partially overcomes his alienation and finds a fellow searcher in his cousin Kate. As we shall see, in *Lost in the Cosmos* and *The Thanatos Syndrome*, Percy shows sympathy for the stoic life of aristocratic honor, which offers a sanctuary from modernity's baser assumptions about human nature, but ultimately rejects it. Instead, Percy tries to make us aware of our condition as fellow pilgrims and wanderers—a way of life that is not specifically liberal, but possible within a liberal political order.

In chapter 4, Edith Wharton brings to light how love of equality detaches individuals from time and place and unleashes endless and restless desires that dissolve the old social classes that used to constrain (in a salutary way) individual liberty for the effect of creating a coherent and enduring life with others. For Wharton, the pursuit of happiness is an ugly justification for self-gratification. In *The Custom of the Country*, Wharton shows Undine Spragg in an endless, futile pursuit of pure, untroubled pleasure. Not only does

Undine's selfishness wreck the lives of her family and child, she fails to find the happiness she wants. In contrast, Newland Archer, in *The Age of Innocence*, sacrifices his deepest desire, because he recognizes his social and paternal duty. In turn, Newland realizes—if not happiness—a deep life satisfaction. Wharton sought ways to resist the detachment and restlessness that are the products of democracy through an appeal to family responsibility and the virtue of moderation that may detract from momentary happiness as it makes possible a more lasting and stable contentment.

In chapter 5, Nathaniel Hawthorne teaches the reader how to be a friend in "The Old Manse" by presenting himself as a friend. He turns to America's Puritan past to explore the connection between freedom and privacy, and our need to pursue happiness in association with others. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne depicts how the Puritan community violates Hester Prynne's heart by its public punishment of her private sin and, furthermore, isolates her from society through the badge of the scarlet letter. Yet, if the Puritans practiced excessive social intrusion into individual lives, Hawthorne's contemporary society as depicted in "The Custom-House" sketch that introduces the main story of *The Scarlet Letter* reveals the deficiency in which individuals enjoy little community with each other. Both societies, Hawthorne argues, fail to recognize that the heart's mystery provides the basis of our moral and political freedom. Political health is served by acknowledging the sacredness of the human heart and limiting the reach of society, but also encouraging individuals to form freely private relationships and friendships to mediate the individual's relationship to society as a whole. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne shows that happy endings are possible. A persistent risk to happiness is our American hope that the past can be expunged and that society can be remade anew. The prudence the Declaration advises when toppling existing orders, Hawthorne sees, is overlooked. By focusing on a future perfected order, he fears that we will miss out on the happiness offered to us in the present. Instead of leveling the past and starting over, we should remake the relationships closest to us. It is Hawthorne, I shall argue, who provides the more positive view of the potential of American freedom to allow human happiness—with guidance from artists or poets.

Our novelists, like happiness researchers, observe that Americans pursue material goods excessively and fail to cultivate the social and personal relationships that contribute to well-being, but go further in their inquiry. Moreover, unlike happiness researchers, our novelists engage the reader as a participant in their critique of the pursuit of happiness and offer alternative possibilities for the pursuit of happiness. Since our novelists offer ongoing reflection and conversation about the meaning of happiness and how we might secure it for ourselves and for others, I argue that they provide a model

for investigation into the pursuit of happiness that is more compatible with liberalism's commitment to respecting pluralism.

NOTES

1. Happiness researchers focus on the 2008–2009 financial crisis as one species of evidence. The 2008–2009 financial crisis fortuitously propelled happiness research to the frontline of international economic policy discussion. While the shortcomings of GDP have been known prior to the financial crisis, the crisis highlighted the pitfalls of relying so heavily on market metrics to approximate social well–being and to guide policy decisions. See, for example, Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, *Mis-measuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn't Add Up* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

2. See, for example, George Loewenstein and David Schkade's "Wouldn't It Be Nice? Predicting Future Feelings," in *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, ed. Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, and Norbert Schwarz (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation: 1999), 85–105.

3. Happiness research is a relatively new subfield in psychology within positive psychology. Historically, psychologists have devoted more research to human pathologies than to positive mental states. Consider that although Freud agrees that the individual seeks happiness, he says "[t]here is no possibility at all of its being carried through; all the regulations of the universe run counter to it" in Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans and ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1961), 25. For Freud, the individual is hardwired to follow the pleasure principle and be frustrated by the reality principle. In the battle of the id and ego, happiness, in the sense of the satisfaction of id, is never achieved. Consequently, Freud's own case studies diagnose many unhappy states. Martin Seligman is widely considered the founder of positive psychology and promoter of happiness as learned optimism. See Martin Seligman, *How Positive Psychology Happened and Where It Is Going* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016) and *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2002). Ed Diener, Eunkook M. Suh, Richard E. Lucas, and Heidi L. Smith also observe that the increased interest in happiness research mirrors broader social interest in the individual, new emphasis on subjective research, increased awareness that noneconomic factors contribute to well-being. See Ed Diener, Eunkook M. Suh, Richard E. Lucas, and Heidi L. Smith, "Subjective Well-Being: Three Decades of Progress," in *Psychological Bulletin* 125 (1999), 276–302. Ruut Veenhoven offers another reason for the growth of interest in happiness and claims that it began as "by-product of the so-called 'Social Indicator Movement'" in *Conditions of Happiness* (Hingham, MA: Kluwer Boston Academic Publishers, 1984), 2.

4. Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith, "Subjective Well-Being: Three Decades of Progress," 277.

5. See Philip Brickman and Donald T. Campbell, "Hedonic Relativism and Planning the Good Society," in *Adaptation Level Theory,* ed. M. H. Appley (New York: Academic Press, 1971), 287–305 and Philip Brickman, Dan Coates, and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, "Lottery Winners and Accident Victims: Is Happiness Relative?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 36 (1978): 917–27. In the 1970s, Philip Brickman and Donald T. Campbell posited that individuals may experience short-term fluctuations in well-being, but regardless of good and bad fortune, individuals eventually adjust to their circumstances and return to a set-point of well-being. The implication is that individuals have relatively little control over their long-term happiness and that political, social, and economic policy and conditions could not significantly and permanently affect their SWB. In support of this theory, Philip Brickman, Dan Coates, and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman compared the well-being of lottery winners and paralyzed accident victims and found that in the long term lottery winners are not generally happier than paraplegics. Brickman, Coates, and Janoff-Bulman further hypothesize that returns to base levels of well-being happened due to contrast and habituation. Although winning the lottery is generally considered a positive event, high happiness levels do not sustain, because now "many ordinary

events may seem less pleasurable, since they now compare less favorably with past experience." Secondly, over time, the impact of winning the lottery delivers less pleasure and, consequently, contributes less to the winner's well-being as the winner habituates to it. Brickman, Coates, and Janoff-Bulman argue that contrast and habituation operate in the reverse manner for paralyzed accident victims. In comparison with their extreme misfortune, paraplegics perceive "mundane pleasures" more favorably; over time, they become habituated to their misfortune and so it impacts their well-being less than over time (918).

6. Richard E. Lucas observes the set-point theory of hedonic adaptation in this strict form presents a downside to psychologists as well. If an individual's SWB is fixed, it leaves little room for change and hope for "promising interventions" in "Personality and Subjective Well-Being," in *The Science of Subjective Well-Being*, eds. Michael Eid and Randy J. Larsen, 172. Likewise, political scientist Benjamin Radcliff observes that the difficulty with hedonic adaptation is that it leaves little room for political life to contribute to happiness in "Politics, Markets, and Life Satisfaction: The Political Economy of Human Happiness," *The American Political Science Review* 95 (2001): 940.

7. See Shane Frederick and George Loewenstein, "Hedonic Adaption," in *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, eds. Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, and Norbert Schwarz (New York: Sage, 1999), 302–29.

8. Hedonic adaptation remains the dominant model. Revisions and refinements of the theory simply put set-point hedonic adaptation "in a broader context" as Richard E. Lucas explains in "Adaptation and the Set-Point Model of Subjective Well-Being: Does Happiness Change After Major Life Events?" *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 16 (2007): 78. See Ed Diener, Richard E. Lucas, Christie Napa Scollon, "Beyond the Hedonic Treadmill: Revising the Adaptation Theory of Well-Being," *American Psychologist* 61 (2006): 305–14; Richard E. Lucas, "Time Does Not Heal All Wounds: A Longitudinal Study of Reaction and Adaptation to Divorce," *Psychological Science* 16 (2005): 945–50; Richard E. Lucas, "Long-Term Disability is Associated with Lasting Changes in Subjective Well-Being: Evidence from Two Nationally Represented Longitudinal Studies," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 93 (2007): 717–730, and Richard E. Lucas, Andrew Clark, Yannis Georgellis, and Ed Diener, "Unemployment Alters the Set Point for Life Satisfaction," *Psychological Science* 15 (2004): 8–13. See also Paul T. Costa, Robert R. McCrae, and Alan B. Zonderman, "Environmental and Dispositional Influences on Well-Being: Longitudinal Follow-Up of an American National Sample," *British Journal of Psychology* 78 (1987): 299–306; Marcel Dijkers, "Quality of Life After Spinal Cord Injury: A Meta Analysis of the Effects of Disablement Components," *Spinal Cord* 35 (1997): 829–40, and David Watson, "Stability Versus Change, Dependability Versus Error: Issues in the Assessment of Personality over Time," *Journal of Research in Personality* 38 (2004): 319–50.

9. Richard A. Easterlin reasons that most people believe that money, or rather the material goods it affords, brings happiness. If true, he hypothesizes that the steady rise of incomes since the end of World War II should indicate greater social happiness. Comparing well-being surveys from the end of World War II and rises in national average income, Easterlin argues that despite significant increases in individual incomes, there has been no increase in national happiness. Growth and improved living standards have not contributed to greater happiness in "Does Money Buy Happiness?" *Public Interest* 30 (1973): 3–10. In contrast, some economists counter that Easterlin's thesis rests on too little data to conclude that wealth has no effect on SWB and that there is a positive connection between happiness and economic growth. See Michael R. Hagerty and Ruut Veenhoven, "Wealth and Happiness Revisited: Growing National Income *Does* Go with Greater Happiness," *Social Indicators Research* 64 (2003): 1–27; Michael R. Hagerty, "Social Comparisons of Income in One's Community: Evidence from National Surveys of Income and Happiness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78 (2000): 764–71; Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, "Economic Growth and Subjective Well-Being: Reassessing the Easterlin Paradox," *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* (2008): 1–35, and Ruut Veenhoven, "Is Happiness Relative?" *Social Indicators Research* 24 (1991): 1–34. Using improved time-series studies, Michael R. Hagerty and Ruut Veenhoven argue "that increasing national income *does* go with increasing national happiness" (22, italics in original). Also claiming to use improved methodological tools and larger data sets, Steven-

son and Wolfers argue that there is a clear positive relationship between income and SWB. In contrast to the argument that the utility of income dwindles through adaptation, Veenhoven argues that a portion of individual happiness depends on the fulfillment of "innate bio-psychological needs which do not adjust to circumstances" and that these basic needs "mark in fact the limits of human adaptability" (32). Veenhoven continues that "[p]eople cannot be happy in chronic hunger, danger and isolation: not even if they have never known better and if their neighbors are worse off" (32).

10. Richard E. Easterlin, "Explaining Happiness," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science of the United States of America* 100 (2003): 11182.

11. Money can't buy happiness used to be just a cliché. Certainly, it seems that self-interest plays some role in the recent popularity of happiness. William Davies makes the argument that businesses and the government have discovered that happiness is profitable in *The Happiness Industry: How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Well-Being* (London: Verso, 2015). Not everyone is excited about the increased interest in happiness. Eric G. Wilson argues that happiness is an impediment to greater achievements in *Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008).

12. See, for example, Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, *Mis-measuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn't Add Up* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

13. See, for example, Stuart Jeffries, "Will This Man Make You Happy?" *The Guardian*, June 24, 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/jun/24/healthandwellbeing.schools and Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005). Bruno S. Frey, another not so dismal economist, brightly declares that economic happiness research will have nothing short of a "revolutionary impact on policy" and calls for young economists to enter the field in *Happiness: A Revolution in Economics* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008), 203.

14. Richard Layard, "This is the Greatest Good: We Have Only One True Yardstick with which to Measure Society's Progress: Happiness." *The Guardian*, September 14, 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/sep/13/happiness-enlightenment-economics-philosophy.

15. See Jeremy S. Brooks, "Avoiding the Limits to Growth: Gross National Happiness in Bhutan as a Model for Sustainable Development," *Sustainability* 5 (2013): 3640–64; Laura Musikanski, "Happiness in Public Policy," *Journal of Social Change* 6 (2014): 55–85; John Lichfield, "Forget GDP, It's Time for Gross Domestic Happiness," *The Independent* (London), September 15, 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2009/sep/20/economics-wealth-gdp-happiness. Lauchlan T. Munro's article argues that Bhutan's move to GNH over GDP was a strategic business move in "Where Did Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Come From? The Origins of an Invented Tradition," *Asian Affairs* 47 (2016): 71–92.

16. See, for example, Arthur C. Brooks, *Gross National Happiness: Why Happiness Matters for America—and How We Can Get More of It* (New York: Basic, 2008) and Kai Schultz, "In Bhutan, Happiness Index as Gauge for Social Ills," *The New York Times*, January 17, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/17/world/asia/bhutan-gross-national-happiness-indicator-.html?mcubz=0.

17. Happiness researchers "overcome the problems of measuring happiness" through subjective measurements in Derek Bok, *The Politics of Happiness: What Government Can Learn From the New Research on Well-Being* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 5.

18. Bok, *The Politics of Happiness,* 204.

19. Bok, *The Politics of Happiness*, 61.

20. Moreover, Bok notes liberal thinkers differ greatly with respect to what justice requires. In contrast to Rawls, Ronald Dworkin argues that justice requires equality of capabilities whereas Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen argue for equality of initial resources.

21. Bok, *The Politics of Happiness*, 87.

22. Bok, *The Politics of Happiness*, 5.

23. According to Bok, lawmakers may vote contrary to public opinion in at least three cases: to make compromises, when the public is misinformed, and when the public is seized by passions. See *The Politics of Happiness*, 59.

24. Bok, *The Politics of Happiness*, 59.

25. See Bok, *The Politics of Happiness*, 170.

26. Bok acknowledges that individual bear some responsibility to achieve happiness. There are too many accidents of life that the state cannot control to ensure an outcome of happiness. Moreover, Bok observes that much unhappiness may be beyond the reach of policy because it is genetic in origin (*The Politics of Happiness*, 52). Bok remains committed to the notion that through science we may be able to exert further control over the events in our lives and even over our genetic inheritance. Though it may be far into the future, universal happiness is a goal to be sought. Individuals must look forward to the day in which better technique develops for the achievement of happiness.

27. Bok, *The Politics of Happiness*, 55.

28. Economist Carol Graham observes that the greatest limit of happiness research for policy makers is that there is no global definition of happiness. The conceptual measure of happiness, SWB, is a subjective self-reported evaluation of well-being. It is the absence of a set definition of happiness that has contributed to the flourishing of happiness studies. But, as Graham argues, "the definition of happiness surely matters to policy," because policy decisions require "normative choices that may be very different across countries and cultures" in *Happiness Around the World: The Paradox of Happy Peasants and Miserable Millionaires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 22.

29. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 160.

30. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 160.

31. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 161.

32. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 161.

33. As Locke observes, our bodies continually put us at unease for no sooner have we satisfied a hunger that our body wants rest, or we think about our next meal. We also have "adopted desires" for things like "*Honour*, *Power*, or *Riches*" that like natural wants also press on us as contingent and necessary to our happiness (italics in original) in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1979), 262.

34. Locke, *Human Understanding*, 263.

35. Locke, *Human Understanding*, 263.

36. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 251.

37. Liberal theorists also distance themselves from happiness so as to put distance between themselves and utilitarians, which liberal theorists regard with suspect commitment to rights. Happiness as pleasure is too slippery a concept that may be used to justify abridgment of rights for the sake of the pleasure of others.

38. Benjamin Constant considered liberty and happiness to be nearly incompatible; because individuals can make poor choices regarding what will make them happy. Happiness is too private a goal and too dependent on individual effort. Constant finds nobility in dissatisfaction that, he believes, is the result of political liberty. In this way, Constant attempts to rescue liberty from its supposedly sordid association with happiness as pleasure and raises political liberty's goal above happiness to the higher, nobler goal of "self-development" in *Political Writings*, trans. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 327.

39. Constant, *Political Writings*, 327.

40. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), §63. For qualifications to this claim, see §83.

41. Rawls retains the liberal belief in the individual pursuit of happiness, because of the difference of "endowments and circumstances" in *A Theory of Justice*, §63.

42. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §83. Happiness is "the satisfaction of rational desire" (§15). Rawls emphasizes that justice as fairness keeps its distance from individuals as they execute their rational life plans. Justice as fairness does not question how individuals make use of their advantages and situations in life (whatever is given after the veil of ignorance has been drawn aside) and it does not judge among rational life plans so long "as it does not violate what justice demands" (§16).

43. Cropsey argues that our preoccupation with self-reflection as a nation stems from our dissatisfaction with what self-knowledge we have. Our nation's ideals as expressed in our founding documents and great public speeches appear incomplete with respect to the totality of

our experience as Americans. Much of our dissatisfaction comes from the peculiar split in our public life, between what Cropsey calls our official or "parchment regime" and our unofficial regime in *Political Philosophy and the Issues of Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980) 2. Our unofficial regime also serves to provide meaning to our "parchment" regime and is private but not "necessarily individual" (2). In a sense, we have not one but two regimes, or perhaps, more accurately, we have two dimensions to our American regime. The distinction between our parchment regime and our unwritten regime rests on the distinction between what is public and governed and what is private and ungoverned. Both dimensions, however, inform our self-understanding. We have a parchment regime that was deliberately selected and preserved in official documents and utterances the ends and means of our public governing institutions. Our parchment regime reflects mostly early modern political thought as expounded by Hobbes and Locke in our official founding documents, judicial opinions, and public speeches. Our unofficial regime of ongoing thought is inherently uncontrollable and also intentionally ungoverned by our government. Together these public documents compose our public political ideals—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Cropsey nevertheless leaves open the possibility of a more constructive relationship between the two dimensions of our regime. Our parchment regime, after all, invites conversation with its critics precisely because it is an incomplete regime. By neither ignoring nor attempting to control the stream of opposing thought coming from the regime in the wider sense, our parchment regime permits an audacious goal—not the low but achievable goals of life, security and material comfort for which it has some respect and much contempt—but the creation of united political entity whose ideals require engagement with opposing thought. Our parchment regime does not suppress other critical thought because it knows its own incompleteness and that it does not encompass the whole of human life. Cropsey calls our parchment regime "decayed or decaying moments of modern thought," but there is reason to suppose that such decay may prove to be a fortuitous occasion, and detects the flip side of strengths (*Political Philosophy*, 7). The incompleteness that allows decay also opens our regime to improvement.

44. Cropsey, *Political Philosophy*, 7.
45. Cropsey, *Political Philosophy*, 12.
46. Cropsey, *Political Philosophy*, 12.
47. Catherine Zuckert, "On Reading Classic American Novelists as Political Thinkers," *The Journal of Politics* 43 (1981): 683. Catherine Zuckert is not alone in supporting the idea that political scientists can gain insight from the study of politics and literature. See Ethan Fishman, "Images of Lockean America in Contemporary American Fiction" in *Reading Political Stories: Representations of Politics in Novels and Pictures*, ed. Maureen Whitebrook (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1992); Wilson Carey McWilliams, "Poetry, Politics, and the Comic Spirit," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 28 (1995): 197–200, and Maureen Whitebrook, "Introduction" in *Reading Political Stories: Representations of Politics in Novels and Pictures*, ed. Maureen Whitebrook (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1992), 6. Drawing a tight connection between the study of politics and literature in the liberal regime, Ethan Fishman argues that Locke and the American founders believed that "public virtue would emerge as a necessary corollary to a society that fostered the free and open pursuit of private goals among individuals and groups" (165). Wilson Carey McWilliams presents Mark Twain's use of comedy in his writings as a specific case in which literature corrects a deficiency in "democratic education" by presenting the comedic figure as an alternative to the dangers of modernity's other heroes, the scientist who controls by technique and the romantic's self-destruction (198). Comedy serves our regime by "unmasking the human pretension to be a whole, to claim to have final answers to the great mysteries" (198). Moreover, McWilliams shows us that Twain employs comedy not to undermine our regime's principles but to find a mode of correction compatible with democratic life. Maureen Whitebrook states that the task of "political literary criticism is to bring out the interrelationship of art and politics within the culture" (6). Art does not simply mirror its culture, but will critique and challenge it by offering alternatives to existing social and political conventions. In this way, art engages in a political task by revealing "political possibilities" heretofore unimagined (6). Novelists are particularly well-situated to examine whether and how the lives of particular people searching for happiness succeed in a liberal community.

48. Most commonly, our novelists explore potential conflicts and gaps in our regime's liberal principles by showing us the "effects of the regime on the formation of character," in Zuckert, "American Novelists," 684.

49. Zuckert, "American Novelists," 688. In contrast, Irving Howe argues that American novelists are less suited to examining political ideas than European novelists in *Politics and the Novel* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 159–63.

50. Zuckert, "American Novelists," 689.

51. See Peter Augustine Lawler and Brian A. Smith, "Walker Percy, American Political Life, and Indigenous American Thomism," in *A Political Companion to Walker Percy*, ed. Peter Augustine Lawler and Brian A. Smith (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 1.

52. Catherine Zuckert's work, *Natural Right and the American Imagination*: *Political Philosophy in Novel Form* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1990), is a model for my book. She focuses on how American authors have explored our regime's relationship to natural rights and depicted various returns to and exits from the state of nature. See also Howard Mumford Jones, *The Pursuit of Happiness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1953). In this unique look at the pursuit of happiness, Jones looks at literature as well as public documents to understand the American regime and the pursuit of happiness. Jones utilizes the writings of literary figures (e.g., James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William James) on the grounds that they are "sufficiently outstanding observers of American life"; he also makes use of juvenile literature (such as *The Wizard of Oz*), popular magazines, and advertisements (104). Whereas in the past happiness had political, social, or economical meanings, Jones finds, Americans now talk about happiness in the sense of a psychological well-being that depends on the individual's adjustment (with the help of experts) to an environment largely beyond his control. This is a heretofore unnoticed dramatic change in the common usage of happiness. Jones welcomes this shift in meaning, because he believes it marks a more democratic understanding—every individual finds himself in a set of circumstances to which he requires adjustment.

Chapter Two

Tom Wolfe's Status-Hungry America

Having made his fame as a journalist in the sixties and seventies for his vivid, literary style of reporting, Tom Wolfe defends his turn to fiction in a *Harper's* article, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast: A Literary Manifesto for the New Social Novel."[1] Wolfe declares American literature anemic for want of "big realistic fictional novel[s]" that will vividly depict America's great post-World War II cities, its turbulent social movements, and other "big, rich, slices of contemporary life."[2] Arguing against literary critics like Lionel Trilling who believe that American literature suffers because the United States lacks the robust class sentiments necessary for realistic characters, Wolfe counters that *status* replaces class in post-World War II America. Status, not class, is the "essential" way to show the "innermost life of the individual."[3] Since status replaces class in America, Wolfe argues that American literature will *and should be* different from literature like *Anna Karenina* in which social classes and customs constrain and shape individual lives. In her pursuit of happiness, the American does not experience the exquisite inner anguish of her European counterpart who rubs up against rigid social boundaries. Nevertheless, social structures have changed—*not disappeared*. Americans strive after status within "statuspheres"—realms of relatively self-contained social groups in which status is accorded by its internal rules—and there are many statuspheres to which individuals can aspire and seek happiness within.[4] Each statusphere promises well-being and ideal living. Americans are free to adopt, to judge each group for themselves, and to leave as they choose in their pursuit of happiness.

However, status-seeking and happiness are often in tension. Just as Wolfe notes that social structure has not disappeared in America but altered, he shows that status-seeking Americans face new obstacles to happiness. Individuals, who prove successful at gaining status, may discover that the things

that they have pursued for the sake of status do not bring them happiness and, in fact, often prove detrimental to real happiness. Free from class jealousies and barriers, Americans enjoy tremendous freedom to choose what and with whom to pursue happiness. But Americans have little preparation to make informed decisions and to resist public pressure. As Tocqueville observes, democratic life tends to weaken the individual's confidence in his powers of reasoning in comparison to the mass of society.[5] Without class sentiments to form opinions and feeling isolated and lacking confidence in his ability to reason, the individual follows public opinion. By attaching great status to material possessions and power, American society encourages individuals to seek things that contribute very little to happiness. Given the freedom to join and leave social groups, Wolfe argues that most of all individuals need the courage to resist the crowd and strike out on their own.

Finding courage is not always so easy. Just as Americans are underprepared to resist public pressure, Americans need help finding courage. Wolfe explores likely supports for courage already available in American culture. As I shall show, Wolfe depicts this problem in his three novels, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, *A Man in Full*, and *I Am Charlotte Simmons* and searches for ways and resources compatible with American liberalism for the individual to stand up for herself.

Wolfe's novels spur numerous book reviews, but over the years, scholars have produced scanty thematic analyses of his novels, as I will do in this chapter for his first three novels. A substantial number of critics dismiss Wolfe's fiction as bad writing—full of one-dimensional characters, stereotypical characterizations of women and minorities, bombastic diction, and overwrought with excessive punctuation.[6] Not all of these criticisms are erroneous.[7] As one of the more thoughtful critics in this camp, Rand Richards Cooper posits that Wolfe successfully chronicles status, but that his writings (nonfiction and fiction) suffer from being "a hundred jazzy variations on the homey theme of keeping up with the Joneses."[8] More pointedly, Cooper argues that Wolfe reduces characterization to a technique and, as a consequence, fails to reveal a whole person since the complexity of his character "lies largely in what they wear, buy, and covet."[9] But, as I shall demonstrate below, Wolfe's characters are more than aggregates of consumer preferences driven to spend and own competitively, but often learn—the hard way—that material consumption, as one of the most conspicuous and typically American ways to achieve status, does not satisfy and that they must exercise their freedom to look for happiness.[10]

One interpretation of Wolfe, especially relevant to my own work, links Wolfe's writings on status to the American pursuit of happiness. According to Carol McNamara, Wolfe shows how American liberty serves the pursuit of happiness by allowing for the emergence of subculture groups in which "individuals seek self-expression and distinction outside of the traditional

status structure."[11] Wolfe's heroes realize that traditional social structures are deadening and dissatisfying. Fortunately, for Americans, they are free politically to find inner freedom in a social subgroup or alternative society.[12] Commenting only on Wolfe's nonfiction works, Ronald Weber argues that Wolfe documents a "happiness explosion" for the general population caused by the rapid infusion of wealth into all levels of society in post-World War II America.[13] Consequently, the lower classes had discretionary wealth for the first time and quickly freed themselves from the tastes and pursuits of the elites so as to follow "their peculiar styles of life, styles that up to that time had been practically invisible in the society as a whole."[14] Wolfe rejects community-guided ways of life, because there are fewer winners and more losers among traditional society.[15] The great achievement of postwar prosperity is an increase in individual happiness, because more individuals are able to get what they want and live as they want.

On the whole, Wolfe believes that postwar American prosperity has been a boon to the majority of individuals who were previously too poor to live much beyond subsistence. Some measure of wealth is instrumental to the pursuit of happiness if only that the individual enjoys social mobility and can follow her lights as oppose to the elite's tastes and paternalistic guidance. But Weber leaves us with Wolfe unreservedly praising all idiosyncratic pursuits of happiness, and the claim that prosperity ushers in more happiness.[16] Weber misses, as McNamara does not, that Wolfe shows us individuals leaving one statusphere in favor of another status group rather than striking out as a lone individual. Wolfe's heroes long for companionship and so seek out alternative communities. Moreover, Wolfe's fictional works show that political freedom and prosperity are useless if individuals do not find the internal resolve to leave unhappy status groups. For Wolfe, the good news is that American political freedom is real and meaningful, because it means that individuals are free to leave one social group and pursue happiness with others in another.

THE BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES

In *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, Sherman McCoy is the top bond salesmen at Pierce & Pierce, has an enviable $2.6 million dollar Park Avenue apartment, and has a wife and child. Success with his job, home, and family, however, has not made him happy. Believing he is deserving of yet greater satisfaction, Sherman wants more and, in so doing, loses everything, including his wife and child whom he comes to realize are dearer than he knew. How Sherman McCoy had everything, lost everything, and gained his soul (so to speak) chronicles what happens to the individual's pursuit of happiness when liberal societies cease connecting status to virtue. In this section, I will explore how

Sherman failed to acquire moral rectitude from his father and discuss how his false sense of freedom based on material success leads to his ruin. Finally, I will argue that at the end of the novel, we glimpse at Sherman's transformation from a contemptible, entitled moneymaker to a more heroic fighter able to resist the social pressures that want to deprive him of his freedom.

Sherman McCoy is the son of a well-respected, part-of-the-establishment New York lawyer, but who opted for a career in Wall Street as a bond salesman. Sherman is the offspring of the lingering and exhausted remains of the old solidly WASP establishment that supported a tighter connection between virtue and status. But Sherman belongs to the new social order of the 1980s that rejects traditional virtues and sentiments (such as duty, responsibility, and dislike of ostentation), gives free reign to greed and private ambition, and enjoys the fruits of ruthless individualism and self-interest. On the way back from Kennedy airport, Sherman and his mistress, Maria, take a wrong turn back to Manhattan, and become lost in the Bronx. Upon finding a tire blocking the entrance back onto the highway, Sherman gets out of his Mercedes roadster to remove the tire. Two young black men approach him and one young man asks if he needs help. Fearing that the tire blocking the on-ramp is a plot to con him, Sherman leaps back into his Mercedes that Maria is now driving. In her haste, Maria hits the skinny black youth backing the car up.

Since she was the driver, Maria convinces Sherman that they ought not to report the incident. Sherman agrees to keep silent. Henry Lamb, the causality of Maria's careless driving, is hospitalized and soon succumbs to a coma. The search to find the undoubtedly white and rich owner of a Mercedes roadster that fled the scene after hitting a young black honor student from the Bronx is manipulated by a series of self-interested parties for the sake of private gain and benefit—such as Albert Vogel, a defense attorney, Peter Fallow, an alcoholic British journalist, Reverend Bacon, a black activist, and Abe Weiss, the Bronx district attorney. They use Henry Lamb's coma as an opportunity to feign indignation and to advance their careers and interests. Soon enough, Sherman is identified as the owner of the Mercedes. He keeps his promise to conceal that Maria was with him and that she was the driver of the car when it struck Lamb. In the ensuing public and legal battle, Sherman is vilified (and glamorized) by the press. He is fired, arrested, indicted, and taken to trial. As a plaything of other individuals' private movitations for aggrandizement, Sherman feels helpless and abandoned. After his wife learns of his infidelity, Sherman realizes what he has lost and finds the courage to fight back. Sherman transforms from a cowardly, snobby, contemptible individual to a fighter, who will no longer be manipulated by others. The story ends with hope that Sherman may be reconciled to his family.

When it was released in 1987, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* appeared prescient. The bond trading bubble was about to burst and tense race relations

were about to break. Indeed, Wolfe's *Bonfire* seemed to bleed into the front pages. In 1987, the stock market crashed and bond trading was largely to blame. By 1991, Michael Milken who became fabulously wealthy from selling junk bonds (or high yield bonds as they are known in polite company) was indicted for insider trading and eventually served time in prison. In 1987, Tawana Brawley, a 15-year-old African-American young woman, claimed that she had been raped, beaten, and smeared with feces by six white men. Brawley's trial helped launch Reverend Al Sharpton's career to national attention. Within five years, the acquittal of the four Los Angeles policemen who had beaten Rodney King sparked highly destructive race riots.[17] Of course, these are events that happened after Wolfe wrote *Bonfire*. Less well remembered are the events that prefigure *Bonfire*'s publication. In 1986, Michael Griffith, a young black man, and a few friends were stranded in Queens when their car broke down. As they looked for help, a group of white men with baseball bats started to harass them and eventually chased Griffith onto the Belt Parkway where he was hit and killed by a car.[18] Wolfe reworks some of the details, but clearly Sherman and Maria's encounter with Henry Lamb and his friend near the highway on-ramp is inspired by Griffith's story. In the wake of Griffith's death, Reverend Al Sharpton, who is the inspiration for Wolfe's Reverend Bacon, organized a march to draw attention to this racially motivated crime. Sharpton's techniques are well-known for being provocative and dramatic. During the march for Griffith, Sharpton and other chief organizers ate pizza at the restaurant where Griffith had his last meal to call attention to his life and unjust death.

All of Wolfe's novels feature prominent racial conflicts. As Wolfe said in "Stalking the Billion-footed Beast," his goal is to examine the richness of American life and racial conflict is certainly one of the most distinctive aspects of American life. Racial conflict is one of the fundamental questions and challenges of American culture. What Wolfe shows us is that when these grand moments surface in which Americans are called to face and consider race relations and justice in America, the question is usually sidestepped in favor of self-aggrandizement. Wolfe recognizes that the deeper struggle in the American heart is not about race, but between self-interest and justice. Happiness cannot come at the expense of justice. In hands other than Wolfe's, his novels would be cynical. But Wolfe luxuriates in depicting how political leadership and the media find it in their interest to create a spectacle of racial conflicts. In *Bonfire*, Wolfe highlights how the death of a young black man, Henry Lamb, is quickly turned to advantage and profit even by those seeking justice.[19]

Sherman McCoy is a self-described "Master of the Universe," which is a title he appropriates from a set of "lurid" Nordic muscular dolls belonging to his daughter, Campbell.[20] The phrase comes to Sherman's mind one day after he nonchalantly performs a sale that results in a "$50,000 commission,

just like that" (italics in original) and he realizes that he is one of a few on Wall Street for whom "no limit [exists] whatsoever!"[21] Sherman's overweening sense of mastery comes from his ability to earn large sums of money easily and quickly, the apparent limitless potential for acquisition, and his elite status as one of a few "Masters of the Universe." Sherman regards himself as one of "that breed whose natural destiny it was . . . to have what they wanted!"[22] He imagines that his wealth, his job, his reputation, his family are secure in his control and unassailable through changes in fortune. And this sense of having achieved unassailable security blinds Sherman to the precariousness of his material possessions. Sherman's desire for more—an undefined, unlimited longing for increase—reveals how little satisfaction his possessions bring him. Given the paltry pleasure he derives from his things, he labors continually to acquire more to demonstrate and maintain his (supposed) mastery. Sherman's desire for accumulation eventually leads to his downfall and exposes how flimsy his claim to power is.

Although the hit and run triggers Sherman's ruin and heightens the intensity in which he loses everything, he is no tragic victim of fortune's wheel—nor, as I shall later show, is he without resources and freedom to benefit from the lessons his downfall teaches him. Wolfe shows how Sherman is responsible for his rapid disgrace. Success as a bond salesman leads Sherman to believe that his mastery is unassailable and so he takes foolish risks in various domains of his life that unravel and reveal how little self-control he possesses. Under the thinnest of excuses, Sherman pretends to walk the dog so as to visit with his mistress. An expensive, intricate, and risky sale of French gold backed bonds known as the Giscard backfires on him and precipitates his financial ruin—a great blow to Sherman's top notch sales savvy.

Being the number one bond salesman gives Sherman immense pleasure, and he enjoys the frantic intensity of the salesroom where in the fray of making money he can ignore the rest of his life and indulge in his supposed mastery. In the bond trading room of Pierce & Pierce, Sherman experiences the thrill of being a risk taker. After a bold sale, he compares his fellow masters of the universe to "victorious warriors after the fray."[23] But this is a false sense of courage and accomplishment. Sherman "only takes risks and gambles with other people's money," and, as a bond salesman, his job is really a means to someone else's end.[24] Wolfe emphasizes this point when Sherman tries to impress his young daughter, Campbell, by explaining his job. But Sherman fails to communicate. His attempt is frustrated, because his job cannot be explained in terms of what he makes, how many subordinates he commands, or a common public good (like the building of hospitals and roads).[25] It is the first hint that his job may not be as impressive as he thinks it is. Sherman does not produce a product, does not lead and take responsibility for other people by exercising leadership, and does not engage in a common enterprise with some sort of public benefit. Sherman is a moneymaker

engaged in a "mad pursuit of personal happiness through material security."[26] Judy, his wife, mockingly takes over the task of explaining to Campbell her father's occupation. Bond trading, she explains, is like selling of slices of cake that belong to someone else and the bond trader keeps the crumbs. Sherman's utter helplessness to describe in a flattering and impressive way to his daughter his occupation brings him painfully close to confronting the insignificance of his profession.

The greatest example of Sherman's lack of personal restraint is his extramarital affair that precipitates his ruin. He lacks mastery over his own sexual impulses. Animated both by a love of acquisition and a sense of entitlement, Sherman McCoy feels justified in pursuing an affair with Maria Ruskin whom Wolfe describes as a hypersexualized woman with a cloying Southern accent. Sherman searches unsuccessfully for a convenient justification for indulging in his unrestrained desires so as to allay his conscience about cheating on his wife. In so doing, Sherman indulges in self-deception. Judy, his aging wife, is no longer as attractive as she had been and Sherman thinks that it is "[n]ot her fault . . . *But not mine, either*!" (italics in original).[27] He thinks he deserves a young and lovely sexual partner. After a fight with Judy who rightfully suspects that Sherman has a mistress, he reflects that he did not want much, compared to what he, a Master of the Universe, deserved. At bottom, Sherman is cruel and irresponsible toward his wife to whom he does not believe he owes fidelity.

Belonging to New York's established class further exacerbates Sherman's sense of entitlement. Sherman lacks the earned moral fiber that his father's Knickerbocker class had. Nevertheless, he clings to the old social class structure and prejudices without having any of the old WASP establishment virtues—namely, that responsibility and self-control lead to and support personal freedom. Sherman's father, John Campbell McCoy, is a lawyer who was known in his heyday (and by Sherman still) as the Lion of Dunning Sponget, his law firm. The Lion towers over Sherman's imagination and provides a foil to Sherman's own conduct. When Sherman was a child, the Lion attempted to imbue his son with personal responsibility, self-restraint, and sympathy with all classes. The Lion rode the subway on principle. In contrast, Sherman takes a taxi every day. Nevertheless, the Lion failed to pass on to his son these virtues.[28] But Sherman is not so much a part of the old New York Knickerbocker establishment that he appears to be. His father, in fact, is an outsider from Tennessee and son of a low-class Southerner. Sherman's grandfather, William Sherman McCoy, came from Knoxville to New York where he prospered. His son, Sherman's father, John Campbell "the Lion" McCoy, was able to attend Yale Law School and marry into New York high society. While the Lion used to take his son, Sherman, to visit Knoxville and see where their family started, Sherman is self-conscious of his family's lack of pedigree. With flushed indignation, Sherman recalls how

his childhood rival, Pollard Browning, used to call McCoy a hick surname in reference to the feuding Hatfields and McCoys. Wolfe hints at the Lion's pretense of playing the part of the old social establishment. The unintentional lesson Sherman received from his father, unfortunately, is the importance of seeking status and achieving the right class. What Sherman misses is how his father ascended society by merit of his prudential and responsible undertakings and not from entitlement.

During his prime, the Lion occupied one of the most impressive corner offices with a view of the New York Harbor. However, as Wolfe takes care to tell us, as partners aged, they were expected quietly and in a dignified manner to relinquish the best offices for the use of the lawyers entering their prime.[29] In contrast, Wolfe tells us that few of the men populating the bond trading room of Pierce & Pierce were over forty.[30] Sherman is thirty-eight and shows no signs of recognizing a time in which he might quietly step aside to make way for the ambitions of younger men. Sherman views the younger men as threats to his own standing. Unlike his son, the Lion was scrupulously financially responsible from the beginning of his life to the end. The Lion and his wife had started out in an old house in need of renovation on an unpopular block at the time and prudentially managed their finances. In his retirement, the Lion has secured sufficient capital to keep the family home and a vacation home on Long Island and to maintain his wife and himself in refined (but not ostentatious) circumstances for the remainder of their lives.[31] Sherman reflects that his father would be aghast at the amount he spent and borrowed for his apartment. Moreover, he knows that his father would be deeply hurt to know that his regular talks with his son on "duty, debt, ostentation, and proportion had whistled straight through his son's skull."[32] These thoughts do not rouse much shame or remorse in Sherman. He lives in an enviable $2.6 million dollar Park Avenue apartment for which he had taken a $1.8 million dollar loan for the sake of decorating. His yearly expenses include (but are not limited to) $252,000 a year for paying back the loan, $44,400 for the apartment's maintenance fees, $37,000 for entertaining, $65,000 to keep the apartment fashionably decorated, $4,000 for Campbell's modest birthday party with only one carnival ride, and $62,000 for the servants' pay.[33] Sherman knows that he spends well in excess of what he earns, but is unable, or more precisely, unwilling to reduce his spending. Sherman's father fails because his lessons are abstracted from particular persons. After all, his father took the subway on principle to stand with the common man.

Having failed to learn from his father's example and instruction, Sherman takes his cues from the outsized habits of his contemporary society. Unlike his father's law firm, Sherman's workplace, the bond trading room embodies the brutally competitive ways of commercial life possible in a liberal regime in which self-interest and private pursuit are fueled unchecked by a sense of entitlement and limitless capacity for mastery and acquisition. Indeed, Wolfe

shows us a dangerous side to the pursuit of happiness—that, as a purely individual activity, it encourages selfishness and ruthlessness toward others. These young men have been educated at the most elite schools in the United States, but in the trading room, all that can be heard is the "roar" in which they shout, peppered with much profanity, at their phones in their quest for wealth.[34] Fueled by the pursuit of private interest, a generation of America's best and brightest acknowledge each other by raised voices—voices clamoring to be heard over one another. This scene is not simply an indictment of Wall Street greed, but also a criticism of America's elite universities at which these young men were regaled with stories of outstanding wealth made in trading rooms and where they memorized the motto: "*Make it now*!" (italics in original).[35]

Furthermore, the Pierce & Pierce bond room is a society based on the barest of mutual self-interest. The bond salesmen receive base salaries of $120,000 a year, but they expect that their real income will come from commissions and profit-sharing. After Pierce & Pierce takes its share, the remainder is divided among the bond salesmen. At first, this may seem like an admirably liberal way of channeling self-interest for common benefit. This policy leads the salesmen to act less like coworkers and more like a room of individuals whose interests momentarily align. They sell bonds together in the same room and share earnings, but this kind of mutual self-interest fails to encourage comradeship or even civil relationships. They make use of each other for their own benefit. Yet, under the exterior of working together for impressive sales, each one is ready to strike against his fellow bond salesmen for the sake of self-advancement. As the top salesmen, Sherman "occupied a moral eminence."[36] Instead of using his status to be a good leader, Sherman uses it to crush and humiliate others. Sherman publicly insults and humiliates his coworker, Ferdinand Arguello, whom he regards as a challenger. Instead of using his authority to protect, Sherman distances himself from his old college friend, Rawlie Thorpe, during a meeting with his superiors so as not to be associated with someone who cracked a mild joke about his superiors. The bond room is a model of vicious self-love in which individuals align in common activity momentarily and guardedly to further their interests.

In contrast, Wolfe presents the courthouse system as an alternative to the bond room—a very different model of a society based on self-interest. The courthouse system allows for a greater level of personal responsibility, principled behavior, loyalty, and integrity. It allows for these virtues and depends on them, but as part of a liberal society, it does not ensure virtuous individual conduct. The courthouse system, as Sherman's lawyer, Tommy Killian explains, operates according to the "Favor Bank."[37] The Favor Bank is a supplement to the law that formally guides the courthouse system. Law is an incomplete guide because it cannot account for ambiguities inherent in law.

More importantly, law alone cannot provide a basis for mutual trust among the judges, lawyers, and police that participate in the courthouse system. Everyone involved in the courthouse grants each other favors, as Killian explains, that "'What goes around comes around.' That means if you don't take care a me today, I won't take care a you tomorrow."[38] Really big favors are called contracts. Honoring a contract is nearly sacrosanct. By making contracts central to the justice system, Wolfe juxtaposes its "norms" to those of the bond room. The bond salesmen falsely believe that their fortunes can only improve and view each other as competitors. The bond salesmen work with their fellow salesmen only in the present case with no future assurance of mutual assistance. In contrast, the courthouse system encourages a more long-term perspective among its participants so that they give favors in the hopes of securing future favors and guarding against turns in fortune. Giving a favor is like "saving up for a rainy day."[39] Self-interest plays an important role in the courthouse system, but nevertheless, the furtherance of justice is a common goal. Moreover, as Killian indicates, in the courthouse system, the members are aware of the fragility of good fortune and the need for mutual assistance. In this way, members of the courthouse system are mindful of the limits of human control.

Considering one's long-term interests is classically liberal. The courthouse system relies on individuals seeing their interest fulfilled in the long term and in common, but it also needs virtues, like courage and loyalty. These virtues are not created by the system, but they are brought to it and can become part of the informal culture of the system. Here Wolfe points to immigrant populations enhancing liberal systems with their virtues and habits formed by thicker conceptions of the good. Although the Irish are a waning population in the police, their long influence infused the police department with their special brand of trustworthiness and courage. As Wolfe explains, Irish courage is of the "donkey."[40] The bravery of the donkey is stubbornly standing fast and being "willing to fight."[41] Loyalty means standing by one of your own. (The code of the donkey is not foolproof, but matters must be extreme before defection.) In this way, Sherman learns that courage is for the sake of another. The bond room failed to provide Sherman with the moral resources to combat the aggressive attack on his life he experiences. By the end of the novel, Sherman embraces the code of the donkey and shows he is ready to fight for his family. When the judge dismisses the indictment, a riot erupts in the courtroom. Reverend Bacon's demonstrators instigate a fight against a small party mainly consisting of the judge, Killian, and Sherman. Sherman starts throwing punches and, perhaps by his evident earnestness and willing to fight, the crowd of demonstrators retreats. Although Sherman wins this round, he still faces prosecution and a retrial.

The Favor Bank as an institution does not ensure just conduct among all participants in the courthouse and cannot constrain all its members such as

the hungry for reelection district attorney, Abe Weiss, and the resentful assistant district attorney, Larry Kramer. They act outside of the courthouse system, because they have lost the common goal of securing justice and so have turned to satisfy their immoderate desires. Kramer believes he deserves more from life than his cramped apartment, dowdy wife, and low paying job. In an attempt to imitate powerful persons like Sherman, Kramer tries to have an affair with a jury member. Yet, as a relatively unimportant figure in the courthouse system, his plot to gain a rent-controlled apartment (as a love nest) is exposed and he is removed from the case due to misconduct. On the other hand, Abe Weiss, the district attorney, suffers no ill fate for his reprehensible actions and gains the reelection he wants so badly. For example, Killian makes a contract with Bernie Fitzgibbon, the chief of the Homicide Bureau, that Sherman's arrest will be private. Weiss circumvents Fitzgibbons' contract and turns the arrest into a media spectacle to enhance his image for reelection. In as much as it is based on honoring contracts, the courthouse system institutionally encourages and reinforces personal integrity to a point. It is an incomplete system that requires that the individual choose to be virtuous.

In the epilogue that takes place a year later, Wolfe grants us a glimpse of Sherman transformed into a courageous fighter through the conceit of an article written by Overton Holmes Jr. in *The New York Times*.[42] Holmes reports that Sherman's legal battle has continued, but that he has dramatically changed. Sherman disavows all connection to Wall Street and Park Avenue, calls himself a "professional defendant," and wears hiking boots and khakis all the time.[43] Short on funds, Sherman legally represents himself and maintains his innocence. Judy has left Sherman, but the reporter notes that she was present at Sherman's latest arraignment. At the arraignment, Sherman "smiled slightly, and raised his left hand in a clenched-fist salute."[44] Holmes, however, does not understand the significance of Sherman's salute. Before Sherman's career on Wall Street, Judy and he used to be political activists in the civil right movement. Early in their marriage, when Sherman left for work on Wall Street, he used to raise his fist in the manner of the Black Power movement to signal to Judy his freedom from Wall Street.[45] They used to believe that they would not sell out to Wall Street values. But their resistence to Wall Street faded quickly, and perhaps because their activism was more posturing than substance. Although Sherman did not hit Henry Lamb with the car, he readily assumed that the two black youths were more likely to con them than to help them.

At the height of his trial and crushing public smear, Sherman tries to salvage his marriage. By reminding Judy of their past, he sorrowfully tells her that he succumbed to the values of Wall Street. Now that he has lost his job, there may be a new opportunity for them—a fresh start in which they recapture their youthful spiritedness. Despite his infidelity and the public

humiliation accompanying the trial, Judy forgives him, but says that forgiveness cannot change what he has done. Words fail Sherman, because there is nothing in his character or past conduct that he can draw on to show her otherwise. Deeds—demonstration of change—are needed.

What the epilogue shows is that Sherman has changed for his family. He is free of Wall Street and fighting against those who sought to capitalize on his downfall. Such deeds might convince and inspire her to rejoin Sherman. Then they could become truly the countercultural pair that they had falsely fancied that they were in their youth. Real counterculturalism does not lead to a prosperous career as a bond salesman. Although Wolfe shows us that Judy returns to see Sherman in the courtroom and undoubtedly understands the meaning of Sherman's raised fist, we cannot know if Judy is willing to make amends with Sherman. We do know, however, that in the year's time Judy has not filed for divorce (the reporter Holmes surely would have mentioned their pending divorce in his article). In the absence of further evidence, we may only conclude that the possibility of reconciliation remains open to Sherman and Judy.

In *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, Wolfe sets up Sherman McCoy as ripe for a tragic fall; it is a spectacular fall, but not a tragedy. In classic tragedies, hubris blinds individuals from true self-knowledge and fools them into thinking that they are freer than they really are. Only after losing everything can tragic heroes come to self-knowledge though it is too late to make amends for their misdeeds. In Oedipus's case, he must trade eyesight for inward sight. Although not the master of the universe he thought he was—that kind of freedom is illusory—Sherman discovers that he is free in a meaningful way to take charge of his life. Highlighting Sherman's freedom, Wolfe does not show us the end of his story. Sherman's future is uncertain and we cannot know how his legal battles will end or if Judy and he will repair their marriage.[46] No longer will Sherman chase after wealth to bring him status. Instead, he will fight within the legal system to maintain his freedom; he hopes to regain standing with his wife and child. Sherman's discovery of his low, but solid animal instincts to fight for survival is not Wolfe's final word on finding ways to counter society's misleading pursuits that fail to satisfy. For consideration of how liberal regimes can make use of pre-liberal support for courage, we must turn to Wolfe's *A Man in Full*. As we shall see, Wolfe does not throw all higher human aspirations on the bonfire.

A MAN IN FULL

If *The Bonfire of the Vanities* leaves Sherman McCoy with too few options and resources for reestablishing a more noble existence compatible with liberal principles, *A Man in Full* supplies the correction. Commentators have

discussed how Wolfe investigates the effect of liberalism on manliness and its related classic virtue, courage, and how he presents a case for stoicism.[47] Other critics have been quick to note that Wolfe does not merely present classic stoicism, but stoicism modified by Christianity to make it more charitable.[48] Indeed, Wolfe uses stoicism to introduce pre-liberal notions of manliness, honor, and courage, and to argue that liberalism needs the support of these virtues. Stoicism fosters the virtues that liberal regimes need for the sake of resisting the materialistic tendencies of American life by giving support to the individual's soul—that there is a part of the person that does not have a price and cannot be compromised. Yet, Wolfe also makes stoicism more other-regarding, but not by formally mixing it with Christian concepts. Wolfe tries to stay within the framework of liberalism. Liberalism's commitment to prevent abuse of another person's right means that there must be courageous individuals willing to protect the weak, the friendless, and the defenseless. As we shall see, helping the weak, friendless, and defenseless starts with befriending them. *A Man in Full* has a number of complex story lines, but I shall focus below on Charlie's and Conrad's, whose story lines are relevant to my analysis.

Charlie Croker is an aging Atlanta real estate businessman, founder of Croker Global. He owns a Gulfstream Five aircraft that is mostly put to use for his commuting between Atlanta and his 29,000 acre plantation in Baker County called "Turpmtine" where he enjoys shooting quail.[49] During his life, Charlie has enjoyed much success, but now he is in his decline physically; more importantly, he also feels out of touch with the more technical side of business concerns. Charlie depends on his youthful financial officer to take care of understanding the financial particulars of operating businesses. While he usually overcame past business difficulties, largely thanks to the acumen of his first wife, he fears that his business empire, Croker Global Corporation, will become a victim of stronger business forces.

Charlie has good reason to be concerned. He is unable to pay back $160 million in loans for which he is personally responsible to his six lenders for the building of Croker Concourse. Croker Concourse is a virtually empty, money-draining monument to Charlie's grandiose, self-inflated ego that stands just a bit too far from the city of Atlanta itself to attract business. The main lender, Plannersbanc, senses Charlie's weakness. They try to humiliate and force Charlie to repay his loans by selling his luxury vehicles, his Gulfstream Five, and his plantation. Because selling these items would be affront to Charlie's sense of success, he refuses to sell any of these items. Instead, he opts to cut jobs at Croker Global Foods.

The layoffs, however, do not reverse Charlie's business woes and he faces imminent financial ruin. Suffering from insomnia, he spends many sleepless nights worrying about losing his business and his lifelong success. He feels alienated from his children and his second (and much younger) wife

is of little comfort to him, who tends to patronize him. Moreover, Charlie experiences dread when his wife suggests sexual intimacy for fear of revealing that he is impotent. His physical decline hastens; a painful knee injury worsens rendering him nearly immobile and in need of surgery. Sinking into self-pity and depression, Charlie realizes that he is not the man he once was.

Although the novel begins with Charlie suffering humiliation, feeling old and spent, and with a painful arthritic knee, Charlie aspires to be a man in full—a man capable of legendary or folk hero feats of strength and daring. Charlie fondly recalls an old folk song with which he identifies that, among its lyrics, says "Charlie Croker was a man in full."[50] Charlie cultivates this folk hero image. To an interviewer asking about his exercise routine, Charlie responds that he does not have one, but that "when I need firewood, I start with a tree."[51] Even Raymond Peepgass, the senior loan officer at Plannersbanc, recognizes that Charlie had "*masculinity to burn*" (italics in original), though he resents Charlie and his "Southern Manhood stuff."[52] With bare hands, Charlie seizes a rattlesnake behind the head even though he knows it is reckless but done for the sake of impressing those around him with his daring.[53] He tries to reclaim his old feeling of fullness, or manly courage, but his attempts are reckless and prankish. His success with the rattlesnake makes him feel "almost whole again," but this moment of wholeness is short-lived.[54] When Plannersbanc seizes his Gulfstream, Charlie drops a wrench in the engine to get back at them for humiliating him.

Charlie enjoys his reputation as a powerful, rugged man, because it gives him an advantage in business so that he can muscle his way to success. In the business world, Raymond Peepgass observes that there are two kinds of men. There were cautious males like him, who did business finance, and then there were men like Charlie Croker who made risky, bold business moves such as real estate development. Charlie is confident that his mettle and strength can ward off failure by pushing around individuals weaker than him. The showdown between Charlie and Plannersbanc exemplifies the business world ethic in which the strongest wins and bends the weaker to his will. That particular meeting goes terribly wrong for Charlie—Raymond Peepgass wins—and more than ever Charlie feels that his end is near. Because the business world rewards risk takers and brute shows of domineering strength, Charlie's physical decline seems to signal the end of his life's work.

However, if we look closer into the cause of Charlie's business troubles, we see that at root the cause is not his physical decline, but his fear of aging, mortality, and losing what he considers his life's work. As he ages, Charlie finds it hard to live up to his image of himself and is unwilling to confront his mortality. His fear of showing weakness and his age leads him to petty and desperate measures to preserve his image of strength to himself and to others. When anyone observes him move with stiffness, Charlie takes scrupulous care to let them—including the Piedmont Driving Club parking captain—

know that his aching right knee is not due to age or arthritis, but an old football injury, which gives it more dignity. Charlie's divorce and remarriage underscore how far he goes to deceive himself. He divorces his first wife, Martha, in favor of Serena, a much younger woman. He rationalizes that he needed a younger wife to stir his sexual appetite because he believes that his success as a businessman is tied to his sexual potency. His remarriage backfires. Serena is not a comforting companion. Charlie does not feel comfortable sharing with her his business concerns. He misses how he could discuss his worries with his first wife, Martha. Moreover, instead of revitalizing Charlie through sex, Serena serves as a nightly reminder of his age and impotence. Charlie avoids initiating sex with Serena, because he fears that he is impotent and does not want definite proof. Charlie evades rather than confronts.

In fact, fear of losing his strength and vigor—all that he prized about himself—motivates Charlie to build Croker Concourse. He believes that his business success has been all his own and overlooks the ways in which his first wife, Martha, helped him. In his youth, Charlie relied much on Martha's social connections for advancement in his early career. Charlie is not the self-made man he thinks he is. Martha recalls "her career as a business partner, co-developer, and indispensable counselor of the man now known as that rugged individualist Charlie Croker."[55] Building Croker Concourse was the business decision that ruined him. Unsurprisingly, it is a decision that he made independently of Martha. Charlie built Croker Concourse and named it after himself for the sake of impressing Serena, proving his vigor to himself, and being a lasting testimony to his success. He makes his boldest risk not from self-confidence, but to hide from himself and others his self-doubt.

As part of his folk hero image, Charlie prizes a painting of Jim Bowie depicted rising from his deathbed to fight at the Alamo. By juxtaposing a real hero with Charlie, Wolfe illustrates Charlie's failure to understand what courage is and what it is for. After the humiliating meeting with Plannersbanc, Charlie looks to the painting to inspire him with courage, but he feels only panic. It is to Charlie's credit that he admires the image of Bowie rising from a deathbed to defend the Alamo and that he longs to be courageous himself. Wolfe shows that Charlie wants the right things, but misunderstands them. Charlie interprets the painting of Bowie on his deathbed to mean "[n]ever say die, even when you're dying."[56] But "never say die" does not inspire courage, but self-denial. Self-denial is a poor attempt to deal with fear of death by refusing to confront it and clinging to life. Courage is "the virtue concerned with controlling fear," and, as Harvey C. Mansfield explains, "[m]anly men rise above their fear, but in doing so they carry their fear with them, though it is under control."[57] Controlling one's fear is achieved not by denying or evading death, but by choosing the manner in which one meets it. Jim Bowie knew that he could not avoid his death. He could die in bed or he

could die defending the Alamo and the people he cared about. Bowie rose from his deathbed, because he *chose* to die for the sake of defending the Alamo against aggressors and not for the sake of futilely hoping to prolong his life. Bowie sacrifices himself for those whom he cared about and felt a debt of honor. Charlie consistently overlooks his debts to others such as Martha.

Too attached to his business, Charlie views it as an extension of him and is unable to let go of it. He confuses his business success as a sign of his physical strength and virility. It is these personal qualities that fade with age that Charlie is most unwilling to be deprived of. He treasures his physical virtues over his internal virtues. Consequently, for Charlie, the things he believes are necessary for his happiness are entirely external to himself. Instead of bringing him happiness or comfort, he frets and loses sleep over how to hold on to his possessions, but most of all, he fears the decline of his body. He does not yet know to treasure strength of soul, which cannot be taken away, over bodily strength that fades with age. Charlie must learn this lesson, but the much admired painting cannot teach it to him.

Charlie faces a dilemma when fate presents him with the chance to be freed of his debts and save his business, but only at the expense of betraying a friend and his own integrity. Fareek Fanon, a black Georgia Tech football star has been accused in public (not legally) of raping the white daughter of an established white Atlanta businessman.[58] It is feared that if the political situation is not diffused, racial tensions could result in a riot. Unlike *Bonfire*'s New York where many parties profited from stirring racial tensions, Atlanta recalls the civil rights movement and the Los Angeles race riots. Atlanta's political leadership is eager to smooth over racial tension.[59] As the African American mayor, Wes Jordan says, the rape of a white woman by a black man "gets right down to the core of the white man's fears."[60] As a former Georgia Tech football star and as part of the white establishment, Charlie is an ideal individual to help diffuse the situation. Through the mayor's representative, Charlie is offered a deal that if he will speak in public in favor of Fanon, Plannersbanc will be pressured into releasing him of his debts. On the other hand, the businessman is a friend of Charlie's to whom he has given his word to support. Charlie is not inclined to betray his friend and he has no security that Atlanta leadership will keep their end of the bargain.[61] Charlie recognizes that his debts are leveraged over him. Stuck with this irresolvable dilemma, Charlie opts for knee surgery to delay making a decision.

While Charlie recovers from his knee surgery, Conrad Hensley, who was one of Charlie's laid off employees, helps Charlie with his physical therapy and to regain control of his knee. Above all, Conrad helps Charlie spiritually to recover himself by introducing him to stoicism. Through Conrad's help, Charlie discovers the courage to carve a third course in which he is freed not

from financial and social ruin but rather from the fear of such ruin. Conrad Hensley is the messenger of stoicism. A dose of stoicism is just what Charlie needs to learn freedom from things that can be taken away. Stoicism, as Mansfield observes, is "the philosophy of inner freedom, of manly confidence learned by living as if you were a prisoner and had to depend for your happiness on nothing external to yourself."[62] Through Conrad, Charlie learns care of the soul, which is more lasting and permanent than his goods and body. However, as will be discussed below, Wolfe shows that classic stoicism is too self-sufficient. Charlie's introduction to stoic inner freedom and contentment is only part of his recovery. The other part, as I shall argue, is that by showing Conrad assist Charlie not only in his physical recovery but also his moral recovery, Wolfe illustrates how Conrad's friendship teaches Charlie the courage that he could not learn from observing the painting of Jim Bowie.

Before he meets Charlie, Conrad experiences a painful moral and spiritual development that culminates in his turn to stoicism. Although raised by hippies who ridiculed bourgeois life, Conrad longs for a typical middle-class life in which orderly living, honesty, and honorable labor are respected. Never knowing or experiencing the habits of middle-class life, Conrad learns about it from a course at Mount Diablo Community College. To Conrad the bourgeois life, which includes "order, moral rectitude, courtesy, cooperation, education, financial success, comfort, respectability, pride in one's offspring, and, above all, domestic tranquility," sounds like an ideal life.[63] But the path to middle-class life does not prove easy. Conrad chooses to marry his pregnant girlfriend, and despite demonstrating academic promise, he forgoes applying at Berkeley so as to work full-time and provide for his family. He works at Croker Global Foods in the ugly, Oakland side of the San Francisco Bay Area. Conrad works in what the employees called the "Suicidal Freezer Unit," whose name indicates the harsh, backbreaking, labor-intensive conditions to which they are subject in the freezer warehouse. He saves diligently from his meager earnings for a condo—the purchase of which represents his attainment of the middle-class life and a better life. Through Conrad, Wolfe shows that middle-class life is honorable and that it is not easy, but requires much dedication, self-restraint, and sacrifice. Nor is bourgeois life devoid of opportunities for virtuous action: he risks himself to save the life of a coworker. Unlike Charlie, Conrad is admirable, steadfast, and courageous.

Conrad suffers a series of near-spirit crushing misfortunes and injustices that culminate in his arrest and imprisonment. When Conrad loses his job at Croker Global Foods, he tries to gain a job typing, but his hands have become so muscular from moving frozen foods in the warehouse that his fingers are too large to type. Then, in an attempt to prevent his car from being destroyed in a towing yard, Conrad appears to threaten the proprietor. A police officer arrests him for assault. He could have pled guilty to the assault

charge and accepted probation. But, instead, he believes that he "wasn't guilty of anything" and is sent to jail.[64] When his wife, Jill, reproaches him for refusing the plea bargain and losing everything, Conrad disagrees and tells her that he "kept [his] honor" and preserved the sanctity of his soul.[65] Jill does not understand how his soul is worth losing his freedom, his family, their savings, and his dream of middle-class life. Conrad does not understand very well either, but he knows that he is innocent and would not lie.

By accident while he is in prison, Conrad receives a book of Epictetus's writings. Epictetus teaches Conrad how to articulate his belief that he had a soul that is worth preserving, that should not be compromised, and that his soul constitutes the most real quality about him. Epictetus attracts Conrad, because Epictetus supposes that "life is hard, brutal, punishing, narrow, and confining, a deadly business, and that fairness and unfairness are beside the point."[66] Epictetus teaches the opposite from everything that Conrad learned about philosophy at school. In school, he was taught that people are free and have only to choose among limitless options.[67] Conrad's life experiences more closely resemble Epictetus's account of human life. Here Wolfe makes a jab at liberalism's incomplete understanding of human beings. Human beings are not the autonomous individuals liberalism supposes. Any account of happiness that focuses on being comfortable and merely securing external goods fails to account for the only part of oneself over which one has control, which is the soul.

With Epictetus as his guide, Conrad finds a new kind of freedom. Within the narrow confines of life, living well means that "you will do your part, and I mine."[68] Doing one's part means acting nobly as a child of Zeus in whose soul resides one's only true possession—"spark of his divine fire" that gives one the ability to reason and to will what is good and avoid what is bad.[69] Conrad learns that one should not worry about things that do not depend on one's will such as possessions, reputation, and imprisonment, nor try to escape misfortune. Regardless of what happens, one can honor the integrity of the soul within. Conrad experiences intellectual delight and sympathy reading Epictetus's dialogues, and in so doing, becomes a twentieth-century student of Epictetus.

Stoicism, however, also has its limits. The Santa Rita prison contains its own unique social structure comprised of racially based prison gangs. The feared Rotto, the leader of the white prison gang, the Nordic Bund, stays in power through intimidation, violence, and raping new, white inmates who do not belong to any gang and so are defenseless. Shortly after Conrad arrives, another new white inmate arrives who is known only as Pocahontas. He is a young, skinny, effeminate man with a Mohawk haircut and many empty earring piercings. Yet Conrad feels sorry for him, but does nothing to bond with the young man for fear of attracting Rotto's attention and aligning himself with someone so vulnerable. Conrad wonders what "his duty toward

this sad, strange, friendless soul" is.[70] Conrad is torn. Epictetus teaches his students to leave the unfortunate to their misfortune. Stoicism is severe and austere. It advises against coming to the aid of one suffering misfortune, because what happens to other people is beyond our power and our responsibility. Interceding on behalf of another suggests that one believes that someone else's well-being affects oneself, which stoicism denies. External suffering and misfortune cannot really agitate the happiness of a true stoic. The stoic knows that his happiness is entirely dependent on his internal resources. The stoic can remain happy regardless of what accidents of fortune may befall him.

Stoicism lacks a duty to others, a principle of charity, or a reason why one might sacrifice one's comfort and well-being for another. At first, Conrad considers Epictetus to be cruel, but then he reflects how the young man cultivated an attention-grabbing appearance with his piercings, hairstyle, and shaved eyebrows and so had brought on much of his misfortune. But as Conrad watches Pocahontas who is isolated, shunned, and helpless as he anticipates Rotto's attack, he feels pity. It is up to Conrad to decide what to do. Epictetus seemed to have all the answers, but Conrad is not so sure. He begins to doubt whether he interpreted Epictetus correctly or whether he was interpreting him severely so as to avoid his duty to help another person. Conrad's hermeneutical doubt is cut short when Rotto and his followers take the young man into the shower to abuse and rape him. When the young man emerges and collapses, Conrad ignores Epictetus's teaching, rushes to the young man's side, and calls for the guards to get medical assistance. By coming to the young man's aid, Conrad marks himself for Rotto and the Nordic Bund's revenge. Conrad decides that it is wrong to look away "when a brute decides to have his way with the hide of another human being."[71] He regrets that he had failed to reach out to the young man before he had been attacked. When Rotto confronts Conrad, he finds the courage to fight back. Providentially, Conrad's muscular hands crush Rotto's wrist, and he wins the match. By a lucky earthquake, Conrad escapes from prison, hides in Atlanta, and meets Charlie Croker.

Conrad becomes a "messenger" of stoicism to Charlie—although a messenger of a distinctively friendlier stoicism.[72] As noted above, Charlie is faced with a dilemma to either speak publicly on behalf of Fareek Fanon and be freed of his debts or lose everything. He asks Conrad for advice. Conrad tells Charlie a story that he learned from Epictetus about what to do when faced with degradation or suffering. Emperor Nero summoned Florus, a historian, to act in plays for his amusement or to suffer death. Florus asks his friend, Agrippinus, a stoic philosopher, what he ought to do. Agrippinus advises that he perform in Nero's play. When Florus asks if Agrippinus planned to act in the play, Agrippinus says that he will not. Bewildered, Florus asks why his friend recommends that he does something that he will

not do. Agrippinus says, "[b]ecause you have *considered* it" (italics in the original).[73]

By this point in the story, we know that Charlie has considered publicly supporting Fanon.[74] Classic stoic advice is to counsel Charlie to go ahead and publicly side with Fanon. Such a course would be true to his albeit weaker self. Nevertheless, Charlie finds hope in what happens to Agrippinus when he refuses Nero. Agrippinus' property is confiscated and he is exiled—he does not receive death—and he and a friend leave together to start a new life elsewhere. Likewise, Conrad and Charlie look for a third option. Instead of trying to evade humiliation or financial ruin, he embraces both. Conrad and Charlie come up with a plan in which Charlie uses the public forum to tell the audience about stoicism. In the end, it was walking away from his reputation and success that enabled Charlie to "[feel] like a man free of all encumbrances. He felt whole again."[75]

The epilogue is a conversation between Roger White, the lawyer who presented Charlie with the option of publicly defending Fanon, and White's friend, the mayor of Atlanta, Wes Jordan. They laugh and find Charlie and Conrad's stoicism amusing. Charlie leaves his corporation and becomes a Zeus evangelist in southern Alabama and the Florida panhandle. His message is so successful that he will host a show called *The Stoic's Hour* that will be nationally syndicated by Fox Broadcasting. Conrad turns himself in to custody. During his trial, when the judge asks him if he has anything to say, Conrad tells him that it is for the judge to do his task and for him to do his task and that he is at peace regardless of what happens to him because he is a spark of Zeus.[76] Impressed, the judge decides to treat him leniently and gives him probation. In some ways, Charlie and Conrad are like Agrippinus and his friend who are exiled from Rome. They have lost their property, their former friends, and their social respectability. And like Agrippinus and his friend who leave their city to begin anew elsewhere, Charlie and Conrad leave Atlanta.

But the comparison should not be pushed too far. Human life is not constrained as metaphysically and politically as stoicism assumes. The difference between Charlie and Conrad and Agrippinus highlights how they come to much better fates than Agrippinus. Charlie and Conrad do not live under Nero or any other tyranny. They are free to rebuild new lives. In America, Conrad receives a light punishment from a judge impressed by his self-possessed demeanor. The state does not take away Charlie's property and status. He chooses to walk away from his possessions and respectability. Moreover, Charlie and Conrad are free to seek the company of other people with whom they can tell about being a spark of the divine. Atlanta's social elite is only a small part of the United States, and they are free to form a new social group of Zeus followers as an alternative to mainstream society. Epictetus's severe, uncompromising outlook of human life in which life is brutal

and unfair initially attracted Conrad, because he believed it was truer to his experience than the philosophy of autonomy he learned about in school. However, Conrad's decision to aid Rotto's victim and then fight Rotto is a turning point in which he realizes that life is neither as constrained as Epictetus teaches nor as autonomous as liberalism teaches.

Despite Epictetus's advice, Conrad decides to risk his own well-being for the sake of the well-being of another. In this way, Wolfe amends stoicism to be more other-regarding. How does Conrad reason to a duty to help others? Both Peter Augustine Lawler and P. J. O'Rourke argue that, in some manner, Wolfe introduces Christian concepts to stoicism. Lawler maintains that Conrad's first act as a stoic to come to the aid of the young man is "an awfully Christian one" and O'Rourke calls it an "act of Christian charity."[77] According to Lawler, stoicism "unrealistically exaggerates individual self-sufficiency" to the point that self-sufficiency and self-reliance on one's internal freedom for happiness deprives the individual of the "social context" in which courage "must operate to be genuinely fulfilling."[78] O'Rourke argues that Wolfe introduces Christian charity through Epictetus who functions as a Christ surrogate.[79]

Yet, both of these arguments go further than Wolfe's text to acknowledge Christianity's influence on Charlie and Conrad's stoicism. Lawler rightly argues that stoicism goes too far to make happiness utterly self-sufficient. Wolfe certainly points to this shortcoming of stoicism and shows that individual happiness depends on our relationships with others, but it is not clear that Wolfe understands his modification of stoicism to be an inclusion of Christian concepts, though he acknowledges a debt to Christian evangelical methods. Christian grassroots evangelicalism and big tent revivalism serve as models for Charlie and Conrad's success at popularizing stoicism in the Southeast. With the prospect of *The Stoic's Hour* being nationally broadcast, Charlie is poised to become a televangelist for stoicism. Wolfe admires Christian evangelicals, if not for their beliefs but for their proud counterculturalism.

In contrast to Lawler and O'Rourke, I maintain that Wolfe amends stoicism to complement liberal principles without turning to explicitly Christian ideas. Classic stoicism's self-reliant happiness is more suited to the living conditions under a Roman tyranny than in the United States. Wolfe adjusts stoicism to be more other-regarding, or more, properly speaking, political. Courageous action is needed against arbitrary and abusive power. Conrad quietly puts Epictetus's teaching to avoid the misfortunes of others aside as a politically prudent teaching in ancient Rome, but with less application is contemporary America. Instead, he realizes that the violation of a spark of the divine in one person exposes in principle every individual to the danger of becoming a plaything of brutes. Everyone is a spark of the divine—even

those who bring much of their misfortune upon themselves—that warrants protection against the abuses of the strong and powerful.

Standing up for others is certainly good, but it is not enough for Conrad.[80] There is still something missing. He longs to share the truth he sees in stoicism with another person. Indeed, Conrad longs to be like the students in Epictetus's dialogues and be able to converse with someone else about the truth of human life. But it is not for Conrad to be a student. Meeting Charlie presents Conrad with the opportunity to teach someone else about Epictetus. When Conrad meets Charlie, he sees how affected Charlie is by his physical decline and believes that Epictetus's teachings concerning the divine spark within everyone could help Charlie. Soon they become friends. Conrad honors Epictetus better by following his example of sharing his philosophy and having friends than if he refused to intervene in the lives of others. In this way, Wolfe suggests that even stoicism does not truly teach rigorous self-sufficient happiness, but that happiness includes sharing and exchanging one's ideas and beliefs with others.

By having Charlie host *The Stoic Hour*, a cheesy-sounding television show, Wolfe shocks our sensibilities so that we see that, from the vantage point of the mainstream, the pursuit of the truth is an affront to respectable society. Television might be considered an updated and American version of the marketplace. Philosophers have long reached out to people in the most ordinary of places. They have not cared about respectability, but about cultivating alternative ways of life with others. The great good of America is that people are free to find ways of living outside the mainstream, which they hope will be more conducive to happiness. Moreover, as Wolfe reminds us, the pursuit of truth has always been outside the mainstream.

Sherman and Charlie are similar protagonists; they are ruined while they conform to mainstream society, but learn to search for status and happiness outside of mainstream society. As we see in the epilogues, mainstream society—and even, no doubt, we readers—considers Sherman, Charlie, and Conrad's actions incomprehensible and wacky, but we also see that they are *happier*. Wolfe must shock our sensibilities so that we see how political liberty serves the pursuit of happiness. Whenever one social group pressures for conformity, we are politically free to leave and need only the courage to do so. Americans do not lack political liberty. But the will to use it is in short supply. From *The Bonfire of the Vanities* to *A Man in Full*, Wolfe shows that the United States lacks the proper support for the development of courage. It should not come as a surprise that in *I Am Charlotte Simmons* Wolfe turns to America's great universities and finds that these establishments dedicated to liberal education do not prepare students to live as free men and women. Unlike Sherman and Charlie, Charlotte does not find the courage to stand against her university's corrupt student life and instead seeks status within its rules.

I AM CHARLOTTE SIMMONS

The Bonfire of the Vanities and *A Man in Full* follow the lives of society's insiders. In contrast, *I Am Charlotte Simmons* traces the development of Charlotte Simmons, a social outsider who faces tremendous social pressure to fit into a corrupt society, but fails to find the courage to stand up for herself. Although she says "I Am Charlotte Simmons" to remind herself of her uniqueness, Charlotte lacks any independent self-understanding removed from the opinion of others. And despite frequently being reminded to stand above the crowd, her education does not prepare her to understand herself as a free being capable of making moral decisions apart from her peers. The proud claim "I Am Charlotte Simmons" proves to be hollow self-assertion.[81] Anemic and with little remembrance of its original purpose, liberal education weakly defends itself against antiliberal ideas that undermine belief in individual moral freedom. *I Am Charlotte Simmons* reminds its readers that the original purpose of liberal education is to prepare individuals to live as free moral agents—a task, Wolfe reminds us, Americans still need to perform today for the sake of pursuing happiness.

I Am Charlotte Simmons was less of a critical success than Wolfe's first two novels. Commentators agree that Wolfe unflatteringly depicts students preoccupied with casual sex, excessive drinking, and vulgar speech, but they sharply disagree on whether college life merits negative portrayal. Friendly reviewers praise the novel for its frank exposure of the corruption and immorality now commonplace at American universities.[82] Likening the novel to a cautionary tale, Mary Ann Glendon believes that the novel depicts "a parent's worst nightmare" because it shows a young, intelligent, innocent girl succumb to the pressures of college life.[83] On the other hand, negative commentators argue that Wolfe prudishly depicts behavior that should not be surprising and no cause for alarm.[84] *New York Times* reviewer, Michiko Kakutani sarcastically summed up the lesson of *I Am Charlotte Simmons*: "yikes—that students crave sex and beer, love to party, wear casual clothes, and use four-letter words."[85] Wolfe, however, presents a different view of his work. The novel was neither to be an exposé of university life nor a prudish rejection of it. Rather, his aim was to explore how universities morally educate young adults. In an interview, Wolfe claims that universities have displaced churches as the primary suppliers of guidance and morals on how to live in the United States today. For the most part, students learn various "isms" that are "subsets of the overarching theme of political correctness, which is tolerance."[86] Wolfe makes it clear that he is not against political correctness and tolerance. Indeed, he praises political correctness for fostering respect for minorities and according status to socially disadvantaged individuals who would otherwise lack status (such as AIDS patients). Nevertheless, Wolfe finds it *limited* in perspective and application. Political cor-

rectness, or rather, liberalism is limited because its primary virtue, tolerance, is passive. More is needed not only for justice, but to live well.

In contrast, Wolfe says that "Aristotelian justice could be severe as well as fair" and it "includes the courage to take up arms to fight in battle to defend your people."[87] Wolfe pointedly adds that when professors talk about courage and justice, they usually mean that students ought to stage a protest and carry placards. Yet, the deeper problem is that liberalism's virtue, tolerance, and its goal, social justice, are secularized Christian teachings (minus the cardinal virtues).[88] Social justice shies away from making distinctions among individuals so as to achieve maximum inclusion. Despite its success at according respect toward marginalized groups, liberalism overextends itself to all ideas and areas of life. It exerts incredible social pressure on the individual to follow its lead and makes the individual more dependent on the crowd for her ideas and modes of behavior. The upshot is that liberalism undermines the individual's self-confidence and denies her particular importance. If Wolfe presents hope in this novel, it resides in liberal education that more closely resembles the classical sense, as articulated by Charlotte who, as we shall see, recalls that learning to live as a free person is the purpose of a liberal education. Even if Charlotte lacks understanding and mouths what to her are meaningless phrases, the promise of a liberal education is meaningful to her boyfriend, Jojo. Jojo learns to resist his "jock" image and demands more from his college education.

Born in Sparta, North Carolina, a conservative, small, poor, uneducated area, Charlotte Simmons stands out as a remarkably intelligent young woman. She graduates from high school as the valedictorian, earns the top honors in nearly every field, and receives a perfect score on her SAT. Miss Pennington, her most trusted teacher and mentor, advises Charlotte to apply to the best American schools, and tells her "*you are destined to do great things*" (italics in original).[89] After being accepted to all, Charlotte accepts a full scholarship to Dupont University, a preeminent university on par with America's best Ivy League schools.

At first, Charlotte maintains her independence and withstands Dupont's easy and luxurious morality that differs greatly from Sparta's moral austerity and proud provincialism. But as I shall argue below, even before entering Dupont, Charlotte's earliest teachers, Mrs. Simmons and Miss Pennington, do not prepare her to look inward and find the fortitude to resist public opinion. She relies on the opinion of others for her self-understanding and so believes that she is the brilliant, exceptional, and independent person they think she is. Wolfe does not, therefore, present Charlotte simply as an innocent young woman corrupted by university life, although Dupont fails to educate her about herself.

Believing she is free from self-illusions, Charlotte tries to demonstrate her freedom by controlling Hoyt Thorpe, the most popular young man at Dupont,

who is attracted to her. Charlotte encourages Hoyt's sexual desire for her. Her goal is to withhold sex from him to demonstrate both his subjection to her and her superior self-control. But Charlotte cannot manage her erotic longings, and Hoyt and she have sex. Afterward, Hoyt disassociates himself from her and publicly humiliates her by crudely describing her first sexual experience. Charlotte realizes that Hoyt had never been under her control and that she was the one seduced and lacking in self-restraint. Charlotte falls into depression, but Adam Gellin, a geeky, intellectual young man who is attracted to her, helps her through it. After she recovers, Charlotte distances herself from Adam, because his friendship does not raise her status. Indeed, Charlotte forgets entirely that Adam had helped her. Like Charlie Croker who forgets that much of his success is credited to his first wife, Martha, Charlotte also forgets her debts and exaggerates her self-sufficiency. Charlotte becomes the girlfriend of Jojo, a basketball star, and ostensibly achieves the status she desires. Despite achieving her fondest wish, the novel's final scene reveals that Charlotte is internally troubled, conflicted, and unhappy.

From her childhood, Charlotte's outstanding intelligence sets her apart from her peers. Her mother, her teachers, and Sparta as a community consider Charlotte so exceptional that they treat and educate her as if she were a superior individual. Mrs. Simmons neglects to teach her daughter basic skills, such as sewing, which she thinks are unworthy of her daughter's superior intelligence.[90] Miss Pennington helps Charlotte advance in her academic studies and encourages her to think about her future and apply to America's best universities. Miss Pennington's care for Charlotte is in stark contrast to how she views most of her students: "they're not even worth the trouble it takes to ignore them."[91] Awed before Charlotte, the community marvels to account for Charlotte's remarkable intelligence given the ordinary material from which she sprung. The community views her like a demigod born without human parentage.

Being set apart, however, means that Charlotte does not easily make friends. In high school, she had only one close friend, but upon arriving at Dupont, she is friendless and isolated. Without friends, Charlotte lacks peers with whom she can confide her hopes as well as her insecurities. At Dupont, she lacks peers who care about her regardless of her personal achievements and her academic status. Charlotte needs friends with whom she can be herself.[92] Being herself, however, is problematic. Her status as superior leaves Charlotte without a clear sense of who she is. She has been repeatedly told she is superior, but if she is above everyone else, where does she belong? Being superior indicates that she is qualitatively better than those who are inferior. But with respect to what reference point? In Sparta, her academic achievement won her accolades. Removed from Sparta's tight community that gave Charlotte her reference point, she struggles at Dupont to know who she is.

Nevertheless, both Mrs. Simmons and Miss Pennington believe they can explain who Charlotte is and vie with each other to influence her. As her mother, Mrs. Simmons believes Charlotte owes who she is to God and her Spartan community.[93] As her closest teacher, Miss Pennington believes she midwifed (metaphorically) Charlotte's intellectual genius. Yet both Mrs. Simmons and Miss Pennington fail to teach Charlotte about herself. Both Mrs. Simmons and Miss Pennington believe Charlotte is a superior order individual and, consequently, neither teaches Charlotte to recognize her limits and faults. While both Mrs. Simmons and Miss Pennington believe they help Charlotte to stay independent and unique, they fail to recognize that being a single outsider leaves Charlotte vulnerable to peer pressure.

Though Mrs. Simmons realizes that her own life had been limited, she takes comfort in her religion and takes pride in her daughter's extraordinary intellect, which she identified when Charlotte was a toddler. As a creature of God, Mrs. Simmons believes her daughter's duty lies in moral rectitude. However, when Mrs. Simmons advises her daughter to resist peer pressure, she does not turn to Christian resources, but to her Spartan and mountain roots. Mrs. Simmons tells Charlotte that when facing peer pressure at Dupont, she should remember that mountain people are "stubborn."[94] Mrs. Simmons advises her daughter that all she has to say is "'I'm Charlotte Simmons, and I don't hold with thangs like 'at.'"[95] Mrs. Simmons is more Spartan than Christian. She appeals to her daughter's pride as a Spartan rather than her humility. For Mrs. Simmons, consequently, there is no question of who her daughter is. She owes God her chastity and Sparta her allegiance. Duty is accepted without argument and challenges to duty are rejected without argument, but with proud self-assertion. However, for Charlotte, Mrs. Simmons's concept of identity is too narrow. Sparta does not encompass all of who Charlotte is. Charlotte shares neither her mother's unwavering faith nor her identity as mountain folk and she prefers Miss Pennington's teachings that point her outside of her experiences in Sparta.

In contrast to Mrs. Simmons, Miss Pennington teaches Charlotte that she has no fixed identity and no content other than what she constructs herself.[96] She believes that Charlotte will, through acts of self-creation, accomplish great things on her own. By introducing Charlotte to the idea of self-creation and absence of fixed human nature, Miss Pennington prepares Charlotte for Dupont's postmodern worldview in which the self, the soul, and free will are illusions to be overcome. Miss Pennington predicts that Charlotte will have troubles with her peers at Dupont and throughout her life. To comfort and harden Charlotte in the face of her peers' scorn for her, Miss Pennington reminds Charlotte that Nietzsche called the people who resent great individuals, like Charlotte, "tarantulas" and that they take pleasure in tearing down the great.[97] Although she foresees that Charlotte will face envy and resent-

ment, Miss Pennington fails to understand Charlotte's rather commonplace desire to be accepted by her peers and to have friends.

At Dupont, Charlotte's neuroscience professor, Mr. Starling, captures her interest. Charlotte believes that Mr. Starling's teachings are exactly what Miss Pennington had promised she would discover beyond Sparta.[98] She found a teacher who "would lead her to the innermost secrets of life."[99] In addition to friends, Charlotte, after all, longs for a teacher. Mr. Starling boasts that his teachings on neuroscience are the real logical conclusion of philosophic materialism.[100] As the better materialist than Karl Marx, Mr. Starling argues that the brain constructs the illusion of the self, the soul, and free will. The "self" is not a "command center" but is like a "village marketplace," in which ideas come to the individual and reside in the mind.[101] From these ideas, the mind constructs the idea of a "self." The mind goes on to construct the idea of free will. Consequently, free will is not real, but a false impression. As an illustration, Starling compares a human to a rock that is thrown in the air. Midway in the rock's journey, it is given self-consciousness. Discovering itself in motion, the thrown conscious rock believes it has free will and "will give you a highly rational account of why it has decided to take the route it's taking."[102]

The thrown rock is powerless to alter its path. External forces alone can change the thrown conscious rock's course, and Mr. Starling explains how scientists can manipulate the brain to alter the mind. Mr. Starling praises José Delgado's experiment that reinvigorated the study of the brain, which had been considered a dead end since Freudian psychology overshadowed material causation. By manipulating rods connected to a bull's brain, Delgado halted the charging bull by switching off its rage. The lesson, Mr. Starling concludes, is that "not only emotions but also *purposes* and *intentions* are physical matters" (italics in original).[103] All that individuals think, feel, and intend are products of the physical workings of the brain over which the individual has no control. Delgado, and, consequently, Mr. Starling, maintain that humans are wholly natural beings. The "self" is a construct of the brain and so a person has no control over her thoughts, feelings, and purposes. This conforms to Mr. Starling's own Nobel prize-winning experiment. His experiment showed that a strong social environment, even an unhealthy environment, would eventually "overwhelm the genetically determined responses of perfectly normal, healthy animals."[104] A person's brain takes in ideas from the outside and uses them to construct the self. The consequence is that the individual has no internal resources to resist external pressures.

Mr. Starling mentions Walter Reed, Madame Curie, and Jose Delgado as scientists who faced danger in conducting their experiments. But Mr. Starling clarifies that they did not exhibit courage, but its "obverse."[105] Instead of fear of danger, they had such great "faith in the empirical validity of their physical knowledge and their own powers of logic" and their "faith in rationalism"

that they had no need of courage.[106] By courage, Mr. Starling means the Aristotelian understanding of courage as the virtue, or, more precisely, the disposition with respect to fear of death. To be clear, courage does not free us from fear of death. As Aristotle explains, in response to our fear, we do not let that fear control us. We rise above our fear by risking our lives. If we can risk the very thing that we fear losing, then we are free from our fear. Consequently, this means that we choose our actions and that our choices are not determined by external or internal physical forces. Aristotle's moral virtues depend on his distinction between voluntary and involuntary acts. The former happens "as a result of force or on account of ignorance" whereas "the origin" of a voluntary act is "the person himself" and it is "up to him to act or not to act."[107] For acts to be free, the source, or origin, comes from within the individual. Aristotle qualifies that the individual chooses with self-awareness and knowledge of the circumstances in which he acts.

Mr. Starling's materialism denies the possibility of voluntary actions, because, according to him, there is no real "self" to feel fear. According to Mr. Starling, Madame Curie, Walter Reed, and Delgado had "no more fear than the conjurer who swallows fire."[108] To complete Mr. Starling's comparison, those who believe in virtuous action such as courage are like those who believe conjurers truly swallow fire. Actions only appear to be voluntary, because one cannot see the workings of the brain. Virtue is a rationalization constructed by the brain to explain the apparent freedom of its decisions. Since voluntary action is impossible, according to Mr. Starling, there is no way for an individual to strike out on his own and resist the crowd.

For Aristotle, fear is good and healthy, because it means that there is self-awareness—consciousness of the self as a particular entity who has a stake in her particular existence. Mr. Starling's scientists are weirdly unaware of themselves. In his lectures, however, Mr. Starling unintentionally affirms that there is a way to resist a dominant culture. Mr. Starling reserves special praise for José Delgado and his *persistence* in studying the functioning of the brain as the key to understanding human behavior *against* the dominant culture in the 1930s that favored Freudian psychoanalysis. According to Mr. Starling's model of human behavior, Delgado should have been a follower of Freud like others in his profession. In spite of Mr. Starling's strict materialism, he understands himself as a free being. Delgado's faith in rationalism gave him a way to transcend social pressure. Mr. Starling is unable to explain or even acknowledge how the scientist is free through his adherence to a higher truth. Like a conjurer revealing his trick, Mr. Starling lets his class in on the so-called truth that humans are thrown rocks. And like all conjurers, Mr. Starling succeeds with misdirection. Charlotte is so pleased with learning the trick that she never pauses to consider how Mr. Starling's account of Delgado's faith in rationalism and in his powers of observation, reason and logic assume that there is a self.

Given Charlotte's past influences, combined with those of Dupont, we should not be surprised that her first months at Dupont are not happy. At Dupont, Charlotte finds that her small-town origins and modest means do not afford her the manners or possessions of the typical teenagers entering college. Like her hometown's namesake Sparta, she is accustomed to strictness, simplicity, and austerity. Charlotte is, at first, appalled by the lax self-deportment of her fellow students, their easy habits and morals, and their wealth of superfluous electronic devices and possessions. She is disgusted by co-ed dorms and bathrooms, the free use of profanity, and the special treatment accorded to student athletes. And she is repelled by her roommate's frequent late nights, drunken behavior, and many sexual partners.

Unsurprisingly, Charlotte feels contemptuously superior toward her fellow college students. She takes solace in her independence and capacity to adhere to the rigorous demands of concentration and dedication necessary for strong academic achievement. She values the lessons of her neuroscience course that there is no such thing as a self, free will, and the soul, because it is esoteric knowledge. Although she lacks sufficient self-reflection to apply the teaching to herself, Charlotte delights in albeit abstract membership to a small, select group of elite individuals who are in the know. But contemptuous superiority is a poor surrogate for company and friendship. Soon loneliness, self-pity, and envy for the college students going out in the evening with their friends overwhelm Charlotte.

In contrast to Charlotte, Jojo, a popular basketball player, starts to discover that college might be for more than hoping to be drafted by the NBA and having a good time. In fact, Jojo first learns that a liberal arts education is for the sake of living as a free person from Charlotte. Through the exchange between Charlotte and Jojo on the meaning of liberal arts education, Wolfe illustrates how, in spite of her intelligence, Charlotte cannot hide how little she really understands—Wolfe, no doubt, suggests that many who mouth "liberal arts" do not understand anything about it. Nevertheless, Jojo learns from Charlotte's lesson because the truth of it does not depend on her understanding. Charlotte explains to Jojo the etymology of liberal and historical meaning of liberal arts. She tells him that the word liberal comes from the Latin word, *liber*, that means free and also book. The Romans used to educate slaves in practical sciences like mathematics and engineering so that slaves could be useful in building and in music so that slaves could be entertaining. Certain disciplines, like rhetoric and philosophy, were reserved for the citizens of Rome, because "these disciplines teach the art of persuasion."[109] The Romans kept knowledge of the arts of persuasion—the liberal arts—to themselves, because they did not want the slaves to learn how to make arguments for their freedom.

Jojo immediately grasps the import of what Charlotte has explained. Jojo feels the sting of being treated like a slave. He realizes that easy classes for

jocks are a way of treating the student athletes like slaves, because "thinking might distract [them] from what [they] were hired for."[110] Jojo knows that he cannot remain in jock courses and be the stooge of the athletic department. Jojo does not hesitate about what he ought to do and plans to enroll in a philosophy course called the "The Age of Socrates." He confronts his coach, Coach Roth, to announce his decision. He tells Coach Roth: "I'm tired of—you know, skimming and scamming by the way I've been doing. I'm not just a stupid jock, I'm tired of treating myself like one!"[111] Jojo used to believe that his natural talent at basketball made him a superior student. Once aware that there is a superior standard to what passes for excellence at Dupont, Jojo is too proud to settle for less. He seeks the courses and professors who will guide him to receive the education that befits a free person. It is not easy either. He stands up to his imposing coach, accepts the scorn of his fellow basketball players, and takes rigorous philosophy courses with a professor little inclined to go easy on him. In this way, Wolfe shows that it is possible for those who pursue a liberal education to receive one—even at a university like Dupont and by implication at America's best Ivy League schools, which it was said to resemble.[112]

Whereas Jojo is willing to change his habits and risk his friends and standing on the team for the sake of becoming a liberally educated adult, Charlotte—who can recite perfectly the Latin root of liberal and the historical origin of liberal art—shows through her speech and deeds that she does not believe that liberal education can teach freedom. When Charlotte tells Jojo that *liber* means free, she notes that *liber* also means book, but dismisses this fact as "coincidence."[113] Books contain the arts of persuasion and encourage critical thinking so that, as our language reflects, reading books is closely related to being free. Jojo understands this connection, and, later in the novel, Wolfe shows him reading Aristotle. Jojo longs for the kind of freedom from and transcendence over material necessity that the liberal arts promise. In contrast, Charlotte's dedication to academic excellence diminishes as she gains more status in the eyes of her peers through her association with Hoyt, one of the most popular boys. Academic excellence for Charlotte was never a way to achieve freedom and virtue, but perversely how she enslaved herself to the opinions of others. Charlotte's education—both at Sparta and at Dupont—fails to instill in her a love of excellence and virtue that could fortify her to resist the easy immorality so prevalent among her peers.

Jojo learns about how he must live to achieve happiness from studying the ancient Greek thinkers Plato and Socrates. Jojo looks to Socrates to give him guidance on happiness and especially likes Socrates's advice "[i]f a man debauches himself, believing this will bring him happiness, then he errs from ignorance, not knowing what true happiness is."[114] Unhappiness comes from ignorance and so only those who do not know better pursue sexual pleasures in the hopes of being happy. It is like a lightbulb turning on for Jojo who has

spent plenty of time chasing sexual conquests. Smugly, Jojo supposes that self-restraint and so happiness will come easily to him. Quite naturally as anyone who has wrestled with Plato can attest, Jojo takes pleasure in understanding Socrates's teachings.

Yet, Jojo learns from reading Aristotle that human beings are more complicated and so their happiness requires more than reason, but also virtue—the inward, habitual disposition of the soul toward the passions. Jojo reads that Aristotle criticizes Socrates for overlooking the irrational parts of the soul that lead individuals to do what they know to be wrong. Jojo realizes the conflict on happiness. Is happiness knowledge and unhappiness ignorance? Or, is there more to happiness than knowledge, because the frailty of human resolve might lead individuals to do what they know is wrong? Jojo, who had been leaning in favor of Socrates's understanding of happiness, soon learns that he is capable of moral weakness when a girl enters his hotel room and seduces him. Self-restraint is not as easy as he thought. Jojo learns that Aristotelian virtue provides a correction to the Socratic understanding of happiness as knowledge. Virtue must be practiced. Wolfe draws out a lesson that what distinguishes individuals is not their ability to reason—or superior natural intelligence as Charlotte thinks or superior natural athletic skill as Jojo had thought—so much as it is their virtue. All human beings share the same passions and desires, but it is how we choose to respond to our passions that distinguishes us and gives us claim to merit and praise.

During her depression that follows her humiliating first sexual experience with Hoyt, Charlotte almost engages in the self-reflective inquiry that would lead her to discover new grounds for pursuing virtue and excellence. The old maxim, "I am Charlotte Simmons," that used to reassure her that she was an individual without equal—above the herd—who did not stoop to the base animal level of her fellow students fails to bring her any comfort. Charlotte hits it with a hammer or tuning fork, as Nietzsche's Zarathustra sounded the idols, and hears it ring hollow. She realizes "what a pathetic, what a feeble piece of self-delusion" it was for her to believe that she was so constituted by nature that she did not share with her fellow peers the same longings, needs, and weaknesses.[115] That Charlotte submitted to her desires and had sex with Hoyt vividly shows how susceptible she is to the same passions that govern her peers. Her superior natural intelligence combined with the education she received in Sparta encouraged her to believe that she transcended her lusts and desires. Consequently, Charlotte thought she did not need self-control, but could exert control over Hoyt. In fact, Charlotte deeply lacks self-discipline. She has always been restrained and guided by the opinions of others—such as her teachers and the community in Sparta and the students at Dupont—sometimes to her benefit and other times not so much. The moment is ripe for Charlotte, like Jojo, to realize a surer ground for virtue, excellence, and happiness.

Throughout Charlotte's depression, Adam Gellin, a young aspiring intellectual who is attracted to her, shows Charlotte the best of friendship and helps her recover. Charlotte calls Adam "my only friend," and confides exclusively to him the whole story about losing her virginity to Hoyt. Adam diligently takes care of her and eventually helps Charlotte recover, thus demonstrating that what Charlotte needed was a friend—someone with whom she could confide, who could see her at her worst, and who would protect, soothe, and give her timely amounts of "tough love." Despite the extensive time, devotion, and self-denial (of his romantic interest in her) that Adam gives Charlotte as he succors her into recovery, Charlotte conveniently forgets it as soon as she has recovered. She returns to believing the old lie that she is of a superior order.

Comparing herself to the phoenix, Charlotte tells herself that "[s]he had risen from the ashes. I *am* Charlotte Simmons again" (italics in original).[116] She has not learned that she is not the self-created and singular being that the mythical phoenix is. In Sparta, Charlotte received the support of her family, friends, and community, and at Dupont, Adam encourages and helps her. Charlotte credits only herself for her success and resurrection. When Adam faces academic ruin and the opportunity arises for Charlotte to give him care and friendly support, she perfunctorily reciprocates. Soon she wearies and resents helping him. Charlotte cannot bear helping Adam, because it reminds her that she owes him for her recovery—a fact that she tries to suppress to herself. It exposes the lie contained in her self-asserted, but ultimately superficial maxim "I am Charlotte Simmons." Charlotte's so-called recovery is an unfortunate regression and missed opportunity to look into who she is.

However, her recovery does not come in time to save her first semester GPA. When Charlotte is unable to explain the dramatic drop in her grades to her mother, Mrs. Simmons sturdily says, "[s]ounds to me like what you need right now is a talk with your own soul."[117] Charlotte never has a talk with her soul, because, as Mr. Starling taught her, the "soul" in quotations is an invention of her brain—there is no soul or self to engage. Nevertheless, Wolfe does show us a conversation between Charlotte and her "soul" in quotations in which Charlotte evades self-reflection. By denying her "self," her "self" has not withered away or disappeared. Charlotte is haunted by her "soul." With every assertion of "I am Charlotte Simmons," it asks "'[y]es, but what does that mean? Who *is* she?'" (italics in original).[118] Charlotte draws a blank. She is unable to think of any way in which she is different, special, or set apart from the crowd. Charlotte buries the secret truth within herself that all she ever wanted was to be thought of as superior. When she was in Sparta, outstanding academic success had given her the status she desired. At Dupont, she discovers that having sex with the popular Hoyt raised her status on campus. As Jojo's girlfriend, Charlotte achieves the status she wanted, but she is troubled, unhappy, and privately doubtful.

In the crucial final scene of the novel, Charlotte, as Jojo's girlfriend, attends one of his basketball games in which he is the star player. Although plenty of people greet her, she sits alone. Instead of focusing on Jojo's performance, she fantasizes that the audience credit her for his academic and athletic turnaround. We readers know that she inspired him to seek a real liberal arts education, but Jojo's Socratic turn to philosophy takes place before they begin dating. Charlotte is not proud of Jojo per se, but she imagines that his achievements are her achievements. She even notes that she finds his conversation lacking in intellectual development.[119] She takes pride in the thought that people believed she "had the giant whipped."[120] This is another indication of how Charlotte still thinks that she has control over others—particularly, control over another's sexual desire for her. Charlotte believes she is at her apex, but rather Wolfe shows us that she is sadly self-deluded. Jojo is not Charlotte's trained dog, but he has learned how to control his passions and desires. On the other hand, Charlotte, it seems, still harbors affection for Hoyt and falsely believes that he truly loved her at one time. Nevertheless, despite her doubts and misgivings, Charlotte believes that she has achieved the status she wanted that sets her above the rest as Jojo's girlfriend.

Instead of being distinctive or apart from the crowd, Charlotte joins the crowd. At the beginning of the novel, Charlotte stood before her graduating class and gave the valedictorian speech, and, at the novel's close, Charlotte sits among a crowd of basketball fans who pay little attention to her, but watch Jojo play his best. Charlotte's empty maxim "I am Charlotte Simmons" fails to provide her with the support for virtue and the personal pride and integrity to resist the crowd. By the novel's final line, Charlotte sings with the crowd, because, as Wolfe tells us, "[i]t obviously behooved Jojo Johanssen's girlfriend to join in."[121] Through the course of the novel, Charlotte loses any understanding of who she is till she has little independent identity from the crowd.

TURNING TO THE ANCIENTS FOR COURAGE

Over the course of his first three novels, Wolfe's writings indicate that the individual pursuit of happiness—even in the move away from one social group—is not necessarily into a state of isolation from others, but is a move with other people into a new social group. Americans enjoy the freedom to leave one social group and join or create another that shares similar values and interests. For Wolfe, the possibility of leaving one social group and finding or founding another society guided by different rules and morals for achieving status distinguishes the American regime from socially stratified nations and, furthermore, makes the pursuit of happiness possible. *Anna*

Karenina, Wolfe says, is "Tolstoy's concept of the heart at war with the structure of society."[122] Wolfe supposes that if Tolstoy's Anna and Vronsky were contemporary New Yorkers, they would move in with each other with much less fuss.[123] However, Wolfe quickly adds that America society still exerts considerable pressure on the hearts of individuals that "provides an infinite number of new agonies for the Annas and Vronskys of the Upper East Side."[124] For Wolfe, pursuing happiness means standing up to public opinion and striking out on one's own. In the absence of class structure, Wolfe recognizes the tenacious hold public opinion has over individuals and how ill-equipped individuals are to go against society. His characters must learn to forgo their status with one group and find another, friendlier group—one that probably will be frowned upon (or at least regarded as a bit loony) by mainstream society. When Sherman, Charlie, and Conrad find the courage to pursue happiness, society considers them a bit crazy. The epilogues in both novels reveal the extent to which orthodox society regards Sherman, Charlie, and Conrad to be nuts and outside social norms. Wolfe admires countercultural and oddball pursuers of happiness for their courage.

In contrast, *I Am Charlotte Simmons* does not have an epilogue that presents a view of Charlotte as she appears to her peers. No longer the outsider from the mountains of Sparta, Charlotte fits in and takes her place in the crowd at the basketball game. Without his customary epilogue, Wolfe reveals her inner thoughts to the reader so as to show how Charlotte rejects the task of self-examination demanded by her soul. But *I Am Charlotte Simmons* is not a wholly unhappy ending. Wolfe shows us her internal struggle—despite her efforts she cannot suppress partial knowledge and awareness of the lie she lives. Her story is not complete. Hope remains for Charlotte both because she yet has a long life ahead of her and through her relationship with Jojo, which I will discuss below.

Unlike Sherman and Charlie who are mature men and benefited from years of worldly success, Charlotte is a young, inexperienced woman who wants what most teenage girls want—friends, a boyfriend, and some measure of approval from her peers. It may be asked if it is fair to hold Charlotte to the same standard as Sherman and Charlie who can leave their former lives behind them and yet draw on a lifetime of plucky daring to see them through.[125] Wolfe seems highly sympathetic to Charlotte's longings to have friends and to belong to a social group in which she is regarded highly. It is understandable that friendless Charlotte prefers to be Jojo's girlfriend than to be alone. Perhaps she hoped that she might, through Jojo's social connections, meet new people with whom to establish friendships. Nevertheless, Charlotte does not seem happy as Jojo's girlfriend, but troubled and insecure. It is not that she should drop out of Dupont like how Sherman turns his back on the New York establishment and how Charlie rejects his former success. Sherman discovers that his family is the most important part of his life. His

struggle is to remain free—literally, out of prison. Charlie and Conrad learn that real freedom is internal and cannot be taken away. Even when facing the prospect of returning to prison, Conrad knows that his soul will remain free. Their stories feature self-discovery and happiness built on liberty. On the other hand, Charlotte is trapped within a self-understanding that denies the possibility of a free self. Charlotte needs to confront herself not necessarily break with a social group. Charlotte's mother is right that she needs a talk with her soul to discover who she is.

The more positive development both in *I Am Charlotte Simmons* and in Wolfe's critique of the pursuit of happiness is Jojo's turn toward Aristotelian virtue. Jojo represents a unique hero among Wolfe's characters, because he does not leave society to pursue happiness. Instead, Jojo takes charge of his decisions, leads others to change, and restores order. Jojo confronts his coach, Coach Roth, about his decision to enroll in an upper level philosophy course, which he vehemently opposes. Later, however, Coach Roth praises Jojo and says he is proud of Jojo.[126] Throughout much of the novel, Jojo feared that an underclassman basketball player would outshine him and displace him on the basketball team. Jojo learns to control his fear and assume his place as the preeminent star. By the end of the novel, Jojo enjoys the promise of the liberal arts—he has learned how to live as a free person. Moreover, by remaining in society, Jojo may inspire others and contribute to restoring—at least in part—the liberal arts at Dupont.

That Jojo remains in society and at the top of society represents a new, more moderate possibility in Wolfe's thought to the pursuit of happiness than the alternative presented by Sherman, Charlie, and Conrad. For Sherman, Charlie, and Conrad, their societies are so disordered and out of touch with promoting meaningful human goods that their only hope is to live in opposition, like Sherman, or as outsiders on the fringe, like Charlie and Conrad. In contrast, Jojo is triumphant at the end of the novel. He succeeds in living well and participating in society—not just as a part, but as a leader and model for others. He can imagine society better and is capable of not only restoring it, but creating new possibilities. Jojo knew that he did not want to be a slavish entertainer as a dumb jock basketball player and so takes action to pursue a liberal arts education without giving up basketball. Jojo brings together academics and athletics—skills only coincidentally found in the same person much like a philosopher-king—and so rises in the minds of those around him respect for liberal arts and philosophy.[127] Jojo plays basketball not as an entertainer, but as one who has learned self-control of his passions and self-discipline of his body. A test of his ability to restore order will be to help Charlotte. In the glimpse into Charlotte's thoughts, we readers learn that she believes she restrains Jojo sexually, but we have only her word on it. It is more likely that Jojo and Charlotte are learning self-restraint together.

Despite having political freedom, individuals face tremendous pressure to pursue goals, such as wealth and power, that society esteems, but that are unlikely to bring happiness. More troubling is that Wolfe does not identify support for courage within our official documents. Support for courage must come from alternative resources compatible, or at least, able to coexist with liberalism. Wolfe turns to the thicker conceptions of the good brought to America by immigrants and also ancient philosophies to provide his characters with the foundation for courageous action. Furthermore, he highlights liberalism's insufficient supports for courageous and virtuous action that fosters a more meaningful concept of happiness than mere human comforts. Yet, Wolfe does not champion ancient thought without question. As shown in *A Man in Full*, Wolfe puts ancient courage in service of the modern individual to resist public opinion and to pursue happiness. Conrad realizes that the stoics believed wrongly that human life so much resembled a prison that one could not intervene against abusive and arbitrary force for the sake of another's well-being. Stoic freedom and courage have no further purpose than the individual's private and internal happiness. The stoics underestimated what humans can do to improve our lives and the lives of others with respect to the political conditions under which we live. Conrad's defense of the victimized young man in the prison is based on a liberal belief that the primary ingredient to living well is being free of arbitrary and illegitimate force.

In *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, Wolfe turns to the ancient Greeks and the conflict between Athens and Sparta. If stoics relied too heavily on internal restraint for happiness and resistance to negative influences, Charlotte's modern Sparta succeeds only with external restraints and rewards. Once removed from Sparta, Charlotte lacks the necessary internal self-discipline to resist the immoral ways of her peers at Dupont. Mrs. Simmons's advice for her daughter to remember that she is from Sparta is too feeble and shallow a support for virtue. Charlotte is too smart for simple rustic pride in her hometown, because she sees how her origins cannot explain her intelligence. She seems greater than where she came from and falls for Miss Pennington's easy Nietzschean teachings that she is destined for great things. Neither Sparta nor Nietzsche can provide Charlotte with the knowledge of who she is for the sake of resisting her peers and creating new possibilities under which to live. Instead, Charlotte succumbs to peer pressure and Mr. Starling's neuroscience that promises to explain who she is through radical materialism. Athens, and particularly Aristotle, however, corrects deficiencies in stoicism and in Sparta. Wolfe turns to Aristotle over the stoics and Sparta for his superior insight that we need others to help us against internal moral weakness and in the pursuit of virtue and happiness.

In the next chapter, we will revisit stoicism's influence in American thought, particularly in the old South, as described by Walker Percy. Like

Wolfe, Percy recognizes much merit in stoicism as a resource within the United States to resist our worst tendencies toward materialism, individualism, and alienation. However, whereas Wolfe adjusts stoicism, Percy rejects stoicism for failing to provide a meaningful correction of liberalism and turns toward more transcendent, religious sources. More fully developed in Percy's writings than in Wolfe's, Percy also considers science and scientific thought as a danger to our understanding as free beings.

NOTES

1. Much of this article was previously published in Elizabeth Amato, "Science and the (Lockean) Pursuit of Happiness in Tom Wolfe's *I Am Charlotte Simmons*," *Perspectives on Political Science* 40 (2011): 132–39.

2. Tom Wolfe, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast: A Literary Manifesto for the New Social Novel," *Harper's* 279 (November 1989): 45 and 47. According to Wolfe, after World War II, aspiring young American novelists were discouraged from writing realistic novels in the vein as Thackeray, Zola, Dickens, and Sinclair Lewis because such novels were considered (by leading intellectuals) to be contemptibly bourgeois. Moreover, realistic novels were not possible because American life is not real, but, instead, American life is "chaotic, fragmented, random, discontinuous; in a word, *absurd*" (49; italics in original).

3. Wolfe, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast," 51. With self-conscious determination, Wolfe writes novels that "portray the individual in intimate and inextricable relation to the society around him" (50). The individual cannot be understood abstracted from society, and, in fact, the best way to show the individual's inner person is by depicting how he relates to society. Consequently, depicting how these new status social structures affect the individual is the peculiar task and challenge to the American novelist.

4. Tom Wolfe, *The Pump House Gang* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 5.

5. Alexis de Tocqueville writes that "[a]s citizens become more equal and alike, the penchant of each to believe blindly a certain man or class diminishes. The disposition to believe the mass is augmented, and more and more it is opinion that leads the world" in *Democracy in America*, ed. and trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (London: The Folio Society, 2002), 409. Tocqueville further writes of the individual that "when he comes to view the sum of those like him and places himself at the side of this great body, he is immediately overwhelmed by his own insignificance and his weakness" (409).

6. Rejecting Wolfe's claim to write a realistic novel, Brock Clarke calls his novels "plodding, self-pleased, cartoonish in "The Novel Is Dead (Long Live the Novel)," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 82 (2006): 165. Instead of faithfully representing social structures, James N. Stull argues that Wolfe manipulates and structures social arrangements like a "master gamesman in "The Cultural Gamesmanship of Tom Wolfe," *Journal of American Culture* 14 (1991): 25. Although examining only nonfiction works, Lisa Stokes argues that close and thoughtful examination of Wolfe's narrative style reveals that Wolfe does not manipulate his subjects, but rather "[n]arrator Wolfe respects his subjects' integrity as autonomous narrative forces" in "Tom Wolfe's Narratives as Stories of Growth," *Journal of American Culture* 14 (1991): 19.

7. William McKeen notes that a reviewer of *The Bonfire of the Vanities* troubled to count its 2,343 exclamation points in *Tom Wolfe*, Twayne's United States Authors Series (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 125.

8. Rand Richards Cooper, "Tom Wolfe, Material Boy," *Commonweal* 9 (1999): 13.

9. Cooper, "Tom Wolfe," 15. Frank Conroy makes a similar observation that Wolfe's characters are relatively think sketches based on what they wear and buy in "Urban Rats in Fashion's Maze," *The New York Times Book Review,* November 1, 1987, http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/11/08/specials/wolfe-bonfire.html?mcubz=0.

10. Friendlier commentators on Wolfe's writings have emphasized how his heroes have been dissatisfied or led astray in their quest for status and have left these social groups to seek

nobler goals. In the tradition of Joseph Campbell's writings, Gary Konas argues that the subjects of Wolfe's nonfiction writings are like literary heroes that undergo the classic rite and journey of mythic heroes in "Travelling 'Furthur' with Tom Wolfe's Heroes," *Journal of Popular Culture* 28 (1994): 177–92. Drawing predominately on Wolfe's nonfiction works and *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, Sheri F. Crawford argues that Wolfe's heroes are "outlaw gentlemen" who demonstrate their freedom and individuality by turning away from the crowd often as a "lone adventurer," nonconformist, or heretic to pursue a higher "calling" in Sheri F. Crawford, "Tom Wolfe: Outlaw Gentleman," *Journal of American Culture* 13 (1990): 39.

11. Carol McNamara, "The Pursuit of Happiness, American Style: Tom Wolfe's Study of Status and Freedom," *Perspectives on Political Science* 34 (2010): 16.

12. McNamara terms this characteristic turning of Wolfe's characters "transcendence" in which some (though not all) characters "either escape or rise above the expectations of others in a way that transcends mere status and achieves true freedom in "The Pursuit of Happiness, American Style," 16.

13. Ronald Weber, "Tom Wolfe's Happiness Explosion," *Journal of Popular Culture* 8 (1974): 71.

14. Weber, "Tom Wolfe's Happiness Explosion," 72.

15. The collapse of traditional society allows for "the celebration of the comic, pleasure-seeking, self-centered modes of the happiness explosion" in Weber, "Tom Wolfe's Happiness Explosion," 78.

16. Even so, Weber may be right about Wolfe's early and nonfiction works, but this is why it is important to consider Wolfe's later and fictional writings.

17. Anjuli Sastry and Karen Grigsby Bates, "When LA Erupted in Anger: A Look at the Rodney King Riots," *NPR*, April 26, 2017, http://www.npr.org/2017/04/26/524744989/when-la-erupted-in-anger-a-look-back-at-the-rodney-king-riots.

18. Chauncey Alcorn and Leonard Greene, "Brother Recalls Michael Griffith's 1986 Racially Charged Death in Howard Beach That Shook NYC," *New York Daily News*, December 20, 2016, http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/kin-recalls-michael-griffith-1986-racial-death-howard-beach-article-1.2917988.

19. See Joshua J. Masters's critique of Wolfe's depiction of race in *Bonfire* in "Race and the Infernal City in Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities*," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 29 (1999): 208–27.

20. Tom Wolfe, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (New York: Dial Press Trade Paperback, 2005) 13. Sherman's self-description as a "Master of the Universe" is no isolated event in the book. Wolfe has Sherman mentally invoke the phrase throughout the novel, usually to express vainglorious self-importance ("He was part of the pulverizing might of Pierce & Pierce, Masters of the Universe. The audacity of it all was breathtaking," 68) or indignation (annoyed with his father Sherman thinks to himself "you and your two hundred Wall Street lawyers were nothing but functionaries for Masters of the Universe" 223). Or Wolfe uses it to comic effect so as to show Sherman's lack of mastery ("Hidden behind the toilet door, the Master of the Universe began ransacking the newspaper at a furious clip, page by filthy page" 132). Although Sherman misses the irony of reminding himself of a child's plaything, we the readers do not, and realize long before he does that his mastery is an illusion.

21. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 13.

22. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 75.

23. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 69.

24. Crawford, "Outlaw Gentleman," 39–50.

25. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 221–23.

26. Crawford, "Outlaw Gentleman," 39.

27. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 12.

28. Commentators on the relationship between Sherman and his father typically flatten John McCoy's character to be simply representative of the WASP establishment. See Crawford, "Outlaw Gentleman," and Carol McNamara,"Men and Money in Tom Wolfe's America," in *Seers and Judges: American Literature as Political Philosophy*, ed. by Christine Dunn Henderson (Lanham, MD, Lexington Books: 2002), 128. Yet they overlook how the Lion must have been quite a social climber himself to have been the son of a Knoxville nobody and so

successfully ingratiated himself with the old New York social structure to become the well-respected, aristocratic lawyer that we see in the novel.

29. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 414.
30. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 56.
31. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 418.
32. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 54.
33. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 133.
34. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 56.
35. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 57.
36. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 59.
37. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 372.
38. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 373.
39. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 372.
40. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 348.
41. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 348.
42. The last glimpse of Sherman comes through the eyes of *The New York Times*'s ostentatiously named reporter Overton Holmes Jr. who presents Sherman's unorthodox behavior as loony. Here Wolfe reminds us that dropping out of the traditional social structure will appear ridiculous.
43. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 636.
44. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 637.
45. Wolfe, *Bonfire*, 69 and 596. At the time, Sherman enjoyed discussing with her that "while he worked *on* Wall Street, he was not *of* Wall Street and was only *using* Wall Street." (69; italics in original). Wolfe twice recalls this habit in the novel and the second occasion will be discussed below.
46. Many commentators on *The Bonfire of the Vanities* agree that the novel's ending is dissatisfying and also reveals that Wolfe has left the reader without a heroic character. Liam Kennedy maintains that the story of Sherman McCoy's downfall is "a cautionary tale for white, middle-class males" in "'It's the Third World Down There!': Urban Decline and (Post)National Mythologies in Bonfire of the Vanities," *Modern Fiction Studies* 43 (1997): 108. Sheri F. Crawford says that Sherman is "Wolfe's first anti-hero" in "Outlaw Gentlemen," 48. In another article, Crawford acknowledges that in an interview Wolfe named Sherman a hero, but dismisses it on the grounds that the only evidence for Sherman's heroism is "an unconvincing clenched fist" in "Rebel-Doodle Dandy," *Journal of American Culture* 14 (1991): 13–18. Carol McNamara argues that since almost all of the characters do not get what they deserve, the novel's ending "seems to be intentionally unsatisfying" in "Men and Money in Tom Wolfe's America," 132. Moreover, McNamara argues that Sherman learns nothing from his experience and his raised fist signals "a mere nostalgic reversion to the days in the village with Judy," because he fails to realize that the politics the Black Power fist represent ("mindless liberalism") are the sort that caused his ruin ("Men and Money," 132). In short, she concludes that "Sherman is still not his own man" ("Men and Money," 132). Although the charge of an unsatisfactory conclusion and lack of heroism are weighty ones, I argue that the evidence supports a less disheartening and more hopeful conclusion—one that indicates that Wolfe both criticizes and praises liberalism.
47. See Mary Ann Glendon, "Who's Afraid of Tom Wolfe?" *First Things* 95 (1999): 13–14 and John O'Sullivan, "Honor Amid the Ruins" *American Spectator* 32 (1999): 64–68.
48. See P. J. O'Rourke, "God and Man in Full," *Policy Review* 94 (1999): 73–77 and Peter Augustine Lawler, *Homeless and at Home in America: Evidence for the Dignity of the Human Soul in Our Time and Place* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2007): 78–89.
49. Tom Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, New York: Dial Press, 4. Baker County is about 200 miles from Atlanta, GA. By car, it is about a three and a half hour trip. By commercial plane, it is less than an hour trip.
50. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 6.
51. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 37.
52. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 32 and 36.

53. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 79. In fact, Charlie claims that "there was no other choice but the foolhardiest possible way."
54. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 82.
55. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 203.
56. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 57.
57. Harvey C. Mansfield, *Manliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 18.
58. As Wolfe shows, Fanon did not rape Elizabeth Armholster. See Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 656–58.
59. Throughout the novel, Wolfe explores racial issues and tensions in Atlanta, but see, for example, *A Man in Full*, 457–64.
60. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 461.
61. See Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 518.
62. Mansfield, *Manliness*, 199.
63. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 157.
64. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 324.
65. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 325.
66. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 381.
67. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 381.
68. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 380.
69. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 411.
70. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 412 and 413.
71. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 420.
72. Wolf, *A Man in Full*. When Conrad is in prison, he thinks of Epictetus as "Zeus' messenger" (409). After the earthquake occasions his escape from prison, Conrad, interpreting the earthquake providentially, believes that he is now a "messenger" of Zeus (594).
73. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 379.
74. See Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 532–33.
75. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 671.
76. Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 681.
77. Lawler, "Real Men," 82 and O'Rourke, "God and Man in Full," 74.
78. Lawler, "Real Men," 82.
79. O'Rourke explains that Epictetus was an optimal choice because unlike stoicism's pre-Christian founder Zeno or the Emperor and also Christian-persecutor Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus was a stoic who was a contemporary with Christians and, like Christ, suffered torture and imprisonment. O'Rourke's evidence that he claims shows that Epictetus is a Christ stand-in is unconvincing. Epictetus's history as a slave and victim of torture certainly make him a more sympathetic character to Conrad than Zeno or Marcus Aurelius. But the fact that Epictetus was a contemporary of early Christians more clearly contrasts his theoretical distinction from any Christian concepts of charity. Moreover, when Conrad stands up to Rotto, he understands his actions to be in line with stoicism not in violation.
80. Conrad failed to befriend the vulnerable young man in the prison, but afterward, Conrad starts helping others. When the earthquake strikes the Santa Rita prison, Conrad helps his cellmate, Five-O, out of the rubble. But by helping to pull Five-O out, Conrad risks his own chance at gaining his freedom and being crushed with Five-O in the crumbling structure. Then, in Atlanta at his first job as a nurse's helper for Carter Home Care, Conrad is assigned to help the Gardners. The Gardners are an old Southern couple with limited mobility and nearly impoverished who are weekly extorted for cash by a con artist. Conrad intimidates the con artist and ensures that he will not approach the Gardners again. Five-O and the Gardners are vulnerable, weak individuals that, Conrad believes, need protection.
81. The originator of Charlotte's mantra appears to be Mrs. Simmons who reminds Charlotte of this saying, slightly modified as "I'm Charlotte Simmons" in Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 81.
82. Peter Berkowitz, "He is Charlotte Simmons," *Policy Review* (March/April 2005): 78–86; Mark Bowden, "Cry Wolfe," *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 2006): 109–114; Mary Ann Glendon, "Off at College," *First Things* 150 (2005): 41–44; Jane M. Orient, "Review of *I Am Charlotte Simmons*," *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons* 10 (2005): 126–27.

83. The novel reveals that university is "where young people are left almost completely free to act on their most primitive impulses" in Mary Ann Glendon, "Off at College," *First Things* 150 (February 2005): 41.

84. See Michael Dirda, "A Coed in Full," *The Washington Post,* November 7, 2004, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A26738-2004Nov4.html; David Kipen, "A College Novel that Reads Like Homework," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 4, 2004, http://www.sfgate.com/books/article/A-college-novel-that-reads-like-homework-2638909.php.; Blake Morrison, "Ohmygod it's a Caricature: Tom Wolfe's *I Am Charlotte Simmons* Shows Detailed Research but Blake Morrison Wants More Artistry," *The Guardian*, November 6, 2004, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/nov/06/fiction.tomwolfe.

85. Michiko Kakutani,"So Where's the Zeitgeist? It Looks Just Like College," *The New York Times*, October 29, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/29/books/so-wheres-the-zeitgeist-it-looks-just-like-college.html?mcubz=0&_r=0. In response, Barbara Scrupki argues that negative reviewers, or liberal reviewers as she identifies them, have a deeper quarrel with Wolfe's latest novel. As Scrupki notes, in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* and *A Man in Full*, Wolfe "satirized the sorts of people liberals love to hate (Wall Street big shots, rich businessmen)" in "Why the Critics Hate Charlotte Simmons," *Academic Questions* (2005): 89. However, in *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, Wolfe depicts "the very avatars of the liberal ethos, the practitioners of liberation—college students at an elite university" (89). Liberal reviewers, Scrupki concludes, ridicule *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, because they correctly recognize that Wolfe faults their liberal ethos for failing to guide students on how to live well.

86. Carol Innone, "A Critic in Full: A Conversation with Tom Wolfe," *Academic Questions* 21 (2008): 141.

87. Innone, "A Critic in Full," 141.

88. Wolfe tells Innone that "'Social justice' is nothing more than a secular rephrasing of Biblical teaching that 'the last come first and the meek shall inherit the earth'" ("A Critic in Full," 141).

89. Tom Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons (*New York: Picador, 2005), 15.

90. Charlotte's lack of needlework is revealed when she haphazardly hems her skirt so as to reveal more of her legs (Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 420).

91. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 29.

92. Only during Charlotte's modest graduation party is she comfortable that she is with "kinfolk and genuine friends" (Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 20).

93. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*. In contrast to Mrs. Simmons, Mr. Simmons finds it hard to show love toward Charlotte, because he has a hard time recognizing her as his own. Charlotte feels alienated from her rustic and taciturn father—she could not tell whether he regarded her with "love or wonder at what an inexplicable prodigy his daughter had become" (21).

94. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 81.

95. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 81.

96. Mickey Craig and Jon Fennell observe that Miss Pennington teaches Charlotte that she is "the higher (wo)man who will overcome the petty drudgery and do great things" in "Wolfe Howling, or the Metamorphosis of Charlotte Simmons," *Perspectives on Political Science* 36 (2007): 105.

97. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 29.

98. By Sparta, Miss Pennington surely meant both Sparta geographically and also Mrs. Simmons's Christian morality. As a good Nietzschean, Miss Pennington believes that Charlotte will transcend Sparta and its "values" and create new horizons for herself. Charlotte's identity has no content (she owes nothing to Sparta), but she is free to will and to create an identity for herself. Charlotte does not realize how deeply in conflict Miss Pennington's Nietzschean teachings and Mr. Starling's account are. Mr. Starling's teaching is contrary to Nietzsche's understanding that human beings are free and have no nature.

99. The full quote is "[Mr. Starling] who would lead her to the innermost secrets of life—and to the utmost brilliance of the glow on the other side of the mountains Miss Pennington had called her attention to four years ago" (Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 426).

100. See Carol McNamara, "Science and the Fate of the Human Soul in Tom Wolfe," in *Perspectives on Political Science* 40 (2011): 123–31.
101. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 425.
102. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 306–7.
103. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 425.
104. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 2. For a full account of his experiment, see pages 1–2.
105. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 423.
106. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 423. Mr. Starling indicates that he has lectured before about rationalism and its history. However, the readers are not privy to these lectures.
107. Aristotle, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 42 and 43.
108. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 423.
109. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 195.
110. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 196.
111. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 203.
112. It became commonplace to assume that Dupont University was modeled primarily on Duke University in part because Wolfe's daughter attended Duke. For example, see Patrick T. Reardon, "The Truth about 'Charlotte,'" *Chicago Tribune*, February 15, 2005, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-02-15/features/0502150074_1_charlotte-simmons-dupont-university-college-life. In addition, in the novel, Wolfe depicts a group of lacrosse players, who exercise little self-restraint and glory in machismo. Given the rape accusation against six Duke lacrosse players, it seemed to fit but Wolfe would have to be a fortune teller. *I Am Charlotte Simmons* was published in 2003 and the Duke lacrosse story happened in 2006. Wolfe has disavowed that Duke inspired Dupont. See Judy Faber, "Tom Wolfe: Novel Isn't About Duke," *CBS News*, May 1, 2006, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tom-wolfe-novel-isnt-about-duke/
113. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 195.
114. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 641.
115. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 617.
116. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 668.
117. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 722.
118. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 737.
119. Charlotte opines that Jojo is "not made for talks" (Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 737).
120. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 732.
121. Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 738.
122. Wolfe, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast," 51.
123. "Anna would just move in with Vronsky, and people in their social set would duly note the change in their Scully & Scully address books; and the arrival of the baby, if they chose to have it, would occasion no more than a grinning snigger in the gossip columns (Wolfe, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast," 51)."
124. Wolfe, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast," 51.
125. Thanks to my external reviewer who suggested that I consider the difference between Sherman and Charlie as mature men and Charlotte as an inexperienced young woman.
126. See Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 561–62.
127. Jojo is not the only example of an earnest student-athlete in the novel. Charles, the basketball team's captain, commanded great respect for his coolness (see Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, 45), but secretly hid his more studious side from view.

Chapter Three

Walker Percy's Search

Walker Percy takes issue with Tom Wolfe's belief that post-World War II prosperity, which gave ordinary Americans the money and free time to pursue their interests, is a good development for happiness.[1] In contrast, Percy maintains that prosperity has not increased happiness, but rather increased prosperity has cast into sharper relief our unhappiness. Unquestionably, modernity has succeeded in delivering humanity from much of the material want and uncertainty present in the natural world and previous political orders. Americans have exercised magnificently the right to pursue happiness. Americans enjoy, on the whole, comfortable lives and unprecedented political and personal freedom. Yet, the individual suffers an "embarrassment of riches."[2] She knows she ought to be happy but is not. The apparent triumph over the causes of human misery—material scarcity and arbitrary government—serve to make more pointed and acute the feeling of lingering unhappiness. All the material and political conditions of happiness seem to be in place, except the happy person.

In this respect, Percy's observations resemble many of the findings made by happiness researchers. Americans enjoy unprecedented economic growth and prosperity, but yet happiness levels remain flat. As shown in chapter 1, happiness researchers such as Easterlin, Layard, and Bok believe that Americans, falsely overestimating the extent to which money contributes to happiness, pursue wealth to the detriment of securing and enjoying other goods such as family and enriching personal experiences. While certainly in agreement that Americans tend to seek happiness in material goods, Percy, in contrast, does not pin unhappiness exclusively on the excessive pursuit of wealth. Unhappiness cannot be removed by simply redirecting Americans toward other pursuits and passions. Swapping out the pursuit of wealth with the pursuit of something else will fail just the same to bring individuals to

happiness. The real trouble, as Percy sees it, is the pursuit of happiness itself. Americans strive to be something that they are not. Percy recognizes that the flip side of the pursuit of happiness is the fleeing of unhappiness. Americans do not so much pursue happiness as they strive not to be unhappy. In this way, the pursuit of happiness serves as an effective distraction and obstacle to considering and reflecting on more fully why we are unhappy. Our discontent, paradoxically enough, is a fortunate—or to use the original meaning of the word—a happy starting point for considering what it tells us about ourselves. The goal, for Percy, is that we may become at home with our unhappiness.

If the pursuit of happiness should be abandoned, then what will replace it? Percy identifies modern science and Southern stoicism as our likely alternatives to the pursuit of happiness, but finds limits to both approaches. Modern science, with which Percy would identify much happiness research, assumes that unhappiness has a solution. Social scientists treat unhappiness like a hindrance to be removed, transcended, or medicated out of existence. Scientific solutions to unhappiness end up relying on ways that suppress the individual's perception of unhappiness, and, Percy argues, also suppress the individual self. On the other hand, Southern stoicism appears to confront human unhappiness with unflinching resolve. The stoic does not expect to be happy and, indeed, accepts unhappiness as a noble burden. But, as Percy recognizes, stoicism also shies away from discovering what unhappiness tells us about ourselves. It evades the self-understanding that comes with reflection on personal discontent.

Instead of treating unhappiness like a problem to be solved or a burden to be shouldered, Percy explains that we must confront unhappiness with the search. The search, as Percy calls it, means recognizing unhappiness as a fortunate starting point for self-reflective inquiry. The discovery that our unhappiness holds a precious clue to understanding ourselves can be a relief from much frustration and anxiety of not being happy. Moreover, by focusing on understanding unhappiness, Percy elevates the importance of the search itself. Unlike the pursuit of happiness, the search does not specify what is to be pursued or found. The emphasis is on the means not end. Instead of the solitary pursuit of happiness, which cares little about the means the pursuit other than efficiency that ends in restlessness, the search focuses on the manner and means of the search itself instead of its object. Foremost, Percy argues that our unhappiness points us toward talking, sharing, and searching with other persons. The search orients us to see other persons as beings like ourselves who are also a little unhappy. The joy of the search is that it opens us up to see that we have fellow searchers and companions in this world. Recognizing others as fellow searchers offers more than companionship, it offers more resources—through talking and reflecting together—for gaining self-knowledge. In this respect, Percy offers a political answer

(not to be confused with a solution) in which the search with others amends the pursuit of happiness.

For many critics, Percy's respectable literary reputation is as an existential and Southern writer deeply influenced by European thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard among others.[3] Much appreciate for his thought is that, sharing with Alexis de Tocqueville the observation that Americans are Cartesians, Percy applies European existential insights about the pitfalls of the Cartesian method and its alienating effect on individuals to the American situation.[4] Although other causes contribute to American existential malaise, Percy argues that the scientific outlook exacerbates our sense of alienation because the "scientific method" cannot look critically upon itself.[5] Thus, Americans are alienated from knowing who they really are, and, more importantly, lack resources to overcome their alienation. Martin Luschei, for example, praises Percy's novels because they present "existential modes of perception" to American readers and, consequently, offer them ways of "penetrate[ing] the malaise."[6] The Cartesian-scientific outlook can only be pierced by importing and adapting decidedly foreign modes of self-understanding.

Consequently, many American scholars valued Percy most, J. Donald Crowley observes, as their own homegrown existentialist who was a "supremely talented translator of European ideas into facts and fictions that bore on native conditions."[7] Unsurprisingly, American scholars who emphasize Percy's existential credentials found little very American or political in his writings.[8] Ironically, European commentators on Percy recognized "an indelible Americanness in Percy."[9] Following their lead and Crowley's lead, I argue that Percy's examination of existential questions puts him firmly within one of the oldest American literary traditions. Like many American authors before him, Percy recognizes how the Puritans, who found themselves in the strange new world and uprooted from the familiar, naturally faced questions about their purpose and place in the world. Existential self-examinations are as old as America itself. In light of the Puritans' essentially existential experience, American authors have long since found inventive ways to explore how to place the self in the world. For example, Washington Irving made famous the story of the famous absentee Rip Van Winkle who returns to his hometown to find it much changed in his absence. Crowley notes other examples by Melville, Hawthorne, James Fenimore Cooper, Whitman, and Fitzgerald who explore through their writings our precarious placement in the world as Americans and individuals. Americans are not complete Cartesians, but, instead, thanks in part America's peculiar arrival in the New World, Americans are frequently led to consider who they are and a strong literary tradition casts much self-reflection upon the American founding.

Our unhappiness, as Walker Percy understands, can either lead us to search for more sophisticated diversions or, as he hopes, guide us to under-

stand ourselves as lost beings in need of each other so as to recover ourselves from becoming empty modern abstractions of the individual. As will be shown in *The Moviegoer*, *Lost in the Cosmos*, and *The Thanatos Syndrome*, Percy repeatedly shows his characters rejecting the pursuit of happiness, embarking on a search, and discovering their need for others. *The Moviegoer* plainly illustrates how the pursuit of happiness as a diversion only fills time without fulfilling the individual and so isolates the individual from recognizing another person as a searcher. In *Lost in the Cosmos* and *The Thanatos Syndrome*, Percy focuses on how the pursuit of happiness risks leading us away from political life toward rule by experts and destruction of the self in the name of increasing well-being. I now turn to *The Moviegoer* in which Percy shows how Binx Bolling discovers the search and finds his way as a fellow wayfarer.

THE MOVIEGOER

The Moviegoer is the story of a young man, John Bickerson "Binx" Bolling, who is called upon by his formidable Aunt Emily to decide what to do with his life. At nearly thirty years old, Binx has been a failed researcher and a veteran of the Korean War. He currently is a prosperous, but banal stockbroker who lives in an undistinguished neighborhood. Aunt Emily, however, aspires for her nephew to pursue greatness, to reject the mean, low way of American bourgeois life, and to accept his duty to make a meaningful contribution to humanity. As such, she strongly encourages Binx to become a doctor. Emily asks him "[d]on't you feel obliged to use your brain and to make a contribution?"[10] But Binx does not feel under any such obligation. Since his return from the Korean War, Binx moved away from his aunt's house in New Orleans's Garden District to the nondescript suburbs, Gentilly, and gave up all pretenses to "grand ambitions."[11] Instead of great ambitions, Binx carefully cultivates the "ordinary life," or, as he also calls it, his "Little Way."[12] Binx claims that he is "a model tenant and a model citizen and takes pleasure in doing all that is expected of [him]" as a typical American everyman.[13] He boasts of having all the usual plastic cards in his wallet, storing important documents like his birth certificate in a fireproof box, and subscribing to *Consumer Reports* so as to own the most efficient products. He conscientiously follows radio public service announcements that advise against littering. In addition to honoring customarily American concerns for security, responsibility, and frugality, Binx whiles away his time seducing his secretaries and going to the movies.

The marquee at the theater Binx frequents proudly advertises "Where Happiness Costs So Little."[14] Such happiness as Binx pursues in his anonymous suburbs is chimerical, because, as one commenter observes, "happiness

so cheaply bought is worth very little."[15] Indeed, the so-called happiness Binx enjoys with his secretaries fades quickly—soon they are mutually tired of each other and part gladly.[16] Binx's cultivation of the "ordinary life" is ultimately unsuccessful, Luschei observes, because he is "ironically self-aware."[17] Binx cannot submerge himself entirely by role playing the good citizen, tenant, and anonymous everyman. Too reflective and self-conscious of his role playing, Binx knows that his life in the suburbs is "the worst kind of self-deception."[18] Binx cannot remain tucked away in the dreamy, submerged comfort of Gentilly.

Indeed, Binx has struggled for some time to decide what to do with his life. The search, an alternative to Emily's plan and Binx's "ordinary life," occurred to Binx when he was in Korea, but promptly forgot about it when he returned home. At the novel's open, the sight of the contents of his pockets, though familiar, appeared wondrous and strange. Binx calls the sight of the familiar transformed into the perplexing "clues."[19] These clues remind Binx to "pursue the search."[20] Binx struggles to follow his search's clues (he still seduces his newest secretary and goes to the movies). His efforts are unsteady. Confronted by Aunt Emily with an ultimatum to decide what to do with his life, Binx despairs. His despair is lifted when he realizes that his cousin, Kate, is a fellow searcher who can bring steadiness and a kind of happiness to their joint search and life together.

Binx associates the pursuit of happiness with "everydayness."[21] Everydayness is submersion of the self into the role of a consumer of goods, services, hobbies and expert advice. Everydayness is the "enemy" of the search, because individuals lost in everydayness do not know that there is anything to search for.[22] The chief representatives of everydayness are Nell and Eddie Lovell. Binx observes that Eddie "understands everything out there and everything out there is something to be understood."[23] For the Lovells, the world is "something to be categorized and explained, then dismissed" as they occupy themselves pursuing happiness.[24] The pursuit of happiness disconnects them from seeking to understand the world and their place within it. They have outsourced examination of the world to experts and so are "free" to pursue happiness as they please through products and prepackaged experiences. Consequently, for the Lovells, the freedom to pursue happiness is freedom from responsibility for the self. Percy's insight is that the liberal formulation of happiness—primarily understood as security, control, and comfort—defines the objects of the individual's pursuit and, in so doing, limits the individual from being open to consider other goods and conditions for human happiness.

The good news is that the haze of everydayness can be pierced. Everydayness shields individuals from considering why they are unhappy, but it cannot wholly distract them from their unhappiness. From this perspective, the pursuit of happiness is little more than a pursuit of distraction from the

despair that stirs frenetically within the self. In fact, everydayness fails so completely to provide real satisfaction to the individual that the self is restlessly in need of more and more distractions from existential despair that is concealed within the self. Everydayness prevents us from undertaking our peculiarly human task to seek an answer to the discontent we feel. The pursuit of happiness does not succeed in bringing the Lovells contentment, but serves to distract the Lovells from undertaking their peculiarly human task to seek an answer to the discontent they feel.

In contrast, Binx's search is characterized by clues that point to an unknown final end—"[t]o be aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something."[25] That something remains incompletely described. Binx finds "clues," but we readers do not know what they are clues of. Binx is onto what? Binx finds clues of what? Binx searches for what? Percy does not fill in the blank. Binx flatly refuses to say that he seeks God or thing else definite.[26] Binx cannot say for what he searches or to what the clues point, because then he would know the object of his search. To name it would be to know what it is. When Sherlock Holmes finds muddy footprints next to a stabbed corpse, he knows to look for a murderer. The identity of the particular individual is a detail that, if not known now, is theoretically possible to be known—to wit, Holmes always discovers the murderer. If Binx knew what the clues indicated, then he would not be searching anymore. The impossibility of saying what the search is allows it to be a true search. Binx's search remains open-ended. The importance of defining the ultimate end of the search recedes from view and instead the way in which one searches with others assumes more significance.

Binx's aunt, Emily, however, is unconvinced and believes Binx spends his time doing nothing worthwhile. Emily witnesses Binx wandering around, going to movies, seducing secretaries, and, worst of all, being unable to explain himself.[27] If Emily narrated the novel, we readers would likely agree with her that Binx is an idler. The time has come, she tells him, to choose what to do with his life. Emily fulfills an important function in the novel—she calls Binx to action, and by the end of the novel, Binx takes action (though not in the manner she desired). Binx ceases his ordinary life escapism, rejects her stoicism, comes to understand his search as a way of living in the world, marries Kate, and decides to go to medical school. Without Emily's prompting, it is doubtful that Binx could have made these decisions by himself.

Like Wolfe, Percy considers stoicism as a possible tonic to liberalism that encourages the individual to treasure inner dignity, to face up to hardships, but still to act nobly within limited horizons. Stoicism is an attractive alternative. Stoicism appeals to humanity's loftier motivations for greatness, honor, and courage. With commanding resolve, stoicism squarely looks eye to eye with life and its hardships. Most appealingly, stoicism already has some roots

in American culture and once held sway in Southern culture to a greater extent than Christianity.[28]

However, Emily's stoicism is not like Conrad and Charlie's stoicism. Whereas Wolfe makes stoicism amenable to liberalism so as to correct or supplement liberalism, Emily's stoicism resists and opposes it, like an enemy. Her stoicism is more inspired by Marcus Aurelius, the grim Emperor who fought long years to keep barbarians from Rome, rather than Epictetus, the slave who found inner freedom in being a spark of Zeus. As a grand, fine, aristocratic Southern woman, Emily sees her way of life dying. According to her, the United States' democratic and liberal ideals and institutions represent the triumph of the common man over the great man. Praise for the common man is just the open praise of vulgarity and mediocrity. She disparages contemporary Americans for their easy sentimentality, lack of national character, and penchant to excuse immorality. Americans are soft, watery, and weak. In contrast to American liberalism and Conrad's democratic stoicism, Emily proudly proclaims that her people are "better because we do not shirk our obligations either to ourselves or to others."[29] Her "gentlefolk" face up to the grim realities of life and bear it with courage and magnanimity.[30] Living at the end of civilization, as Emily believes, provides occasions for great demonstrations of stoical resolve. Emily declares to Binx that she prefers "to fade out of the picture" than be a part of a ruined civilization.[31] She is content that "we live by our lights, we die by our lights, and whoever the high gods may be, we'll look them in the eye without apology."[32]

Despite her grim forecast, Emily's resolve heightens the attractiveness of stoicism as an alternative to the submerged life of everydayness like Nell and Eddie Lovell and by extension Americans generally. Her speech stirs up human pride against the so-called happiness of the Lovells that resembles the contentedness of pigs. The Lovells fill their time with pastimes and diversions—theater readings and redecorating. Emily offers hardship instead of comfort, risk instead of security, and transcendent, glorious aspirations instead of low and achievable goals. Through Emily, Percy "strike[s] telling blows at some of the more absurd flaws of contemporary civilization."[33] Emily reminds us that happiness at the cost of nobler aspirations that neglects our desire to transcend our individual selves is no happiness.

Emily likens the United States' ignoble perversity of order and right to a second fall of Rome. She announces that "the age of Catos is gone" and ask rhetorically the "barbarians [are] at the inner gate and who defends the West?"[34] By comparing the end of the genteel South with the fall of Rome, she transcends the historical particulars of the South's decline and sees herself taking part in the eternal struggle between civilization and barbarism. By raising and educating Binx, Emily believes she imparted to him the last remaining vestiges of the greatness and nobility of Western culture. Emily wants Binx to be courageous, spirited, and able to make a stand against the

vulgarity and mediocrity she sees overtaking the fine, old ways. Emily offers Binx a place alongside her as a comrade in arms.

As Binx realizes, at the bottom of his aunt's noble community of comrades in arms is self-deception. Emily does not see people as they are. She "transfigures everyone" and projects a romanticized image or role upon them to act out.[35] She sees the black servant, Mercer, as the "faithful retainer, a living connection with a bygone age," but, as Binx tells us, he thieves from her.[36] She imagines that her husband, Jules, and friend of the family, Sam Yerger, are the last of the Catos. Jules is a successful merchant and Sam is a Hemingway-like writer. She imagines a false community in which the people near her are the last of the good and true and that together they stand against the barbarians. Moreover, so well does Emily transform people into either "the heroic or the craven" that they come to understand themselves as she does.[37] Emily expects Binx to accept a role. When Binx was eight, his elder brother died, and she admonished him to "act like a soldier."[38] Binx questions if that "[w]as that all I had to do?"[39] As an adult, Emily tells him to be "as a Roman and a man."[40] Emily constructs, as one commenter notes, a "world bottomed on the principle not of fulfillment but of performance."[41] Playing a part is easy, but, as Binx suspects, the actor hides himself in the role and becomes a part in someone else's—in this case, Emily's—production. Binx already recoils from the pursuit of happiness's life of diversion, because the self tries to divert itself from its despair. Emily's stoicism is simply a better diversion.

Emily cannot understand Binx's search, because she has no doubt of the right course of action—to do one's duty. For the stoic, the question of what to do with the self is closed and there is little room for self-reflective inquiry. Unhappiness is accepted as a fact of life, but, as Binx realizes, accepting unhappiness is not the same as trying to find out what it reveals about the self. Southern stoicism is philosophical resignation—the path to further inquiry is shut. The Southern stoic, like the liberal pursuer of happiness, remains alienated from seriously seeking to understand the self's peculiar existence.

The search, as Percy shows us, provides a real alternative to the pursuit of happiness that stoicism cannot give. The individual learns how to be herself through realizing his need of and dependency on others. The pursuer of happiness views other individuals as goods, or objects, to be possessed for the sake of happy life. The individual does not need others to help or join her in her pursuit of happiness. This is why, for Percy, the pursuit of happiness is a non-starter. Individuals, according to Percy, are not self-sufficient, but rather are dependent and in need of each other to live well. The stumbling block to the pursuit of happiness is that it is a lonely pursuit that isolates the individual from others. Despite the modern exaltation of autonomy, dependency and need are not negative qualities. Instead, human neediness becomes

a happy, or fortunate, condition for individuals to gain the help they need from each other. We are needy beings, but we are rich with resources—fellow searchers and friends—with whom we share our lives in political communities.

As long as the individual persists in doggedly pursuing happiness by herself, she cannot become or be happy. But, as Percy emphasizes especially in *Lost in the Cosmos* and *The Thanatos Syndrome*, the danger does not end here—it cannot be contained within the private life of the unhappy individual pursuer of happiness, but may cancerously spread to the social and political body. The lonely pursuer of happiness, overcome with despair, may turn to violence and self-destruction. After his encounter with his aunt, Binx considers seducing his secretary's roommate to distract himself from the despair that has finally shattered his sense of everydayness. Fortunately for Binx, the sight of Kate looking for him stops him from descending into the despair. Binx realizes that Kate is like himself—a being who is also troubled and in need of help to live well. Binx wakes up from his "role-playing"; he sees Kate as it were for the first time "as a human being in an ontological predicament identical to his own."[42] The recognition that Kate is a person like himself brings Binx joy.

As Mary Grabar notes, Kate is "further along" in the search than Binx.[43] Kate recognizes before Binx does that they share a common problem. Kate knows that her stepmother, Emily, is wrong about Binx being a "proper Bolling"—by which Emily means a Southern gentleman.[44] Kate tells Binx that he is "like [herself], but worse. Much worse."[45] Kate is a searcher and she sees that Binx is also troubled and trying to find an alternative to Emily's stoicism; however, at the time, Binx does not understand what she means. Percy hints at Binx's realization at the end of the novel. Near midsentence in his attempt to seduce his secretary's roommate on the pay phone, Binx sees Kate looking for him across the playground. Kate helps Binx in a way that he cannot help himself. Binx needs Kate and Kate needs Binx. Binx realizes the joy of being needed and being needed by the very person whom he can help. Stoical courage does not prevent Binx from sinking into despair, but Kate does. He needs someone else with whom to share his search, because he is not a self-sufficient being. Binx is a part, though not a part in a movie or cosmic drama. As Percy shows, being a part is better than playing a part. In Emily's cosmic drama, individuals are self-sufficient, but stuck in roles not of their choosing. Binx realizes as he sees Kate looking for him that she is another being like him and so is capable of joining him being in and reflecting on the world. Binx's discovery of the possibility of a joint search is not a solution or resolution, but a gladdening discovery.

Through Binx, Percy shows us that the self's dependency that draws us to others is a happier circumstance than pretending that the self is self-sufficient. The Lovells believe they can find happiness by playing the role, or

part, of a consumer. The Lovells play a part, but Binx realizes that he is a part in need of another person. The pursuer of happiness denies his partiality and so experiences much uneasiness and unhappiness as a result. The deep trouble with stoicism, for Percy, is that it is not a real alternative to the pursuit of happiness. Stoicism also denies human neediness and tries to treat human unhappiness by casting individuals into self-sufficient roles. Percy's search presents the possibility of some relief and respite from unhappiness and loneliness when we realize our need for others. Rather than being a step down from self-sufficiency, being a part and needing others becomes the occasion for greater happiness. Binx experiences gladness in finding in Kate another fellow wayfarer with whom he can share his life. Binx and Kate's marriage represents not the resolution or end of the search, but, instead, the way in Binx and Kate will continue searching together.

The Moviegoer has a conventionally happy ending in which the protagonist gets the girl and marries her. Binx's conventional happy ending is amusing given his observation that "movies are onto the search, but they screw [endings] up."[46] Binx complains that although movies have promising beginnings in which the main character finds himself in strange circumstances, he inevitably loses his sense of strangeness, finds a girl, and settles down with her. As a consequence, the main character becomes "so sunk in everydayness that he might just as well be dead."[47] *The Moviegoer* follows the typical Hollywood romance formula, but Percy does not end *The Moviegoer* promptly after Binx and Kate happily unite. Percy gives us further scenes that reveal the death of Binx's brother, Binx assuming responsibility for helping with his siblings, and Binx helping Kate. In this way, Percy creatively avoids a proper ending in which all the parts are tidily explained and the story comes to a full stop. The search is not completed within the dust jacket of the novel. Marriage represents not the resolution and end of the search, but, instead, as the way in which Binx and Kate will continue searching together.

Despite Percy's criticisms of the United States and the pursuit of happiness, he shows that the right kind of search is possible within the United States. Unlike Emily's stoicism, the United States does not preclude the possibility of a search. The United States is open to philosophic investigation in a way that Emily's stoicism is not. The Declaration may, so to speak, cast individuals adrift from traditional moorings, but individuals are already adrift. Using one of Percy's favorite metaphors, individuals are like castaways who find themselves somewhere and do not know what to do and have only each other to help them along the way. The individual finds herself—a being with consciousness—to be a strange being. As Percy notes in *Signposts in a Strange Land*, at the heart of a human community is a paradox, because its "members are both alone yet not alone" and the individual through trying to understand himself as this unique being who is "stuck with the consciousness of himself as a self" realizes that "there are others who, however tenta-

tively, have undertaken the same quest."[48] *The Moviegoer* ends with good news. The relief from uneasiness begins by realizing that there are fellow wayfarers and that even within a nation largely given over to everydayness the search is possible.

Yet, *The Moviegoer* is not a Pollyanna story. *The Moviegoer* alludes to the broader political danger of selves sunk in everydayness pose to human life and happiness. Percy hints at the despairing self's destructive potential when Binx waits for Kate to appear on the playground and begins to doubt that she will come. Binx's thoughts turn to the Cold War, and he observes that "what people really fear is not that the bomb will fall but that the bomb will not fall."[49] Binx's self-destructive thoughts never come to fruition, because Kate's appearance averts Binx's turn from the worst. Consequently, *The Moviegoer's* happy ending is possible because the individual enjoys much freedom to order his life aside from the political body. However, in *Lost in the Cosmos* and also *The Thanatos Syndrome*, Percy considers how political orders may try to achieve happiness through self-destruction.

LOST IN THE COSMOS: THE LAST SELF-HELP BOOK

In *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book*, Percy playfully mocks the American desire for self-reliant, step-by-step techniques for well-being. Armed with self-help manuals, Americans believe they do not need anyone else to help them, because they can help themselves. However, Percy's mockery is limited. First, the popularity of self-help books points to a broadly-felt desire for self-knowledge and guidance that indicates some level of self-awareness that the self needs help. This differs somewhat from *The Moviegoer*. The nearly impenetrable everydayness that *The Moviegoer* suggests that everydayness so effectively obscures the inner despair of the soul of most Americans that little hope persists of ever piercing through the dark cloud of everydayness. *Lost in the Cosmos* presents a more complex view of the individual. Americans are searchers who look for help, if not always in the right places. Secondly, even as the self-help book seems to promise self-sufficiency, the self-help book betrays its purpose. Self-help manuals pretend to dispose of the need of an in-person teacher, but they cannot dispose of the writer of the self-help book. Percy exploits this inconsistency. By "inviting the reader into the writing as joint enterprise," Crowley observes that Percy and reader "engage actively in a mutual, communal creative process."[50] Percy uses the self-help format to further friendly and joint purposes rather than encourage self-reliance and independence. Reading *Lost in the Cosmos* gives the reader a taste of the collaborative relation possible between two individuals searching together. This collaborative relationship prepares the reader to evaluate the political consequences of false self-sufficiency and

phantom happiness. Moreover, readers are invited to take joy in needing others with which to share their lives and for being the occasion of happiness in others.

Lost in the Cosmos is not a traditional novel. Yet, it is an appropriate subject inasmuch as its self-help format mimics psychological self-help books designed to guide individuals to happiness and uses fictional sketches to illuminate examples. A twenty question quiz makes up the bulk of *Lost in the Cosmos*; interrupted by an "intermezzo" on "A Semiotic Primer of the Self."[51] The so-called twenty quiz questions are really elaborate thought experiments often coupled with fictional sketches to present to the reader the different ways in which the individual can situate the self in the cosmos. The last two questions, which Percy calls space odysseys, explore both where we will look for help and who might offer help. My focus will be on the second space odyssey.

Lost in the Cosmos has its fans, but its peculiar character and odd format makes scholarly treatments challenging and infrequent.[52] The few scholars that address the book prove that fruitful treatments may be gained from its analysis. One commentator compared *Lost in the Cosmos* to a refashioning of "Rip Van Winkle, now in space-age dress."[53] Just as Rip Van Winkle returns from his long slumber and retells his story, Percy designs two space odysseys to help us readers return to ourselves, so to speak. Recognizing the political aspect of *Lost in the Cosmos*, Peter Augustine Lawler argues that *Lost* may be treated as Percy's Christian and political case against Carl Sagan's scientific reductionism.[54] Following Lawler's political analysis of the text, I will also focus on the space odysseys, and, particularly, the second space odyssey in which Percy depicts Captain Schuyler compelled to decide the fate of the human race by either going to Europa to found a new beginning for humanity or staying on Earth at Lost Cove, Tennessee. After a summary, I will argue that the colony on Europa falls short of expectations and delivers well-being not happiness, and that despite Percy's critique of the Declaration, he is pro-happiness and that Lost Cove is the choice for happiness. Finally, I will discuss why Percy chooses a stoic, the Captain, to make this decision, and consider why the Captain might choose Lost Cove.

Lost in the Cosmos begins with the premise that we knowers of the natural world know very little about ourselves. Percy claims no originality on this point and prefaces the book with a quote by Nietzsche that "[w]e are unknown, we knowers, to ourselves . . . as far as ourselves are concerned we are not knowers."[55] According to Percy, we can readily identify Jupiter from scores of other tiny pinpricks of light in the night sky, but cannot identify ourselves. As the world becomes more known and grasped by our principles and techniques, these reductionist principles and techniques are the prime suspects that prevent us from knowing ourselves. We remove ourselves from the world we seek to understand, and so the self becomes a leftover.

Percy attributes this error to the philosophical underpinnings of the Declaration. The textbook American self is a right-bearing being who seeks fulfillment and happiness through work, society, leisure activities, and scientific and artistic pursuits and who should in a "free and affluent society" succeed in finding fulfillment: "Happiness can be pursued and to a degree caught."[56] According to Percy, the Declaration is primarily a Lockean document, and Locke follows Descartes with respect to the abstract, autonomous self that emerges from Descartes's separation of the soul (*res cogitans*) from the body (*res extensa*).[57] Freed from traditional and religious moorings, the self becomes lost and "dislocated."[58] The individual does not find happiness as promised by the release from traditional and religious understandings of the self. The American identity is incomplete. It morphs into the "diverted self" in which "the pursuit of happiness becomes the pursuit of ["endless"] diversion."[59] The United States' failure is due to its success at creating a "free and affluent society" in which the individual has abundant ways of being a consumer of goods in the vain attempt to fulfill the (vacuous) self. Instead of being fulfilled, "the self . . . is in fact impoverished and deprived, like Lazarus at the feast, having suffered a radical deprivation and loss of sovereignty."[60] The leftover self becomes more like a ghost or specter. As spectator of the world, the lost understands it perfectly, but is maddeningly unable to participate within it. The specter haunts the world instead of living within it and increasingly finds its sad state intolerable. Disappointed and unable to make itself be happy, the lost self seeks relief from the burden of being a self through modes of transcendence, immanence, and denial that lead to self-destruction.

The next eighteen questions present different roles through which the lost self manages his consciousness—how do ghosts make themselves known? For example, the first question presents the amnesic self. Percy observes that many films, books, and soap operas inevitably depict a character who develops amnesia. Amnesia opens up the opportunity for the character to start over in a new place, new friends, and new lover.[61] The trouble with the amnesic is that the new life becomes as familiar as the old. Percy concludes that eventually these roles become exhausted and the self, like a poltergeist, turns to violence and destruction. That is the bad news. But the good news is that the American textbook self-understanding is tissue thin and easily put aside in favor of the search. In the space odysseys, Percy considers what help we can hope for.

The space odysseys constitute the final two questions of the book and begin with the same scenario. Earth receives a signal that appears to be sent from alien life and a manned spaceship is sent to find and establish communication with the aliens. In the first space odyssey, the spaceship find aliens, but the aliens refuse to help the humans. Although the spaceship attempted to conceal it, it is revealed that the spaceship's crew is in disarray and that Earth

has experienced devastating war. The aliens have had previous experiences with beings such as humans who "do not know themselves or what to do with themselves" and those encounters ended badly.[62] The aliens recognize that the humans are not really interested in receiving the kind of help they need. Moreover, they do not help because they have no self-interest to help and only risk disordering themselves by interacting with the spaceship.[63] Here Percy takes aim at such thinkers as Carl Sagan and others who seem to believe that alien life will be undoubtedly interested in helping humans.[64] Percy is less sanguine that aliens would want to help us. In this space odyssey, Percy encourages us to consider where or from whom we are most likely to receive help.

In the second space odyssey, a possible signal from aliens is detected. NASA decides to send a spaceship to investigate. The slender hope is that aliens may be able to help humanity from its self-destructive warfare. Nevertheless, considering the likelihood of devastating warfare on Earth, NASA designs the spaceship's crew to carry on the human race in the event of the end of civilization. While the space mission travels eighteen years, nearly 400 years pass on Earth and so a plan for reproduction must be adopted. NASA settles on programmed serial monogamy—a crew of one man and three women.[65] When the spaceship does not find aliens, it returns to war-devastated Earth. By eliminating the possibility of help from alien life in the second space odyssey, the survivors must look to each other and deliberate about how best to live. Two options are set forth for the captain of the space crew—one that virtually ensures the continuation of the species and secures its well-being and the second that proves riskier from the perspective of species survival and security, but better for fulfilling the human desire for happiness. Percy does not reveal the captain's decision, but instead shows what would happen in either case.

Captain Marcus Aurelius Schuyler is an Air Force Academy pilot who studied astronomy and history. Captain Schuyler takes after his stoic namesake with respect to his "dark view of the human condition" and his penchant to "t[ake] his pleasure in acting well even though he knew it probably would not avail and that things would end badly."[66] With his ancient perspective, Captain Schuyler is aptly suited to this mission as an individual ready to do what is necessary under bleak circumstances. The remaining three women crew members are Tiffany, an astrophysicist-psychotherapist, Kimberly, a linguist-semioticist, and Jane, the ship's doctor. Jane is also a religious minority affirmative action choice, as required by recent Supreme Court rulings. As a Methodist, Jane represents the small Christian minority lingering in America. On the outward journey, she refuses to have sex with Captain Schuyler until he, in his capacity as captain of the ship, marries them. During their eighteen year journey, twelve children are born to the space travelers.

Finding no aliens, the spaceship returns to Earth. Upon arriving in the Utah desert, they find Earth devastated by nuclear war, but with a few survivors. Aristarchus Jones, a loner astronomer who calculated when and where the spaceship would return, greets them on their return. Abbot Leibowitz, the abbot of a Benedictine monastery who leads a small community of monks and misbegotten children, also welcomes the spaceship. Radiation has contributed to birth defects and caused increasing sterility among the surviving human inhabitants of Earth. Returning from space, the space travelers are like "aliens." The arrival of the spaceship with the crew and their healthy children present a hope that the human race might yet survive and thrive. Yet, it is an undetermined hope. It is not clear what course of action would be best for humanity, because it is not settled what ends are best for human life.

As the pilot of the spaceship, it is up to the stoical Captain Schuyler to decide the future of the human race. Aristarchus Jones and the Abbot Liebowitz present the captain with two alternatives: either go to Europa, a habitable moon of Jupiter, or take their chances on Earth in Lost Cove, Tennessee. Aristarchus Jones argues that the human race cannot survive on Earth—too much radiation and sterility. Colonizing Europa presents a bright opportunity to make a new start. This new civilization can be based on "reason and science" like ancient pre-Socratic Ionia, which was free from the mistakes of Plato and religion.[67] On the other hand, Abbot Liebowitz says that he does not know whether human life is finished on Earth. He gives a Christian account of humans as fallen beings, redeemed through the birth, passion, and resurrection of Christ, and waiting for the promised return of Christ. Abbot Liebowitz believes he may be the only person alive who can consecrate priests and so says that he will "stay here in case the human race survives and need priests."[68] Percy does not show us which Schuyler chooses, but shows us the consequences of each choice.

If Captain Schuyler decides in favor of Aristarchus Jones, he leaves nuclear war-ravaged Earth for a moon of Jupiter, Europa, to realize Jones's utopian society. Named in honor of the original birthplace of science, New Ionia is "operated on the principles of Skinner's Walden II modified by Jungian self-analysis, with suitable rewards for friendly social behavior and punishment, even exile, for aggression, jealous, hostile, solitary, mystical, or other anti-social behavior."[69] Instead of government, the New Ionians have daily group therapy sessions in which they practice a new golden rule of "honesty, absolute honesty."[70] Furthermore, New Ionia is free from pain and deformity (the deformed children were left behind on Earth), from political and ethnic conflict, and from sexual inhibitions. Much, however, of their contentment and group cooperation is drug-induced. The air is much thinner on Europa and to compensate the New Ionians are given daily rations of cocaine. To encourage proper social behavior, they are daily expected to participate in *dewalis* sessions where they smoke dried lichen that "induce[s]

a mild euphoria."[71] After many years, New Ionia becomes a "peaceful agricultural-fishing society."[72]

In New Ionia, the Captain sits outside his cave reading *Henry IV* and replays an old recording of Mozart's fourteenth string quartet. Captain Schuyler is ironic toward the utopian society and considers the group sessions akin to AA meetings. Jane and he are no longer married and Jane sulks in her cave by herself; she knows New Ionia does not tolerate sulking in the open. Two extraordinarily beautiful young women, Candace and Rima, attend to him. While Rima massages the Captain's neck, Candace invites him to her cave to have sex. After the Captain perfunctorily agrees, Rima tightens her grip on him in intimidation. Taking the hint, the Captain requests that Rima join them, and they retreat to his cave, but he is little moved by the prospect of sex.

If Captain Schuyler decides in favor of Abbot Liebowitz, he stays on post-apocalyptic Earth and goes to Lost Cove, Tennessee. The community grows traditional local crops like collards; they trap rabbits, enjoy tobacco, and drink whiskey. Radiation levels persist and sperm count varies. Even so, Lost Cove increases in numbers both from pregnancies and from other survivors joining the community. These survivors include "Southerners, white and Anglo-Saxon, and blacks, with a sprinkling of Hispanics, Jews, and Northern ethnics."[73] Both the physically sound and deformed children flourish. Unlike in New Ionia, the Lost Cove community has room for many types of individuals. To be sure, Lost Cove does not suit everyone. Some of the hippies voluntarily decide to leave and "move on" from Lost Cove.[74] Presumably, they form or join a community elsewhere.

In addition to ethic and racial groups, many social and religious groups flourish in Lost Cove. On the Sunday that Percy shows us, some are at Mass or at Protestant services, and the nonbelievers are "gathered companionably" to talk.[75] The Captain enjoys sitting on a hillside just above the cave where he is joined by other "unbelievers—non-church-goers and dissidents of one sort and another."[76] It is an eclectic crowd of mountain men, former Atlanta businessmen, feminists, hippies and vagabonds. The Sunday morning hillside nonbelievers debate about agricultural and political subjects such as corn co-ops and what ought Lost Cove do about the violent (and snake handling) community in old Carolinas. The Captain serves as the community's leader and negotiates with an emissary from the violent Carolina community that wishes to reignite old ethic and religious conflicts. Percy notes that the Carolina emissary and the Captain "shake their hands in friendship," take a drink together, and, having honored diplomatic courtesies, they "hunker down" to discuss politics.[77] The Carolina emissary offers a political alliance to the Captain. He suggests that the whites, Protestants, and Americans unite against everyone else—blacks, Jews, Catholics, and foreigners. The Captain laughs and realizes "here we go again."[78] Despite being the survivors of the

near annihilation of the human race, nothing has changed—that is, human beings still are capable of violence, sectarianism, racism, divisiveness, and self-destruction.

From the perspective of survival, human race will be best served by going to Europa. Going to Lost Cove is the biologically riskier choice. Radiation still threatens the survivors, sperm count varies, and other violent communities threaten Lost Cove. In New Ionia, there is no radiation to worry about and fertility rises and Captain Schuyler can be confident that he saved the human species from extinction.

Aristarchus Jones, however, promises more than survival. He promises that New Ionia will be a happy new beginning for human civilization. Free from the errors of the past and from biological defects, they build New Ionia on the scientific insights into human sociability and well-being. To a great extent, New Ionia succeeds. As a fishing community, the New Ionians enjoy much leisure apparently free from backbreaking labor of procuring food and securing settlements. No other peoples on Europa exist to threaten them and so there is no need to defend New Ionia. In lieu of such basic concerns, New Ionia focuses on the group's well-being.[79] Life in New Ionia appears comfortable, secure, leisurely, and peaceful.

Despite its appearance, New Ionia falls short of the utopian promise. To be clear, New Ionia is not an Orwellian political dystopia, but a portrayal of a scientific, nonpolitical attempt to construct a society conducive to human well-being. New Ionia succeeds insofar as well-being is concerned, but it lacks the richer, robust feelings associated with happiness. Life is so well-managed in New Ionia that there is too little to do. Captain Schuyler is like a man in exile with only his books and music to relieve somewhat his old longings for action and decision. One commentator observes that Captain Schuyler reads *Henry IV*, Shakespeare's play about leadership, but New Ionia needs no leadership.[80] Since individuals have little need of each other, they do not enjoy the hearty relationships that contribute to happiness. Captain Schuyler does not talk, discuss, debate, or bicker with the inhabitants in New Ionia. He has sex with the younger New Ionians—New Ionia is not unpleasant—but sex is a poor surrogate for the more "complex courtship" he enjoyed with the three women crew members on the outward journey to find alien life.[81] New Ionia's post-political society does not need a man of action and so the Captain retreats to the stoic's inner sanctuary. In this respect, Captain Schuyler bears the lingering aches for action and complex human relationships better than Jane, who sulks by herself in her cave. Unhappiness retreats within the narrow bounds of the individual private life.

In New Ionia, public displays of unhappiness are not permitted. Jane sulks in her cave, because she knows she would not be allowed to sulk in public. In this respect, Percy shows that Aristarchus Jones's plan to do without political life and the errors of the past by imposing honesty—transparen-

cy—as the reigning virtue and key to happiness does not succeed. In fact, these so-called demands for honesty aim to suppress voices that question and disagree with the reigning ideology. In addition, group sessions aim to reduce difference among individuals, or "otherness," so as to prevent discord. New Ionia succeeds in keeping the peace, but New Ionia's honesty policy prevents individuals from sharing their lives with others through private relationships. No spousal pairs, no families, no friends, no political parties, clubs, or other private associations smaller than New Ionia itself exist. Even sexual unions include more than two persons. The Captain does not dare refuse Rima's hint to be included for sex with Candace and himself. Smaller private associations are treated with suspicion, because individuals may keep secrets with each other. Group sessions relentlessly aim to bring to light the internal feelings of its members. Those individuals who display behavior or sentiments antithetical to New Ionia's founding principle can be exiled. It is unclear who or by what decision-making body or process dissenters are punished, but exile from New Ionia is surely the equivalent of a death sentence. No other communities exist on Europa to harbor dissenters, and there is little chance of any others coming into being.

Upon arriving in Europa, Aristarchus Jones fittingly compares their arrival to the arrival of the Pilgrims to the New World and how they must have felt: "we left the old world and the old beliefs behind."[82] Aristarchus Jones recognizes that New Ionia's closest historical predecessor is the arrival of the Puritans in the New World. Percy, like Nathaniel Hawthorne, recognizes that the Puritans did not succeed in leaving behind the past. Hawthorne, generalizing from our Puritan founders, observes in *The Scarlet Letter* that despite "whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project," founders of utopias inevitably must construct cemeteries and prisons.[83] New Ionia punishes and exiles those whose ideas are antithetical to the group's ideals. Rima's subtle physical pressure on the Captain's shoulders indicates that jealousy and aggression have not disappeared in New Ionia despite suppression by drugs and regular therapeutic meetings. New Ionia has only freed itself of the old political, traditional, and institutional ways and expressions of internal feeling and desires, not eradicated them completely.

The choice between Aristarchus Jones and the Abbot is not, as one might be tempted to think, a choice between science and faith.[84] Instead, both alternatives require faith. Jones believes that they *now* possess both the experience and the right knowledge to construct society afresh with an aim for happiness. They can leave behind the mistakes of the past and secure a bright new future. Happiness is within reach. Abbot Liebowitz believes that humans are God's creatures, who have through sin fallen, but are redeemable through the Son of God; moreover, the Church waits for His second coming. Both

alternatives require a remarkable degree of faith that Captain Schuyler, who will make the decision, does not have.

It is unlikely that the Captain is greatly moved by Aristarchus Jones's modern enthusiasm for science's ability to create a perfect society or for the Abbot's concern that the human race needs priests. It is worth considering why Percy gives this choice to a stoic and how might the Captain be swayed to make his decision in favor of Lost Cove—the choice for the complex and varied human relationships necessary for happiness. As a stoic, Captain Schuyler possesses admirable qualities for leadership. Captain Schuyler is resolute and confident through bleak circumstances. He is leader and capable of making political decisions for the sake of those in his care. Percy allows the stoic virtues to shine, because the Captain is not a Southern stoic and so does not share with Emily a longing for the South's aristocratic past. Instead, Captain Schuyler is a descendant of the Dutch who settled in New York. Unlike Percy's usual heroes who are lapsed Catholics, Captain Schuyler is a "Post-Protestant"—post-Puritan—hero.[85] The Captain arrives at his wintry outlook to cope with the disappointment of the New World. He is a post-modern stoic. To the Puritans, the New World seemed like an opportunity for a fresh start under divine favor, which was free from the aristocratic errors of the past. But they did not wholly succeed in leaving the Old World behind. In this respect, Captain Schuyler resembles many Americans who, without new frontiers to explore, have lost faith in American exceptionalism. Like Emily, Captain Schuyler likes leading a lost cause, and he thinks the mission to investigate the alien signal is a lost cause. Despite his fondness for lost causes, Percy cheats the Captain out of his lost cause and compels him to put his virtues in service of the future and for the sake of the survivors. Captain Schuyler had enjoyed thinking he lived at the end of an age, but, quite unexpectedly, he finds himself in position of being a founder—the so-called lost cause mission may prove to be an unexpected success.

If the Captain follows his preference for lost causes, he will choose New Ionia. Unlike Aristarchus Jones, Captain Schuyler knows that New Ionia will be another failed attempt to escape the past and the self by relocating, just as the Puritans tried in the New World. With resignation, the Captain would accept it as humanity's fate to chase after new beginnings and happiness and end up disappointed. In New Ionia, Captain Schuyler would retreat, with his books and music, and live with thin contentment as he relied on his own internal resources for his happiness with scant regard for anyone else.

If Captain Schuyler chooses the Abbot Liebowitz's plan, he is choosing in favor of being with Jane. The supposed failed mission succeeds in an unexpected way and provides the pivotal experience to incline Captain Schuyler to choose Lost Cove. The Captain learns to include himself among the survivors—to make decisions as one of them, not on behalf of them. His original mission was a search for alien life, but instead, Captain Schuyler and Jane

find each other on the journey. While on the return journey to Earth, the crew looks forward to their return and eagerly chat about what they will do and where they will go when they arrive. Jane asks the Captain if he would prefer to come to Tennessee with her to which he responds that he would rather go with her. Captain Schuyler's preference for Jane indicates a reform in his stoicism away from internal self-sufficiency and toward realizing that he needs other people and is not simply needed by them. The Captain does not have to accept the Abbot's account of man as a fallen being awaiting the second coming of Christ to choose Lost Cove.

The space mission with Jane revealed to him the possibilities of sharing his life searching with someone else. In Lost Cove, the Captain departs from the Sunday nonbelievers group on the grounds that Jane will be looking for him and that he must go attend to a pig in a smoker.[86] In a nod to perhaps the Captain's old stoic vanity for self-sufficiency, he conceals his need to go look for Jane under the excuse that she will be looking for him and that he must attend to dinner. The Captain is pretending in the commonplace way that people invent polite reasons for going home to be with their closest loved ones. Unlike in New Ionia, in Lost Cove, it is normal to conceal and keep one's private life relatively private. Indeed, Percy does not show us the Captain and Jane's home and allows their private relationship to remain out of view. Captain Schuyler, however, is happy to leave the hillside because he knows that Jane will be looking for him and so he goes in search of her.

Secondly, as the pilot of the ship, Captain Schuyler enjoys a position of leadership. To choose New Ionia would be to choose against himself, because New Ionia does not need his fortitude, confidence, and protection.[87] Decisions in New Ionia affecting the group will be managed according to scientific-behavioral theories that once the appropriate conditions are set in place allow little room for further intervening activity. In New Ionia, the Captain is a relic (perhaps useful only as a fertile male), but in Lost Cove, he has much to do for the community's political life. Abbot Liebowitz's plan is incomplete or partial, because he makes no mention of the political organization of Lost Cove. Political life is left up to the Captain and the community of Lost Cove.

In the final scenario set either in New Ionia or Lost Cove, an old antenna receives a message from alien life.[88] The message is a series of questions asking the listeners if they are in trouble, if they understand the self, if they need help, and if they have received it. Percy asks the reader where she would rather be—New Ionia or Lost Cove—when the message is received. Before considering how the reader might answer the question, it is useful to reflect on the alien sender of the message. The alien appears to be a fellow searcher, because he asks questions rather than claims to have the answers. This is an unexpected twist, because Percy inverts the usual alien encounter in which humans look for aliens. In both space odysseys, Percy follows the

usual story in which Earth sends a spaceship in search of aliens who have the answers to our political, social, moral, and economic troubles. Such a search for aliens is really a search for better experts to manage our lives since human experts will fall short. But the message is from an alien who, like us, is also searching.

It may not matter where the reader is when the message is received. As noted above, while New Ionia may succeed in providing for the community's material well-being, its techniques do not succeed in delivering its inhabitants from their human longings. Arguably, New Ionia may be the best place to be because the façade of New Ionian happiness is paper thin. Nevertheless, as will be more thoroughly explored in *The Thanatos Syndrome*, the use of chemicals to suppress unhappy feelings threatens to deprive the individual of her most precious clue and prompt to begin the search. Lost Cove, however, is the better place for preparing the individual to understand herself as a creature in need of friends and fellow searchers.

Percy presents a practical demonstration in *Lost in the Cosmos* that New Ionia may promise happiness, but, in Lost Cove, there are happier people. Lost Cove is the choice for individuals making their way in life guided by particular human relationships. In this light, New Ionia's utopian promise of happiness looks more like a meager survival of the species than the richness, and even excess, of human ties known in Lost Cove. As Percy shows in Lost Cove, Captain Schuyler leads the community, discusses political matters, and meets with foreign agents. Under the Captain's leadership, Lost Cove is made up ethnically of peoples from diverse backgrounds, enjoys religious diversity, and cares for the healthy and misbegotten children alike.

Although he set forth the plan for New Ionia, Aristarchus Jones does not appear in either alternative future. In New Ionia, presumably, he wields the unseen power that directs the community. In Lost Cove, perhaps Jones withdraws from society to resume research, or perhaps he moves on to live elsewhere. Percy treats Aristarchus Jones rather kindly. Jones is a searcher though clueless about his own existence as a searcher. He uncovered the old records about the spaceship's scheduled return, and, having faith that it would return, he traveled on horseback to the Utah desert in expectation of the spaceship's arrival. The sense of a higher purpose, however, that justifies the slight regard for the particularity of human life that leads Jones to recommend leaving behind on Earth the misbegotten children and all the other survivors comes under closer scrutiny in *The Thanatos Syndrome*. Everydayness stands out as the enemy to the search in *The Moviegoer*, and Percy portrays Jones as an individual in error, but does not fully show his perspective's potential harm to society. Aristarchus Jones's confidence that science can find a solution to human unhappiness comes under more direct criticism in *The Thanatos Syndrome*.

THE THANATOS SYNDROME

In *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy emphasizes how techniques to distract the self from its unhappiness inevitably fail, but in *The Thanatos Syndrome*, he recognizes that mood altering chemicals pose a grave threat. To be clear, Percy imagines that science will develop drugs that are more effective distractions from unhappiness—not that these drugs will be perfected means of depriving the self of the self. The real danger is, as Peter Augustine Lawler rightly notes, "what such efforts will do to us."[89] And that, as Brian A. Smith notes, such scientific attempts to modify human behavior may "succeed in eradicating man's natural intuitions regarding a healthy life, thus cause him to lose his one path to living well."[90] The scientific approach to pursuing happiness sacrifices our capacity for happiness, our consciousness, in the name of promoting animalistic well-being.

In *The Thanatos Syndrome*, through the use of chemicals to alleviate unhappy feelings, a Feliciana parish in Louisiana is threatened by a utopian social engineering conspiracy that tries to re-create society free from the causes of human misery and unhappiness.[91] The problem is not that the scientists fail and produce a dystopia—Percy once again inverts the usual story line—but rather they succeed to a remarkable degree in alleviating social problems. Their "solution" extracts heavy costs. Members of Feliciana parish risk losing their self-awareness, humanity, life and liberty. Percy defends unhappiness—not in itself good—but as part of the predicament of being a conscious self and so as a clue to self-understanding that promises a greater and more fulfilling happiness. Unhappiness can direct us to a greater good of being in community with others that makes unhappiness seem less terrible and provides real relief from the restless pursuit of happiness.

The Thanatos Syndrome begins as a mystery.[92] The story is set in the not too far off future in which Dr. Tom More, a psychiatrist, "stumble[s] onto something" wrong with his patients.[93] More sees clues and slight differences in their behavior that point toward a peculiar sickness, or loss of self among the inhabitants of Feliciana parish. His former patients do not exhibit their "old terrors" but appear to be cured of them.[94] Instead of anxiety and discontent, they display "a mild vacancy, a species of unfocused animal good spirits."[95] Feliciana parish citizens, while freed of their old fears, have deteriorated communication skills. Though they appear contented, they sometimes exhibit remarkable brutality and odd sexual behavior. With the help of an eclectic group of friends, More puts together the clues and uncovers who and what is behind the community's loss of self.

More discovers that Bob Comeaux and John Van Dorn have added heavy sodium to the parish's water supply as part of a project (called Blue Boy) to decrease crime and misery and increase well-being and happiness.[96] The Blue Boy project enjoys significant and remarkable success. It reduces many

social evils such as crime, unemployment, suicide, violence, domestic abuse, teenage pregnancies, drug use, depression, and anxiety. Moreover, although heavy sodium decreases verbal and communication skills, it improves mental recall and computations. For example, individuals cannot link together words and sentences to tell a story, but they can recall information and make calculations much like a savant.

Blue Boy is an unauthorized project and Comeaux and Van Dorn know that releasing heavy sodium without consent is a dubious maneuver. Yet, Comeaux and Van Dorn reasonably expect that when they reveal the positive statistics to the public, their project will be embraced by the current presidential administration. For the time being, though, they must wait to make public the success of their project until after the upcoming presidential election in which they expect the incumbent to win reelection easily. Comeaux and Van Dorn fear that More will expose Blue Boy to the public prior to the election. If More reveals to the public that heavy sodium—used in nuclear reactors—has been added to the water supply without their consent, Blue Boy will be jettisoned as a political hot potato. Comeaux tries to get More on his side. First, Comeaux appeals to More as a fellow scientist engaged in the same enterprise to improve human life. Second, Comeaux reminds More that his research on heavy sodium made the Blue Boy project possible—he is already implicit in the project.[97] Third, Comeaux tries old-fashioned blackmail.[98]

More dislikes Comeaux and Van Dorn's methods, but initially seems impressed with their results. He flounders to provide a counterargument to Comeaux and Van Dorn's claim that their methods have superseded the psychiatrist's method of talking and listening. Still perplexed, More visits Father Smith for advice. Father Smith links the scientists' abstract love of humanity and eugenic policies to the Third Reich. In an impassioned speech, Father Smith explains that "tenderness" is a "disguise" and leads "[t]o the gas chamber."[99] More finally decides to thwart Comeaux and Van Dorn's project. Blue Boy is shut down and the people of Feliciana recover their former, troubled selves, but Van Dorn and Comeaux escape punishment.

Tom More may be the protagonist of the story, but many commentators believe the irascible Father Smith is Percy's true spokesman and, as one critic claims, "represents Percy's most uncompromising attack on science."[100] Representative of this view, Mary Deems Howland observes with disapproval that More consistently fails to counter directly Comeaux's argument that they share the basic goal to improve the human lot.[101] Howland finds Father Smith's uncompromising condemnation and refutation of Comeaux and Van Dorn's project more satisfying. Whereas More is compromised by his breakthrough research on heavy sodium that made Blue Boy possible and his ambivalent sympathies with Comeaux's goal to reduce human suffering and improve the human lot, Father Smith remains staunchly and adamantly opposed. More consistently fails, it is true, to confront Co-

meaux with a counterargument in the style of Father Smith's impassioned defense of the sacredness of particular life against Comeaux and Van Dorn's devaluation of individual life.[102] Father Smith's argument is attractive because he is so uncompromisingly opposed to the scientists. He has no doubt that every human being is a creature of God, created in His image, and whose life is sacred. Yet, Father Smith's argument only convinces if one already agrees with him. More never directly confirms Father Smith's metaphysical account of fallen human nature redeemable only through God's grace. Instead, More defends the search with others against Comeaux and Van Dorn who would do away with the unhappiness that leads individuals to seek to understand themselves. More defeats Comeaux and Van Dorn not by theoretical argumentation, but he gives a practical demonstration in which, after foiling their conspiracy and instead of punishing or killing them, he tries to help them.

Percy sets *The Thanatos Syndrome* slightly in the future in which he may suppose fictional, but plausible political circumstances in which groups of individuals deemed of limited social utility can be manipulated for the sake of improving the well-being of the whole. Given the public policies already in operation at the start of the novel, the American doctrine of rights does not sufficiently protect individual life and liberty. The doctrine is too thin. The pursuit of happiness, instead of being the reason for life and liberty, becomes the justification to deprive individuals of life and liberty. Socially vulnerable groups (such as AIDS patients, children with severe mental and physical impairments, and the elderly) are already marginalized and deprived of life and liberty through ordinary political procedures. As far as the novel shows, the public accepts these laws as legitimate and efficacious. Congress cuts funding for Medicare, but not for the Qualitarian centers in which the euthanasia of impaired and unwanted children and elderly is routine. By federal regulation, AIDS patients and children born with AIDS live under quarantine—a great deprivation of personal liberty. Through many rulings that support the euthanasia of children and the elderly, the Supreme Court recognizes a "Right to Death provision."[103]

Comeaux and Van Dorn correctly see their project as a continuation of these public policies. The court grounded decisions in favor of euthanatizing severely deformed and mentally impaired children on the proper respect for the family, the opinions of experts, and due concern for children who may otherwise lead intolerable lives of abuse and suffering. In consideration of the euthanasia of the elderly, the court balanced how a life with dignity must entail death with dignity. No doubt these are the reasonable considerations the court would balance in their judgment. Percy takes care to add these details to make the Court's ruling plausible to the reader.

In this way, Percy points to deficiencies in American public discourse. The doctrine of rights does not sufficiently protect individuals who have

been deemed socially undesirable from oppression, because it is incomplete. The doctrine of rights relies too heavily on an abstracted concept of the individual as an autonomous self in which autonomy is the essential characteristic of the individual. Giving primacy to the preservation of individual autonomy mistakes the autonomous self, a theoretical creation, for the whole person. When public conversations, such as judicial and legislative deliberations, focus on quality of life and dignity to preserve individual autonomy, they obscure the extent to which we are all needy beings who require noncontractual social relationships to mutually seek self-knowledge. Comeaux confidently expects that just as the courts have consistently upheld the addition of fluoride in drinking water—for the mere but tangible benefit of improving the public's teeth—it will uphold the addition of heavy sodium in the water supply as a true political and social panacea.[104]

The main objection More musters against the scientists' plot is that they are "assaulting the cortex of an individual" without informed consent.[105] More's argument rests on familiar liberal grounds regarding the principles of consent. By giving More this argument, Percy shows the weakness of solely liberal foundations to protect individuals from the kind of scientific manipulation conducted by Comeaux. Comeaux belittles the question of consent, calls it a "philosophical question," and claims that the pertinent question is whether human misery is caused by evolving unnecessarily large brains.[106] Deftly, Comeaux replaces a political question of consent that entails theories about social contract, rights, duties, and personhood in favor of a much simpler empirical, material question. He rejects the stuff of normal political discourse regarding rights and consent as so much metaphysical nonsense that overlooks the real and the material problem behind social problems, which can be solved by altering the brain's chemicals.

Turning the tables on More, Comeaux claims that he protects society from the real assaulters—those usual criminal malefactors like murderers, robbers, and rapists. Blue Boy virtually eliminates those violent social malfeasances. By bypassing the usual political concerns for consent and rights, Comeaux and Van Dorn believe they achieve what the political process could not. Divisive political debates can be transcended by scientific solutions. Case in point, Comeaux cites that the rise of teenage pregnancies entails contentious debates on "contraceptives in schools, abortion, [and] child abuse."[107] By adding a hormone to school cafeteria diet that changes the female reproduction cycle from menstrual to estrus, teenage pregnancies virtually disappear in the test high school. With that simple biological alternation, the old for and against abortion arguments are bypassed, the state saves money, families stay together, and so "[f]amily life is improved."[108]

Such palpable results as Blue Boy's appear to overcome objections based on rights and consent, because heavy sodium achieves the social concord and individual well-being that the doctrine of rights and politics failed to pro-

duce. Given the desperate and bleak depiction of rampant crime and unhappiness, the public may embrace Blue Boy for the sake of anything to cure themselves. Not only are American governing institutions unable to uphold individual life and liberty, it seems that the public itself may have lost the will to defend individual life and liberty. The ends of liberalism (and even the pursuit of happiness) is better accomplished by means other than its own. Blue Boy accomplishes what the political process fails to do. Social ills are overcome, but lost is the individual freedom to answer the question "how to live" both for oneself and as a participating member of society.

Consequently, Blue Boy's brilliant statistical success hides how these so-called social improvements come at the expense of the groups traditionally and historically marginalized in American society. The spread of AIDS is reduced primarily because heavy sodium decreases the desire for drugs (fewer needle transmissions) and reduces homosexual tendencies. Comeaux proudly says that voluntarily the Gay and Lesbian Club at LSU disbanded, gay bars closed, and that the sale of homosexual videos dropped. Crime dropped and instead of "young punks" on the streets, they are learning trades in occupations like plumbing and the service industry.[109] Comeaux tells More about how beautiful the Baton Rouge projects have become with plush gardens and native artwork. Perhaps the most dramatic presentation of the effects of heavy sodium is the image of the prison inmates in the fields—the men bare-chested and women wearing "colorful kerchiefs"—singing old hymns ("*swing low, sweet chariot*," italics in original) and picking cotton.[110] Comeaux says that they are happy with their new life. Although he claims that he is "just a guy out to improve a little bit the quality of life for all Americans," he has re-created society according to his likening.[111] Comeaux suppresses homosexuality so as to eliminate AIDS, gains control over women's reproduction systems, channels troubled youths to service industry jobs, and converts prisoners into virtual slaves working the fields.

In contrast to the Blue Boy scientists, More's approach to treatment that is less like a cure and more, as one commentator describes it, "a process involving mutuality and reciprocity between physician and patient."[112] More seeks to help his patients and also hopes to be helped by them. For example, although More is concerned about Father Smith's mental and physical health, he seeks Father Smith's advice about how to respond to Comeaux's job offer and the heavy sodium in the water. Unlike the scientists, More understands that he is a relational being who depends on others. More calls this his "best therapy" in which he is "asking for help and helping by asking."[113]

Tom More brings people together in common tasks by showing them how they can help each other. Movies and TV stories "go wrong" when the bad guy is shot according to More, because "[y]ou don't shoot X for what he did to Y, even though he deserves shooting."[114] More knows that killing Comeaux and Van Dorn will not remove the human longing for death and self-

destruction. The Comeauxes and Van Dorns of the world cannot be defeated entirely, nor can the impulse toward death be located within specific individuals who by their disposal will set the world aright. Instead, More says that "[y]ou allow X a way out so he can help Y."[115] More's strategy is not to convince someone that he is in need of someone else, but show him how he can help another person. Individuals, perhaps most of all liberal individuals who value autonomy, enjoy thinking of themselves as benefactors rather than beneficiaries. As a practical matter, when one individual helps another, the action is not simply external but also operates internally on the doer and so brings about good to the doer as well as the recipient. Individuals are simultaneously a benefactor and a beneficiary. Needing and helping another person creates a relation to someone as another self and not an object to be manipulated. It is this full, comprehensive good that More sees is possible, but is impossible in Comeaux and Van Dorn's envisioned societies.

More is remarkably successful at rehabilitating many of the lesser participants in the scientists' scheme.[116] But there is a limit to rehabilitation. Van Dorn returns to his "old self, his charming, grandiose, slightly phony Confederate self," writes a splashy bestseller, and becomes a regular on TV talk-shows.[117] Comeaux quietly disappears—rumor has it—to China to assist in their one-child per family policy. Despite More's best efforts, Van Dorn and Comeaux voluntarily refuse to be helped. But many of More's patients return eager to pick up their search for self-understanding where they left off. In the final pages of the novel, Mickey LeFaye, one of More's patients who had been "cured" by heavy sodium, returns to his office once again full of her old fears that there is something wrong despite being surrounded by apparent well-being. An old reoccurring dream about her childhood in Vermont in an apple barn with a stranger has returned and she is eager to talk with Tom More about what it means. Unlike her previous visits to More's office, Mickey now believes that the stranger is kind and wants to tell her something. She is keen to explore this possibility with More and seems almost happy despite her fears. More cannot offer Mickey release from her fears the way that the heavy sodium did, but instead, Mickey knows that she has someone to help her with her search.

Consequently, *The Thanatos Syndrome* does not end with a perfect resolution. The project to add heavy sodium to the water supply is an example, even a crude example, not the real source of the impulse toward death and self-destruction. As Percy shows, "happily ever after" is a misguided ending for even the "good guys" who are also troubled and lost selves. Percy presents neither total triumph nor utter defeat, but shows that searching with others for hope that the self does not have to succumb to self-destruction.

UNDERSTANDING OUR UNHAPPINESS

In *The Thanatos Syndrome*, More wonders that if a drug can "turn a haunted soul into a bustling little body, why take on such a quixotic quest as pursuing the secret of one's very self?"[118] If a pill can relieve the self of its cares and burdens, then engaging in the task of searching the self seems self-indulgent and perverse. As a psychiatrist, More can prescribe psycho-pharmaceuticals, but he rarely prescribes them. The patient will feel better, he says, but "they'll never find out what the terror is trying to tell them."[119] More points to the Enlightenment as the source of a distinctive type of modern anxiety and unhappiness: "this is not the Age of Enlightenment but the Age of Not Knowing What to Do."[120] Consequently, pursuing happiness is "an odd pursuit," because it is trying to be something that you are not, which is like trying to have another eye color than the one you have.[121] The deep problem with the pursuit of happiness is that it encourages people to pursue happiness in a manner that prevents them from recognizing that their manner of pursuit is precisely what prevents them from being relieved of their fear of anxiety. More's message to his patients who seek a cure is that there is not a cure. He suggests that "[m]aybe a cure is knowing there is no cure."[122] More does not cure his patients of their anxiety, but cures them of their expectation that they ought to be cured and helps them think of anxiety as a clue to self-understanding.

Likewise, through *The Moviegoer* and *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy draws his readers to consider unhappiness as a happy starting place for joint searches. Unhappiness draws us together because it points us toward understanding how we may help each other and need each other as we journey together through life. Searching with others separates Percy's approach from the scientist's and the stoic's. Neither science, with which Percy would closely align the pursuit of happiness, nor stoicism understands the human being as a needy, dependent being, who, above all, needs other people to live well. Our human weakness is a fortunate, or even happy circumstance. According to Percy, science and stoicism mistakenly exaggerate human autonomy or self-sufficiency. Yet humans are not helpless beings, but are able to help and be helped by each other. Through our capacity to help and be helped, our lives achieve greater well-being and contentment than we could know as pursuers of happiness.

Percy remains deeply critical of the pursuit of happiness as a pursuit of well-being that attempts to relieve the individual entirely of her unhappiness. But he is not entirely opposed to the Declaration. Implicitly, Percy recognizes that the Declaration assumes that the moral worth of the pursuit of happiness lies within the individual's free ability to determine the means of her pursuit. As a practical matter, the liberty left to the individual to pursue happiness also allows for the search. Americans err insofar as we set happi-

ness as the object of our pursuit and encourage the swiftest and surest attainment of it. Yet, there remains a strong presumption that the means of the pursuit—the free pursuit of happiness—matter for the sake of achieving the end. For Percy, the means of the search is important, because how we search ultimately determines what we will find. Percy argues for the integrity of the search as a means of living well over the pursuit of happiness.

Despite their differences, Wolfe and Percy agree that the individual cannot live well apart from society, and, as we have seen, they direct our attention away from individualistic pursuits and toward finding the good life with others. Society inclines us to esteem the wrong things for the sake of happiness and it is our task to discern where our true interest and well-being lies. Wolfe admirably points to our need for courage to stand up to society and focuses on supplementing liberalism with ancient thought, particularly stoicism. On its own, Wolfe recognizes that stoicism is too self-sufficient and insular and unwilling to risk one's own internal happiness for the sake of another. Wolfe amends stoicism with liberalism's commitment to protect the weak and vulnerable against arbitrary force. Yet, Percy remains unconvinced. He is critical of stoicism precisely for the reason that he thinks it will contribute more to isolation and individualism than to fellow feeling and community. Instead of turning to ancient sources, Percy reminds us of our common existential predicament and restores to us the fundamental question of "what shall I do" that the pursuit of happiness tries implicitly to answer. In searching to answer this question, Percy makes the search with others and as fellow wayfarers the means for living well.[123]

Neither Wolfe nor Percy have much regard for traditional social structures and both usually view social constraints with suspicion as forces bent on leading the individual toward wastrel and materialistic pursuits. Edith Wharton shows us another possibility in which society can beneficially constrain the individual for the sake of living well. In response to Wolfe and Percy, Wharton argues that to seek happiness outside of the social structure and the positions or roles in which we are born is to venture where happiness cannot be found. For Edith Wharton, Percy's supposed return to the fundamental question of our existence is self-indulgent and nonsensical. Wharton remains as critical of the pursuit of happiness as Percy, but faults the pursuit of happiness for encouraging individuals to seek the phantom of self-gratification and unmixed pleasure over the self-sacrifice and mixed happiness that characterizes human life.

NOTES

1. Much of this chapter was originally published in Elizabeth Amato, "Walker Percy's Critique of the Pursuit of Happiness in *The Moviegoer*, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book*, and *The Thanatos Syndrome*," in *A Political Companion to Walker Percy*, eds. Peter

Augustine Lawler and Brian A. Smith, 47–68 (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013).

2. Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (New York, Picador: 1983), 74.

3. See Martin, Luschei, *The Sovereign Wayfarer: Walker Percy's Diagnosis of the Malaise* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972) as the first book-length study of Percy's then only three novels. Another notable Percy scholar, Lewis A. Lawson also established Percy's existential credentials. Lawson argued that Percy's use of humor and satire to expose a malaise that can only be indirectly communicated linked his thought to Søren Kierkegaard in Lewis A. Lawson, "Walker Percy's Indirect Communications," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 11 (1969): 867–900. See Jerome Taylor, *In Search of Self: Life, Death, and Walker Percy* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1986); Mary Deems Howland's *The Gift of the Other: Gabriel Marcel's Concept of Intersubjectivity in Walker Percy's Novels* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1990); Panthea Reid Broughton, ed., *The Art of Walker Percy: Stratagems for Being* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); Jac Tharpe, ed., *Walker Percy: Art and Ethics* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 1980); John F. Zeugner, "Walker Percy and Gabriel Marcel: The Castaway and the Wayfarer," *Mississippi Quarterly* 28 (1974): 21–53; Bradley R. Dewey, "Walker Percy Talks about Kierkegaard," *Journal of Religion* 54 (1974): 273–98; Mary K. Sweeny, *Walker Percy and the Postmodern World* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987); Patricia Lewis Poteat, *Walker Percy and the Old Modern Age: Reflections on Language, Argument, and the Telling of Stories* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), and Ann Jerome Croce, "The Making of Post-Modern Man: Modernism and the Southern Tradition in the Fiction of Walker Percy," *Critique* 29 (1988): 213–21.

4. See Alexis de Tocqueville's chapter "On the Philosophical Method of the Americans" in *Democracy in America*, 403–7.

5. Luschei, *Sovereign*, 19.

6. Luschei, *Sovereign*, 20.

7. J. Donald Crowley, "Walker Percy: The Continuity of the Complex Fate," in *Critical Essays on Walker Percy*, ed. J. Donald Crowley and Sue Mitchell Crowley (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1989), 18.

8. For example, Cecil L. Eubanks interprets Percy so as to identify him with Kierkegaard and argues that "political activity must inevitably be regarded as another form of the dreaded abstraction" in "Walker Percy: Eschatology and the Politics of Grace" *The Southern Quarterly* 18 (1980): 124. Since politics is simply an abstraction, Eubanks concludes, it is "fundamentally incompatible with the searchings of the sovereign wayfarer" (126).

9. Crowley, "Continuity of the Complex Fate," 18.

10. Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer* (New York: Vintage International, 1998) 53.

11. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 9.

12. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 9 and 99. Terrye Newkirk notes that by using "Little Way" to describe his life, Binx "burlesques" St. Thérèse's "Little Way of spiritual childhood" in which her goal is "to live everyday life with great heroism" in "*Via Negativa* and the Little Way: The Hidden God of *The Moviegoer*," *Renascence* 44 (1992): 190 and 191. In contrast, Binx's "Little Way" intentionally avoids any hint of heroism. Binx's "Little Way" uses ordinary life as a shield to hide from his aunt's hopes for glorious and grand deeds. Binx's "Little Way" diminishes ordinary life for the sake of living an undistinguished life in contrast to how St. Thérèse's "Little Way" elevates ordinary life.

13. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 6.

14. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 7.

15. William Rodney Allen, *Walker Percy: A Southern Wayfarer* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), 25.

16. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 8.

17. Luschei, *Sovereign*, 75.

18. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 18.

19. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 11.

20. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 11.

21. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 13.
22. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 145.
23. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 19.
24. Barbara Filippidis, "Vision and the Journey to Selfhood in Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*," *Renascence* 33 (1980): 13.
25. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 13.
26. See Percy, *Moviegoer*, 13.
27. Emily never understands Binx's search and Binx never succeeds in finding right words to explain it.
28. Walker Percy, "Stoicism in the South," *Signposts in a Strange Land* (New York: Picador, 1991). See Lewis A. Lawson's "Walker Percy's Southern Stoic," *The Southern Literary Journal* 3 (1970): 5–31. See also Carl J. Richard's study of the influence of the classics in antebellum America in *The Golden Age of the Classics in America: Greece, Rome, and the Antebellum United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
29. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 223.
30. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 222.
31. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 224.
32. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 224.
33. Filippdis, "Vision and the Journey," 11.
34. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 49 and 33.
35. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 49.
36. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 23.
37. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 49.
38. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 4.
39. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 4.
40. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 78.
41. Richard Pindell, "Basking in the Eye of the Storm: The Esthetics of Loss in Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*," *boundary 2* 4 (1975): 222.
42. Newkirk, "*Via Negativa*," 192 and 193.
43. Mary Grabar, "Percy's Despairing Female in the 'Unmoved Mover,'" *Renascence* 54 (2002): 126.
44. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 43.
45. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 43.
46. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 13.
47. Percy, *Moviegoer*, 13.
48. Percy, *Signposts*, 151.
49. Percy, *The Moviegoer*, 228. See also Virginia Nickles Osborne's "'The Most Ordinary Life Imaginable': Cold War Culture in Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*," *The Southern Literary Journal* 41 (2009): 106–25. Osborne's reading is remarkably free from existential analysis and focuses exclusively on *The Moviegoer* as a landmark Southern novel that shifts from the usual, "lost cause" subject matter to Cold War concerns. Although Osborne considers Binx's despondence as the result of living under the threat of atomic war, Osborne highlights better than any other scholar how much the threat of nuclear war appears in the story.
50. Crowley, "Continuity of the Complex Fate," 270.
51. Percy, *Lost*, 83 and 85.
52. Most often scholars use parts of the book, particularly the semiotic "intermezzo," in the course of other projects on Percy's work to clarify his theory of language. For example, John Edward Hardy uses the semiotic "intermezzo" and the space odysseys to explain Percy's theory of language in the introduction to his book *The Fiction of Walker Percy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 13–19. John F. Desmond uses the semiotic "intermezzo" to establish a "conceptual framework" in "Resurrecting the Body: Walker Percy and the Sensuous-Erotic Spirit" *Renascence* 58 (2006): 195. In a discussion of Percy's theory of re-entry, suicide, and *The Second Coming*, Robert W. Rudnicki borrows the list of selves presented in the twenty question quiz in *Percyscapes: The Fugue State in Twentieth-Century Southern Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 44–49. *Lost in the Cosmos*'s peculiar format often strikes a wrong note with some commentators. In her review, Francine Du Plessix Gray

found the book "exasperating" and a "pop-Socratic" failure to make the reader aware of Percy's despair caused by vapid American life in "A Pop-Socratic Survey of Despair," *The New York Times*, June 5, 1983, http://www.nytimes.com/1983/06/05/books/a-pop-socratic-survey-of-despair.html?mcubz=0. Thomas Disch finds Percy's direct address to the reader "an oppressive experience" and dislikes the "chummy multiple-choice questionnaires" in "Walker Percy's Summa Semiotica." *The Washington Post,* June 19, 1983. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/1983/06/19/walker-percys-summa-semiotica/5f54406d-87a0-4cb3-bed6-e1f998026fb2/?utm_term=.5ecca99b4b26. Kieran Quinlan faults the book for its "lack of reflective seriousness" in *Walker Percy: the Last Catholic Novelist* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996) 178. Anatole Broyard called the twenty question quiz a "kind of parody of the Socratic method" in "Books of the Times: Trying to Help the Self" *The New York Times*, June 11, 1983. http://www.nytimes.com/1983/06/11/books/books-of-the-times-trying-to-help-the-self.html?mcubz=0.

Arguing that there is method in the book's apparent mad design, Michael A. Mikolajczak claims that *Lost in the Cosmos* is not a disorganized montage, but "is carefully structured and highly controlled in "'A Home That Is Hope': Lost Cove, Tennessee," *Renascence* 50 (1998): 299. In fact, Mikolajczak notes that Percy repeats this same thematic order in the subtitle to Percy's book of essays *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other*. Mikolajczak divides the novel into three thematic parts in which the first part addresses the peculiarity of human beings and the predicament they find themselves in, the second part the triadic character of human language, and in the third part the relationship between the human beings and language. Mikolajczak makes a good case that *Lost in the Cosmos* is an ordered and organized whole. However, his focus on language overlooks how Percy engages in political questions of the ends and purposes of political communities. Notwithstanding this criticism, Mikolajczak's analysis has been most helpful.

53. The spaceship, whose captain is of Dutch descent, is, like Rip Van Winkle, absentee for eighteen years and returns to discover it dramatically changed. Despite near obliteration of the Earth, the crew of the spaceship remain themselves just like how Rip Van Winkle is not the least changed, but still enjoys idling. See Crowley, "Continuity of the Complex Fate," 270.

54. According to Peter Augustine Lawler, both Percy and Sagan recognize that human beings are "naturally wanderers and wonderers," but disagree on the reason in *Aliens in America: The Strange Truth about Our Souls* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2002), 52. Sagan believes we wander like our original hunter-gatherers for the sake of survival, but Percy believes we wander because we wonder about ourselves. Lawler argues that Percy exposes Sagan's scientism to be destructive of the wondering that science needs.

55. Percy, *Lost*, vii.

56. Percy, *Lost*, 12.

57. Percy's critique of the Cartesian dualism and ontology is well explored by scholars. See John F. Desmond, "Walker Percy and Suicide," *Modern Age* (2005): 58–63, Jon Young "Walker Percy on the Cartesian Ideal of Knowing," *Renascence* 42 (1990): 123–40, and Mathew Sitman and Brian Smith's "The Rift in the Modern Mind: Tocqueville and Percy on the Rise of the Cartesian Self," *Perspectives on Political Science* 36 (2007): 15–22.

58. Percy, *Lost*, 12.

59. Percy, *Lost*, 12.

60. Percy, *Lost*, 74.

61. Percy cites Hitchcock's *Spellbound* as the prime example of the amnesic self in which amnesic Gregory Peck assumes a new life, and with the help of Ingrid Bergman, uncovers his past life.

62. Percy, *Lost*, 211.

63. Nathan P. Carson argues that these aliens represent "unfallen symbol-mongering beings" who are self-conscious but who have not become lost in the "inauthenticity of grasping for themselves as autonomous solitary *somethings*" (italics in original) in "Walker Percy's 'Theory of Man' and the Elimination of Virtue" in *A Political Companion to Walker Percy*, eds. Peter Augustine Lawler and Brian A. Smith (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 101.

64. See Percy, *Lost*, 172–74 in which he wonders why Sagan is so interested in finding alien life and consequently why he is "so lonely" (173). See also Lawler*, Aliens in America*, 52 for discussion of Percy's interest in Carl Sagan.
65. Percy, *Lost*, 227.
66. Percy, *Lost*, 229.
67. Percy, *Lost*, 246.
68. Percy, *Lost*, 249.
69. Percy, *Lost*, 256.
70. Percy, *Lost*, 257.
71. Percy, *Lost*, 256.
72. Percy, *Lost*, 256.
73. Percy, *Lost*, 258.
74. Percy, *Lost*, 261.
75. Percy, *Lost*, 259.
76. Percy, *Lost*, 259.
77. Percy, *Lost*, 260.
78. Percy, *Lost*, 261.
79. Aristarchus Jones says that they will focus on "learning to know ourselves, for only by knowing our interior gods and demons can we exorcise them" (Percy, *Lost*, 256).
80. Mikolajczak, "Home That Is Hope," 313.
81. Percy, *Lost*, 235. The Captain has fun "playing the unflappable captain" and "doing his job, and lounging at his ease" in such a way to please the women, which in turn pleased him (228 and 235).
82. Percy, *Lost*, 256.
83. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 42.
84. See Mikolajczk, "Home That is Hope," 312.
85. Percy, *Lost*, 231.
86. See Percy, *Lost*, 261.
87. The Captain's last name, Schuyler, in Dutch means "protector" or "scholar."
88. See Percy, *Lost*, 261–62.
89. Peter Augustine Lawler, "Walker Percy, Alexis de Tocqueville, and the Stoic and Christian Foundations of American Thomism," in *A Political Companion to Walker Percy*, eds. Peter Augustine Lawler and Brian A. Smith (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 241.
90. Brian A. Smith, "Walker Percy's Last Men: *Love in the Ruins* as a Fable of American Decline," in *A Political Companion to Walker Percy*, eds. Peter Augustine Lawler and Brian A. Smith (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 195.
91. Nor is this the first time the Feliciana parish has been subject to utopian plans. *Love in the Ruins*, which is set before the events in *The Thanatos Syndrome* introduces Tom More, filled with ambition, creates a machine that promises to save the world from its self-destructive path, but fails and in so doing, discovers love and friendship instead. As Brian A. Smith explains, "More's lapsometer [his machine] could not save the world—or even More himself. Instead, Ellen's love helps him recover a more moderate life" in "Walker Percy's Last Men," 203. As the title suggests, the goal is not to remake the world anew, but hope remains that "we might reknit our communities amid the ruins" (203).
92. *The Thanatos Syndrome* is a sequel to *Love in the Ruins*, in which Dr. Thomas More invents a soul-diagnostic machine that promises to cure the United States of everydayness. See Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World* (New York: Picador, 1971). In the sequel, More's "scale is smaller," and he lives a "small life" that has given him "leave to notice small things" in *The Thanatos Syndrome* (New York, Picador: 1987), 67. This new capacity to notice and connect small things, clues as Binx would call them, will help More succeed on a smaller scale. Consequently, More has already learned Binx's lesson of the search as fellow wayfarers. He knows that unhappiness is a part of being a self, but we are happily (fortunately) situated to search with others by talking and listening.
93. Percy, *Thanatos,* 4.

94. Percy, *Thanatos*, 21.

95. Percy, *Thanatos*, 21.

96. Although Comeaux and Van Dorn work together, they have appreciably different visions for society. Comeaux works at a qualitarian center where, due to the recent Supreme Court rulings, unwanted children and the elderly are euthanized in the name of preserving quality and dignity of life. In addition to the futuristic political landscape, federal regulation requires the quarantine of AIDS patients and children born with AIDS. Comeaux reasons that evolution gave human beings unnecessarily large brains that led to the superego's excessive ability to inhibit ego. Release the ego from the superego's hold over it and people are happier, less prone to the cares and anxieties that lead to most social problems. Evolution's mistake can be corrected through the right therapeutic drugs. Bob Comeaux adopts the image of the Southern gentleman and tries to reconstruct Feliciana as "the best of the Southern Way of Life" (Percy, *Thanatos*, 197). Comeaux is, in fact, not from the South at all, but from Long Island and changed his last name from the Italian "Como." Comeaux's coconspirator, Van Dorn, is the project manager of the coolant division at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the director of Belle Ame Academy. In his capacity at the NRC, Van Dorn supplies Comeaux with the waste-heavy sodium that he puts in the water supply. Van Dorn thinks Comeaux has shortsighted goals for society and regards Blue Boy as just the first phase in the restoration of society and the promotion of excellence. Van Dorn has contempt for Comeaux as a "technologist" and argues that "[y]ou don't treat human ills by creaming the human cortext" (Percy, *Thanatos*, 217). Van Dorn recognizes that human beings have to remain human "enough to achieve the ultimate goals of being human" (Percy, *Thanatos*, 219). While Comeaux thinks nature, or evolution gave us too big of brains to be happy, Van Dorn blames society for inhibiting the sexual energy that motivates the greatest achievements of artists and scientists. Proper education—intellectual, physical and sexual—can release those energies. At Belle Ame Academy, which is "founded on Greek ideals of virtue," Van Dorn employs "the tough old European Gymnasium-Hochschule treatment" (Percy, *Thanatos*, 214 and 219). According to him, this rigorous method releases the repressed sexual energy necessary for "sexual geniuses" like Mozart and Einstein to achieve excellence in the arts and sciences (Percy, *Thanatos*, 220). The Belle Ame teachers engage in pedophilic acts with the children as part of their educational training in excellence.

97. Comeaux notes that More is "the father of isotope brain pharmacology" (Percy, *Thanatos*, 200).

98. Despite his release from prison, More has only a probationary license under the supervision of Bob Comeaux and Max Gottlieb, the members of the ethics committee charged to evaluate More. Comeaux tries to pressure More into joining him in the Quality of Life Division by withholding his recommendation.

99. Percy, *Thanatos*, 128. After his hospice closed, Father Simon Smith started living in a fire tower much like a St. Simeon Stylite, a Desert Father ascetic who lived on top of a pillar. Father Smith explains the modern attraction to death by telling More about an episode in his youth while visiting relatives in Germany. In his contempt for both the religion of his mother and romanticism of his father, he had been deeply attracted to the readiness, willingness and determination of his cousin, Helmut, to die for his country as an SS officer cadet. Father Smith admits that if he had been a German youth and not an American, he would have joined Helmut. Father Smith's point is that not just the scientists behind Blue Boy, but everyone is sick with the thanatos syndrome.

100. Robert Hughes, "Walker Percy's Comedy and 'The Thanatos Syndrome,'" *Southern Literary Journal* 22 (1989): 6. See John F. Desmond, "Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, and the Holocaust," in *At the Crossroads*, 94–101; Gary M. Ciuba, *Walker Percy: Books of Revelations* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 270–83; Patricia Lewis Poteat, "Pilgrim's Progress; or, a Few Night Thoughts on Tenderness and the Will to Power," in *Walker Percy: Novelist and Philosopher*, ed. Jan Nordby Gretlund and Karl-Heinz Westarp (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 208–24; Sue Michell Crowley, "*The Thanatos Syndrome*: Walker Percy's Tribute to Flannery O'Connor," in Jan Nordby Gretlund and Karl-Heinz Westarp, ed., *Walker Percy: Novelist and Philosopher* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 225–37.

101. Mary Deems Howland comments that "[w]hen More fails to tell Comeaux that what he is doing is wrong, the reader feels compelled to jump into the void left by Tom and confront Bob's ideas directly" in *The Gift of the Other*, 137. Howland refers to an incident after the qualitarian center is closed in which Comeaux tells More that "What people don't know but what you and I know is that we're both after the same thing—such as reducing the suffering in the world and making criminals behave themselves. . . . *You can't give me one good reason why what I am doing is wrong.* The only difference between us is that you're in good taste and I'm not" (Percy, *Thanatos*, 347; italics in original). Before More has a chance to respond, Comeaux leaves.

102. Micah Mattix also observes that Tom More is divided—he recognizes that what Van Dorn and Comeaux are doing is wrong, but he is "tempted by the ethical reasoning" of the scientists in "Walker Percy's Alternative to Scientism in *The Thanatos Syndrome*" in *A Political Companion to Walker Percy*, eds. Peter Augustine Lawler and Brian A. Smith (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 153.

103. Percy, *Thanatos*, 199.

104. Percy, *Thanatos*, 194. It appears that Percy paints a harsh portrait of the future of American politics, and depicts our political institutions failing utterly to protect life and liberty. Later in the novel, Percy reveals that the Supreme Court's ruling was more ambiguous with regard to interpretation and implementation. After More foils the conspiracy, he asks Max Gottlieb to have all infant candidates for pedeuthanasia to be sent to the hospice. Max Gottlieb objects that he cannot, because it would violate the Supreme Court case, *Doe v. Dade*, that determined that personhood does not begin until eighteen months of age. More counters that the court ruling did not require pedeuthanasia. It "only permits it under certain circumstances" (Percy, *Thanatos*, 334). It makes a difference whether the ruling is interpreted broadly to require euthanasia or narrowly to permit it conditionally. By More's narrow interpretation, the Supreme Court's ruling appears more reasonable and circumspect. It appears that doctors, like Comeaux, interpreted the ruling to support their eugenic purposes whereas it is possible to interpret it narrowly to apply to exceptional cases.

105. Percy, *Thanatos*, 193.

106. Percy, *Thanatos*, 194. In Freudian terms, Comeaux explains that heavy sodium suppresses the superego and bolsters the ego by releasing natural feel good chemicals, endorphins.

107. Percy, *Thanatos*, 196.

108. Percy, *Thanatos*, 197.

109. Percy, *Thanatos*, 198.

110. Percy, *Thanatos*, 266.

111. Percy, *Thanatos*, 200.

112. Young, "Percy on the Cartesian Ideal," 134.

113. Percy, *Thanatos*, 234. To be clear, More does not pretend to need help for the sake of boosting the confidence of his patients. More describes how Ella, a patient who feared failure, discovered that she and he had attended the same high school and university and gave him two yearbooks. Giving More the yearbooks allowed Ella to remind her doctor about himself and his past. Ella helped More in a small, but nonetheless real way.

114. Percy, *Thanatos*, 332.

115. Percy, *Thanatos*, 332.

116. The grandest demonstration of More's ability to find ways for individuals to help each other is the rehabilitation of the Belle Ame pedophiles, and Comeaux and Van Dorn's penalty. The pedophiles, Mr. and Mrs. Brunette, Coach, and Mrs. Cheney, serve their sentence of five years of community service at St. Margaret's Hospice. The Brunettes work with Alzheimer's patients, Mrs. Cheney becomes a nurse aide for malformed children, and Coach starts a soccer team for the quarantined AIDS children. In this way, as Desmond observes, Percy shows that it is better "to put the culprits to constructive use in the community and help them recover their humanity than to banish them, yet at the same time safeguarding them and others from temptation" in *Walker Percy's Search for Community* (Athens, University of Georgia Press: 2004), 243. Even Van Dorn recovers from the heavy sodium effects after Eve, a gorilla who knows sign language, helps him recover language and, consequently, his humanity.

117. Percy, *Thanatos*, 344.

118. Percy, *Thanatos*, 13.

119. Percy, *Thanatos*, 6. More is not against psycho-pharmaceuticals in principle, but pragmatically prescribes them. The significance is that medicines that alter moods are not inherently bad, and may, in fact, be used to good purpose.

120. Percy, *Thanatos*, 75.

121. The pursuit of happiness takes two forms depending on whether one is a bluebird or jaybird. Bluebirds try to be happy and jaybirds try to act happy. Bluebirds are generally women who want to be happy and so seek the bluebird of happiness—the one thing that will bring happiness if only the object of desire can be attained. Jaybirds are commonly men who try to demonstrate loudly their success at happiness not simply to other people but to themselves (Percy, *Thanatos*, 89).

122. Percy, *Thanatos*, 76.

123. For the best analysis of what Percy means by being a wayfarer see Brian A. Smith, *Walker Percy and the Politics of the Wayfarer* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).

Chapter Four

Edith Wharton's Case for Happiness and Society

As we have seen, Tom Wolfe's decentralized social groups and Walker Percy's joint searches are ways of pursuing happiness in the absence of traditional social structure. In contrast, Edith Wharton shows us how social structure shapes and constrains individuals and so provides a stable context in which individuals enjoy whole and cohesive lives. Wharton wrote at the turn of the twentieth century, when traditional social order was intact, but crumbling under the force of the Industrial Revolution, mass immigration, the progressive movement and other social and political unrest. The Industrial Revolution gave rise to a new wealth-based class in which individuals were free from many traditional social constraints and encouraged to pursue wealth to their utmost ability as concurrent to the pursuit of happiness. Immigration brought waves of new peoples to the United States that traditional society could not incorporate. Finally, the progressive movement called for many reforms to restore public confidence in the political system including calls to clean up corruption, ensure broad democratic decision-making procedures, and focus on national politics. Wharton lamented the decline of traditional society and the rise of the *nouveau riche*'s unrestrained crass materialism and de facto takeover of society, but she was not a simple-minded defender of the status quo. Wharton, as a member of old New York society, was ably situated to comment both on the advantages that traditional society offered to the individual and also how society could abuse its authority over the individual.

Through her novels, Wharton depicts the confrontation between old and new society and what it means for the individual's happiness. Her characters press against social constraints in the interest of pursuing their happiness. In *The Custom of the Country*, the social barriers to satisfying Undine Spragg's

desires prove thin. Wharton cautions against the pursuit of happiness as a dangerous individualistic pursuit of an unrealistic, idealized state of felicity and shows how this pursuit might deteriorate into an ugly, unhappy pursuit of appetite that fails to satiate. Thus, *The Custom of the Country* portrays the oft recognized problems that a commercial society poses for individual well-being. On the other hand, in *The Age of Innocence*, Wharton portrays, without sentiment, the damaging extent to which society can abuse its authority over the individual. The protagonist of *The Age of Innocence*, Newland Archer, neither seeks mere material well-being nor is he as unscrupulous as Undine, but like Undine, he wants a perfected state of happiness free from all social complications. Newland wants a kind of spiritual well-being free from the consequences of social duty and personal choice, but learns the unrestrained pursuit of individual gratification and well-being cannot be used as a trump card that justifies betrayals of social duty and trust. While Undine's pursuit of happiness can never be satisfied and no social obligation—even the welfare of her child—serves to constrain her desires, Newland's romantic pursuit of the Countess Olenska is finally checked by his obligation as a father.

During her lifetime, Edith Wharton enjoyed much commercial and critical success from her writings including the award of the Pulitzer Prize in 1920 for *The Age of Innocence*.[1] Yet, there has been little agreement on Wharton's central teaching concerning the individual in society. Was Edith Wharton a traditionalist who defended the old social structure and regretted its passing? Or was Edith Wharton a critic of society and a forward-thinking feminist? Scholars differ because they emphasize either Wharton's conservative social views and politics or her criticisms of marriage and the education of women. Wharton's curious blend of traditional social values and social criticism defies easy categorization.

In the traditionalist camp, it is argued that her writings champion a political and social conservatism that indicates her preference for the old ways against the rapid and destabilizing social and political transformations of the early twentieth century. Undoubtedly, the belief that she praised traditional society contributed to winning the Pulitzer Prize for *The Age of Innocence*.[2] Her contemporaries put her solidly in the traditionalist camp.[3] Vernon L. Parrington dismisses her as a snob who displays "an unquestioned acceptance of the aristocratic world."[4] Parrington continues that she wasted her talent on depicting "rich nobodies," and that she did not try to "understand America as it is," unlike the naturalist school of writing.[5] More recent scholarship claims that Wharton's writing reflects many racist and antiliberal ideas about the poor and foreign born that ultimately support an elitist class and social structure.[6] However, Wharton cannot be squeezed into the traditionalist box given her severe critique of her old New York society.

In the 1970s, Wharton quickly became a darling of feminist scholars for both her personal history as a divorcee who enjoyed a successful literary career and the long overlooked evidence of her sharp criticism of marriage in her novels.[7] Wharton's life is nearly a feminist's storybook (anti)romance. As the daughter of the best of New York society, she was matched with Teddy Wharton, a respectable Bostonian, whom she dutifully married. Their marriage proved unhappy and Wharton turned to writing. After a passionate extramarital affair fizzled, Wharton divorced her husband and set up permanent residency in France where she cultivated a new, independent life and continued her successful literary career.[8] Feminist scholars argue that Wharton confronts in her novels the worst evils perpetrated by old New York society upon women.[9] The unhappy marriages and frustrated lovers in her novels prove that rigid social conventions harmed women. Subsequent scholarship discusses in-depth how Wharton critiqued America's paternalistic society.[10]

Harmonizing Wharton the traditionalist and Wharton the social critic is not easy.[11] I argue that Wharton demonstrates the abuses of society's authority, but also shows that its authority is legitimate and its power necessary and beneficial to constrain the individual. Wharton sees room for positive social change, but some of the changes she observes are not real improvements. Increased emphasis on individual gratification that frays social bonds is no advancement. Wharton's writing focuses on the experiences of wealthy and socially elite Americans, but as she takes pains to demonstrate, they do not form a separate class that has its peculiar values. She justifies writing about the New York elite she grew up with on the grounds that they are shaped by the same democratic sensibilities as all Americans. Throughout her writings, Wharton distinguishes traditional society from the self-absorbed and money-making pursuits of the *nouveau riche*. Wharton carves a moderate course between traditional society and the demands for political, economic, and social reform in which leadership comes from traditional ranks. Above all, she seeks to disabuse her readers of the notion that living a good life is the gratification of every desire as the *nouveau riche* seems to believe. The pursuit of happiness does not justify breaking moral rules and deceiving the people closest to us. Instead, such a self-absorbed quest contributes to social fragmentation and an inchoate individual life in which happiness though ever pursued cannot be caught. Honoring social trust is a higher good than individual gratification and one that can bring an individual contentment. Traditional society connects the individual to other individuals through moral obligations and so provides coherence and wholeness to individual life that is needful for living well.

THE CUSTOM OF THE COUNTRY

Wharton describes the antihero, Undine, as "always doubling and twisting on herself" and through her "incessant movements" she intended "to be animated in society," because "noise and restlessness were her only notion of vivacity."[12] *The Custom of the Country* depicts not only how the pursuit of happiness, or of personal gratification, dissolves social ties and makes for incommodious living, but also defeats its purpose and fails to satisfy Undine or bring any respite from the inchoate desires that drive her. Undine Spragg illustrates the restlessness and destructiveness of the individual pursuit of happiness that accompanied the new moneyed class.[13] Undine is an exaggeration, but an exaggeration of self-centered tendencies checked by traditional society, but unleashed by the *nouveau riche*. My summary of the story is detailed so as to present fully the extent of Undine's insatiable appetite.

The Custom of the Country begins with Undine Spragg and her parents who moved from Apex (somewhere ambiguously in the Midwest or West) to New York City. Given her family's wealth, Undine expected to be welcomed into the best society, but for two years, her attempts are frustrated. Peter Van Degen, the rich son of a banker, leads a new crowd of wealthy New Yorkers that Undine wants to join. Unconnected to the concerns and obligations of traditional society, Van Degen married into traditional society for the sake of respectability, but his interest lies in imagining new delights for the city's elite to pass time.[14] At a party given by popular portrait artist, Claud Walsingham Popple, Undine's remarkable beauty attracts Ralph Marvell of the old New York Dagonet family that lives in Washington Square. Undine learns that the Marvells are considered better society than Van Degen. The Dagonet family's elevated status comes from traditional society not the flashy, trendy new society to which Undine is attracted. Unwittingly, Undine delights in the idea of entering a new "inner circle" by marrying Ralph Marvell.[15] Unfortunately for Undine, her marriage to Ralph Marvell is just the one of many new beginnings (not even the first in her life) in which Undine expects that she has finally found the right social "set" that will fulfill her. However, every time Undine catches sight of a new social circle, her present circumstances are "spoiled by a peep through another door."[16]

Although trained as a lawyer, Ralph Marvell works little, aspires to write, and lives moderately within a narrow compass. He is attracted to Undine both for her beauty and for what he perceives as a similarity between the Dagonets and the Spraggs as "plain people."[17] Motivated by a paternalistic concern to protect, Ralph determines to save Undine from the vulgarism and materialism of Van Degen's pleasure-seeking society. Not until they are married does Ralph realize that Undine has no desire to be saved from the pursuit of self-gratification. Satisfying Undine's new pleasures and amusements is expensive. Undine's parents continue to supplement her income at

the expense of their material diminishment throughout her life. Soon Ralph obtains a job in business—a job for which he is ill suited and inept—to provide Undine with money to satisfy her ever-expanding desires. Undine is disappointed in Ralph's inability to earn enough money to supply her wants. She decides to divorce him and tries to marry Van Degen, but fails. Undine travels to France, leaving her son with Ralph, and attracts the aristocratic Raymond de Chelles into proposing marriage. But as a divorced woman trying to marry a Catholic, Undine must secure an annulment of her marriage to Ralph. To obtain the money necessary to secure an annulment, Undine uses her legal custody of her son as a pawn to extract a large sum of money from Ralph. If Ralph will give her the money, then she will not press her custodial right and thus Paul can remain with the Dagonet family. Foolishly Ralph had not fought for legal custody of his son during the divorce (when it might have been possible to gain custody). On top of that, Ralph learns that Undine had been married before their marriage. Unable to cope, Ralph commits suicide.

Life with Raymond at his ancestral family estate also proves a disappointment. The collective pressure of centuries of familial duty and responsibility are more than Undine can overcome.[18] Undine returns to the United States, divorces Raymond, and quickly remarries her first husband and now millionaire, Elmer Moffatt. As for Raymond, to cover Undine's and his brother's debts, he sells his family treasures. Wharton provides a glimpse into Paul, Undine's son with Ralph, who is sent away to school. Paul is lonely and longs for stability and the fatherly affection he knew from Raymond, who is the only father he remembers. The novel ends with Undine unhappy, because she sees "there was something she could never get."[19] Undine's peak into diplomatic society mars her present delight and financial security. She wishes to be an ambassador's wife. Moffat cannot be appointed as an ambassador to England, because he is married to a divorcee and consequently cannot be received at court. Traditions, once again, are both incomprehensible to Undine and stand in the way of her desires. Moreover, Undine blames Moffat and is incapable of the self-reflection required to realize that it is her divorce that stands in the way.

Edmund Wilson calls Undine Spragg "an international cocktail bitch."[20] Most critics consider Undine an antihero although few have been as direct as Wilson.[21] Yet, Undine has her defenders. The argument for Undine is that she takes control of her life by setting her price "on the marriage market" since, as a woman, she is unable to achieve material success through business as men, like Elmer Moffatt, can.[22] By allowing us to see how men negatively evaluate Undine's methods, Wharton exposes the double standard for men and women. Gender, not morals, distinguishes Undine and Moffatt, and Undine's exclusion from competing with men in business justifies her ruthless actions. The most humanizing presentation of Undine comes from Linda

Costanzo Cahir, who argues that Undine has flashes of humanity in which she momentarily forgets her self-interest.[23] Undine may be, as Cahir believes, capable of sincere other-regarding thought, but this serves to highlight her destructive self-gratification. As I will show, Undine imitates, deceives, and even bullies those closest to her in her quest to be happy, because she is suspicious of other people. Her boundless desires threaten to overwhelm any design on lasting happiness. Relying solely on herself, Undine tries to restrain her own desires but fails. However, Undine's efforts yield little, and she finds no lasting happiness. The unrestrained pursuit of private gratification that animates Undine Spragg prevents her from knowing and enjoying the goodness in the things she gains and threatens to undermine her purpose to be happy.

Undine's greatest talent is for imitation so as to be ingratiated with those whom she believes will prove useful acquaintances. The clearest example of Undine echoing another is with Princess Estradina. When the Princess introduces herself to Undine, she quickly tries "to think far enough ahead to guess what they [the Princess and her mother] would expect her to say."[24] Undine is well-practiced at conforming herself to her company's expectations of her. Wharton says that "it was instinctive with her to become, for the moment, the person she thought her interlocutors expected her to be."[25] Having no stable identity of her own, Undine takes her cues from others. Yet, imitation succeeds only so far. Undine can only reflect and not add anything new to conversation. The Princess soon discovers the limits of Undine's company. Conversation requires that there is some spiritual and intellectual distinction between participants. Each person has something distinctive to offer. If there is no "otherness," then conversation holds all the interest of silently staring into a mirror. Undine is not insensible to her shortcoming—she realizes that "she had been a slight disappointment to the Princess," but she does not know why or how to correct it.[26]

Nor is Undine likely to learn. There are occasions when it takes more than a knack for counterfeiting others to join a group. Imitation proves insufficient for Undine when she is expected to contribute her thoughts and ideas. She has never cultivated her own ideas. At Undine's first dinner with Ralph's sister, Laura Fairford's conversation is coordinated like a "concert and not a solo" in which Mrs. Fairford, like a capable conductor, brings everyone into the conversation.[27] No doubt punning on her name, Wharton contrasts, Mrs. Fairford, a fair-minded conversationalist, with Undine. Like a good ruler, Mrs. Fairford guides the conversation so that everyone participates and shares their ideas with the gathering. Undine proves difficult to incorporate into conversation since she has little interest in art exhibits, reads only romantic books, and is unable to discuss the plays she has seen. Moreover, Undine remains distrustful of Mrs. Fairford's attempts to draw her into the conversation, because she is more interested in observing mannerisms and

remembering gossip. She speaks only brief and impersonal comments such as "I don't care if I do" and says "I wouldn't wonder" if she thought her interlocutor was trying to "astonish her."[28] These impersonal and guarded comments demonstrate her suspicion of her fellow companions. If she does not understand something that has been said, she assumes that the person is trying to best her or manipulate her. Because that is what she does. Suspicion and fear mark Undine's relationships to others and prevent her from learning how to participate in good conversation. To Undine's greater misfortune, she closes herself off from learning new things and developing the inner life that she lacks.

Attempts to gain opinions and views so that she might be considered a desirable conversationalist and good company also fail Undine. During her marriage with Raymond, Undine is distressed to be invited only to impersonal dinner parties and not the more intimate and socially desirable parties. Madame de Trézac explains that it is because she is a boring conversationalist. To remedy this, Undine makes a few attempts to improve herself. She visits the Louvre and attends lectures by voguish thinkers. Unsurprisingly, her opinions are commonplace or baffling (due to her lack of understanding). She mistakes the purpose of conversation to be a showcase for ideas, like a gallery of pictures, rather than the exchange and development of ideas shared in speech with others. Failing at self-cultivation, Undine resorts to "the scientific cultivation of her beauty."[29]

Beneath Undine's reflective surface is deception and manipulation. To get what she wants, Undine crafts particular appeals designed to invoke sympathetic sentiments in the listener. In the hopes of convincing Van Degen to help her divorce her husband, Undine tells him that she is "unhappy."[30] The emotional appeal works and Van Degen agrees to help her. But when Undine tells her father "I'm unhappy at home," Mr. Spragg is not swayed.[31] Undine realizes that "sentimental casuistry" will not achieve the desired result with her father. Deftly, she shifts gears to stir her father's pride as a businessman and self-made man against her husband's family. She says that Ralph's aristocratic family does not approve of making money, resents that Ralph must work in business, and believes that Mr. Spragg ought to support financially Undine and their child. It works like a charm. Nor is it beyond Undine to bend the truth. When she needs Moffatt's help to divorce Raymond, she recounts Raymond's exacting attention toward her to make it seem like she was in "bondage" to a domineering husband.[32] It is true that Raymond had been attentive to her during their first few months of marriage; however, since realizing how little they shared in common, he took little interest in her activities and company.

In addition to imitation and deception, Undine bullies. Bullying is a direct method of applying pressure to people when there is no advantage from presenting a pleasing exterior. When Undine bullies, she is her most honest.

In defense of what she believes deserves, Undine bullies her parents. Consequently, Mrs. Spragg vacillates between a "life-long instinct of obedience and swift unformulated fear" with regard to her daughter.[33] Undine neither honors her parents nor shows any indication of feeling indebted to them. In fact, she resents them for resisting her demands in the slightest. We also see that Undine takes pleasure in browbeating her social inferiors. After a successful round of bargaining with her French dressmakers, she boasts "you ought to see how I've beaten them down!"[34] Dressmakers are hardly on the same social ground as Undine and, therefore, are defenseless to abusive patrons. Like all bullies, Undine glories in her personal triumph of strength over social vulnerability. She enjoys relating to Ralph how she imposed her will on her dressmakers. As a final instance, Princess Estradina introduces Undine to an acquaintance from her childhood, Madame de Trézac (formerly Miss Wincher). As children, they had been rivals. Undine fears that Madame de Trézac will provide the Princess with unflattering information about her past. When Madame de Trézac does not and, in fact, seeks to gain her favor, Undine relishes her new power over her childhood rival.

Imitation, deception, and bullying do not always gain Undine what she wants. The trouble is that her desires are boundless and she cannot keep them in check. But since social restraints are weak and she rejects the help of family and friends, Undine must rely on herself. She tries to forgo short-term pleasures for the sake of long-term gain. From her father, Undine learns how to delay gratification. Selling real estate in Apex at the right time required Mr. Spragg to demonstrate "patient skill," and as a result, he landed the transaction that jumped-started his success.[35] Mrs. Heeny, a manicurist, masseuse, and gossip, tells Undine to "[g]o steady, Undine, and you'll get anywheres."[36] "Going steady" is a short-hand term that refers to the calculated self-restraint from indulging in pleasures needed to make a "good turn" whether in business or in life.[37] To be clear, "going steady" is not the virtue of moderation, but a lesser order kind of self-restraint. "Going steady" is essentially John Locke's advice to suspend satisfaction for the sake of future enjoyment.

Locke's advice passes for moderation in the United States, but it is not a virtue. Wharton exploits the cracks in Locke's advice. If the individual cannot hold the future objective firmly in mind, Lockean self-restraint is, not surprisingly, undermined by the desire for satisfaction of immediate desires. It requires enormous self-restraint and a disciplined will. As Wharton shows more clearly in *The Age of Innocence*, the human will is weak and benefits from traditions that direct and support it. In *The Custom of the Country*, however, society's traditional authority has unraveled considerably. Undine has a hard time focusing on future objectives. Reckless in her eagerness for Van Degen's wealth, Undine has an affair with him and uses his money before divorcing Ralph and marrying him.[38] After her failure to secure Van

Degen as a husband, Undine undertakes an ambitious project "to lay a solid foundation before she began to build up the light superstructure of enjoyment."[39] Yet, Undine is frequently short of cash, because some new thing that promises further delight eggs her on. "Going steady" requires a level of disciplined self-restraint and stability of purpose that Undine does not have.

Not only does Undine struggle to sustain periods of deprivation for an imagined future state, but her lack of self-reflection makes it difficult for her to assimilate her past experiences. Since Undine cannot retain the past in memory, she cannot restrain herself with a view to the future and consequently "the visible and tangible would always prevail."[40] While taking a ride in Van Degen's car, she is so overwhelmed with pleasure in the moment that it "drowns scruples and silences memory."[41] In fact, we find out that on this occasion Undine has entirely forgotten to take her son, Paul, to his birthday party. Yet, for Wharton, memory is a key to learning and maturity. Not until Moffatt reappears in France does Undine recall memories from her prior marriage with him in Apex. Nevertheless, she marries him again apparently forgetful of the reasons why she divorced him. Moreover, as her marriage to Moffat demonstrates, her inability to learn from her past experiences leads her to repeat the past. At the end of the novel, Undine is dissatisfied with Moffat's lack of class compared with Ralph and Raymond "who were gradually becoming merged in her memory."[42] Unable to distinguish between her previous husbands, she fondly recalls their manners and good graces. She has forgotten how their sense of social and familial obligation was incompatible with her self-indulgence and extravagant expenses. We can imagine that in a sequel to *The Custom of the Country* Undine divorces Elmer Moffatt, marries another well-bred man, and finds that his sensibilities collide with her own. Undine's attempt to restrain her desires at least for the purpose of securing future and lasting happiness is undermined by her personal lack of coherence.

It is possible that Undine's means, however selfish, could justify her goal to be happy, but Undine finds little satisfaction in the things she gets. Despite being dedicated to chasing after amusement and delight, Undine "gains little spontaneous enjoyment from them."[43] Her pleasures do not come from her enjoyment of the things she attains, but fluctuate depending on how she observes other people enjoy or dismiss the same things. Seeing someone distain something she had wanted devalues the object immediately in her eyes. As a young woman still living with her parents, Undine compelled her parents to stay at a fashionable summer resort in Virginia. Upon hearing a young lady also staying at the resort disparage it, Undine is miserable for the remainder of the holiday and never wishes to return. At the opera, Undine notes that there are empty boxes and wonders about the owners and "what rarer delight could they be tasting?"[44] Afterward, Undine does not attend the opera again.

In contrast, traditional society cultivates an understanding of how to enjoy the goodness of things. When Raymond realizes the unbridgeable gap between Undine and himself, he angrily says that she "come[s] among us . . . wanting the things that we want and not knowing why we want them."[45] Since Undine values things based on how much they are desired by someone else, she distances herself from the possibility of really enjoying and knowing their goodness.

We might be tempted to think that Undine could be nudged toward superior pleasures. But Undine cannot be encouraged to enjoy a thing that must be enjoyed for its own sake. Ralph hopes that through his guidance and influence, he will develop Undine's aesthetic tastes. To this end, Ralph and Undine travel to Italy for their honeymoon. He tries to share with her the pleasures of Italy's natural beauty, sitting in cathedrals at sunset, and reading poetry. Undine is bored by the stillness and heat. Instead, she longs for "a crowd."[46] When married to Elmer Moffatt, Undine recognizes that he enjoys art in ways that she cannot understand. Nonetheless, his love of art appeals to her insofar as it required money to gratify.

For Undine, this means that everything has a cash value and nothing has a stable identity of its own. As Ralph's wife, Undine resets two pieces of his family jewelry and irreparably damages the "identity of the jewels" and his family's long connection with those heirlooms.[47] As Raymond's wife, Undine wants to sell his family's tapestries to pay for her debts and keep her in the lifestyle she thinks she deserves. The tapestries have been in the family for generations and represent stability and continuity from generation to generation. She does not understand why Raymond is upset or why he would want to keep his family's old tapestries instead of converting them into quick cash. All Undine considers is what a thing's market value is. She is not at all curious why her husbands enjoy art or care about preserving family treasures—that there might be something intrinsic to art or to the identity of things passed down through generations that makes it worthwhile.

Satisfaction, it often turns out, misses its mark. Any irritant no matter how small could blight her enjoyment.[48] Consequently, "all she needed to make her happy" is the "[p]eace of mind" that comes with a steady source of income.[49] (Apparently, she does not believe that there are problems that money cannot smooth over.) The agitated pursuit of happiness is the search for relief from the pursuit, but it is a peace unlikely to be found. In comparison of Undine and Herman Melville's Captain Ahab, one commentator argues that Undine, like Ahab, "tries again and again to strike through the mask of the apparent (best) to the real (best); and, like Ahab, she will never rest until her impossible pursuit is complete."[50] Her ultimate goal of inexhaustible wealth and peace of mind spurs her onward. Undine divorces three times and remarries her first husband, Moffatt. While this fourth marriage may at first seem like a happy return to a past she should have embraced

earlier, her remarriage to Moffatt signals a deeper failure. She has not progressed toward her goal of peace of mind. Thus, the story "ends at a pause, not a conclusion."[51] Undine's remarriage to Moffatt represents a "cyclical" return to where she started—not satisfaction but endless cycling much like the hedonic treadmill.[52]

The Custom of the Country does not have a happy ending and suggests an uncertain future. Although Undine does not appreciate the social cost to her hopeless pursuit of happiness, Wharton shows how her insatiable desires contribute to lasting damage to the lives of others. Undine impoverishes her parents, Ralph commits suicide, Raymond is financially ruined, and Paul, her son, is neglected. Yet, the most pitiable harm Undine does is to herself. The closest Undine comes to self-reflection is literal not metaphorical—she enjoys looking at herself in mirrors. As a child, her "chief delight" was to wear her mother's finest clothes and play in front of a mirror.[53] As an adult, she play acts in front of a mirror in preparation of attending dinner at Mrs. Fairford's. Undine's dumb pantomime before a mirror indicates the poverty of her internal self and the value she places on the image of herself rather than on herself. At the novel's end and in an image that mirrors (pun intended) the first image of Undine parading in front of a mirror, we see that Undine gains little critical perspective from her reflected countenance. Looking at her reflection, she is "lost in this pleasing contemplation."[54] So absorbed in her reflection, she barely notices when her current husband, Elmer Moffatt, enters the room. Undine enjoys immensely these moments of unmixed pleasure that arise from the loss of herself in her reflection. These are not mere instances of overweening vanity. Captivated by her reflection, Undine the person is lost to Undine the image. To see how Undine's fate can be avoided, I turn to Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* in which Newland Archer struggles with Undine-like desires for personal gratification, but is saved from her fate by realizing his social responsibility.

THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

The Age of Innocence is set in the 1870s—on the eve of many of the social, political, and economic transformations that precipitated the decline of old traditional families that assumed the top ranks of society in the New York of Wharton's childhood. The setting, however, is not Wharton's sentimental escape to the protected and enclosed society of her childhood. Traditional society appears safely insulated, but there are signs that its influence wanes.[55] Traditional society is still ascendant, but is already on the defense. The social constraints that keep Newland and Ellen separate in this novel will soon be swept away. The beginnings of progressive social and political causes, mass immigration, new technologies, and rapid business and industri-

al expansion that eventually bring an end to Old New York society have begun to make themselves felt. In fact, as the old establishment weakens, it becomes more rigid and exacting in its rules.

Wharton introduces Newland Archer as a young man who has idealized expectations for his wife. He wants her to be both "worldly-wise and eager to please."[56] At the opera, a dark haired, stylishly dressed woman sits with the Mingott family, which includes his fianceé, May Welland. Her presence causes a stir among the audience who know that she is the Countess Ellen Olenska, May Welland's cousin, who has left her Polish husband and returned to New York. Although Newland approves of "family solidarity," he is surprised at their audacity to bring her publicly (at the opera no less!) into the family. Although it is customary to wait to announce engagements, May Welland and Newland Archer decide to announce it early at the much anticipated ball after the opera. Their purpose is to align the respectability of both their families behind Ellen's arrival.

The families exert much effort to secure Ellen in New York society, which is successful only after one of the very few truly aristocratic families, the van der Luydens, invite Ellen to a dinner.[57] Much to the dismay of the Mingotts, Ellen desires to obtain a divorce from her husband. The family requests that Newland, in his capacity as an attorney, talk her out of it so as to avoid public unpleasantness for the family. Newland has misgivings about persuading Ellen not to seek a divorce. He recognizes that the family merely wants to avoid unpleasantness. Yet, Newland, also wishing to avoid unpleasantness, counsels Ellen from seeking a divorce in the interest of sacrificing individual desire to the collective good.

Newland, however, becomes attracted to Ellen and her exotic ways. Recognizing the danger in his attraction to Ellen, he asks May to forgo the customary long engagement as "foolish conventionalities" and marry quickly.[58] Suspecting that he may still love his (former) mistress Mrs. Rushworth, May offers him freedom from their engagement. Newland discretely assures her that no such obligation remains between Mrs. Rushworth and him and she agrees to hasten the marriage.

Soon after their marriage, Newland is disappointed by the narrowness of his wife's interests in travel, art, and literature. He quickly loses interest in enlightening her. Convinced that his future holds little for him, he welcomes Ellen's reentry into his life in the hopes of pursuing an affair with her. At first, Ellen refuses him and argues that "they should not break faith with the people who trusted them."[59] Her resolve falters. Ellen agrees to meet with Newland once before returning to Paris, but then unexpectedly cancels. During Ellen's farewell banquet May and he host, Newland realizes that everyone already thinks they are lovers and he resolves to follow her to Europe. After the banquet, May reveals to Newland that she is expecting their first child. Although she had only been certain that morning of her pregnancy,

May told Ellen two days prior of her pregnancy. Newland realizes that because May stretched the truth concerning her pregnancy to Ellen, Ellen broke off the rendezvous with him. In the epilogue, Newland stays with May, remains faithful, and they have three children. Urged by Theodore Roosevelt, Newland runs for and wins one term in the New York state legislature. He is not reelected, but he does not return wholly to private life. Instead, he presides over the Metropolitan Museum of Art, engages in public letter writing campaigns, and is considered a leading citizen. When his eldest son, Dallas, and he travel to France, Newland has the opportunity to meet Ellen. He speculates that since both of their spouses have died, they could be together. Newland, however, declines to visit Ellen.

The Age of Innocence offers "a delicate middle way" in its presentation of the conflict between the individual and social traditions.[60] Wharton's novel is not a tragic story about how society forces the individual to perform onerous social duty for the sake of the abstract social good at the expense of individual happiness. Nor is it an explanation of how the individual is the mere plaything of social forces. Instead, Wharton offers the possibility that social conventions may serve the individual's interest toward the end of having a good life. Undine's desires are not constrained and so she flies from one husband to the next in search of an unrealistic notion of private happiness. In contrast, by staying with May, raising their children, and taking a part in his community, Newland's life gains wholeness and dignity that it would otherwise not have had. More importantly, Newland realizes that he could not live happily with Ellen if he had broken trust with his wife and family. Honesty and fidelity to those whom one loves forms a large part of individual well-being—even more so than simply getting what one wants. As a young man, Newland thought that his social relations existed to please himself and he did not foresee the ways his social obligations would lead him to forgo his immediate desires. Through his duty to his family and society, Newland learns to recognize that other people are not mere instruments of one's well-being who can be lied to or manipulated for one's well-being. In contrast to Undine, Newland learns that one's happiness is served by living honorably with others.

From the start, Wharton shows us that Newland, due to his intellectual and artistic interests, fancies himself more cosmopolitan and enlightened than most of the men in society. Nevertheless, he concedes that he shares society's moral teachings. Newland's pretenses to cosmopolitanism conceal the extent to which he is truly conventional and give him the false luxury of feeling above custom's constraints. As Wharton shows us, Newland is not as enlightened as he pretends and expresses some rather stereotypically male and classist opinions. When Ellen first appeared in the family opera box, Newland is unsettled that her tainted presence is sitting next to his future blameless bride. He is annoyed at the prospect that her failed marriage and

his spotless engagement become intertwined. When considering his marriage to May, Wharton tells us that "he thanked heaven that he was a New Yorker, and about to ally himself with one of his own kind."[61]

A marriage based on compatibility and friendship between equals is Newland's ideal, but he understands that the customary education of young women presents obstacles. In New York, young women were not educated with a view to providing young New York men with intellectual equals and tender lifelong companions. Newland muses on the difference of social customs governing his young, male adulthood and those that produced May Welland, who had not been permitted to enjoy, as he had, "the experiences, the versatility, and freedom of judgment."[62] Newland believes that the development of intelligence that he wished for in his wife depended upon his wife having similar experiences. Consequently, he assumes that May must be narrow and naïve. (Of course, despite his varied experiences, Newland is not as liberated as he thinks he is.) Moreover, Newland realizes that aside from male vanity there was no justifiable reason "why his bride should not have been allowed the same freedom of experience as himself."[63] The innocence young men desired of their brides encouraged not only sexual inexperience, but the educational underdevelopment of intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities in young women.

By the time young New York women married, their capacities for intellectual and moral development are undermined by the customs that guide the education of women. Yet, it is precisely these intellectual and moral characteristics in a wife that Newland believes to be essential to the well-being of his marriage. Although Newland realizes this prior to his marriage, he refuses to believe that his marriage will be like other unsatisfactory marriages he witnesses. Under his tutelage, he imagines, his innocently educated fiancée will blossom into his intellectual equal as his wife.

After his marriage, Newland becomes disillusioned with his marriage and blames social forces for his unhappiness. He believes that his marriage to May was simply the culmination of social interests rather than practices constructed to encourage individual well-being. May and Newland's engagement, as Wharton tells us, had been "long foreseen by watchful relatives, [and] had been carefully passed upon in family council."[64] For the returning newlyweds, the Wellands gave them a modern house practically equipped with good plumbing that May decorated in a conventional fashion. Newland feels his life narrowing into customary routes and wonders where "his real experiences were [to be] lived."[65] Newland comes to see himself as a victim of social mechanisms and processes so long in development and unstoppable with the steady velocity of the years that he believes that he has not really been the author of his most significant life decisions. Wharton shows us, however, the narrowing of Newland's life is not due to severe social re-

straints, but the result of his own unreflective adherence to trendy cosmopolitanism and conventionalism.

As noted above, after his marriage, Newland believes that New York's marriage customs encourage the alignment of social interests rather than the joining of compatible persons. In one very important respect, it is an exaggeration to say that New York custom did not serve the interest of the individual. One social custom had no other function than to encourage the marriage of compatible persons—the long engagement. Wharton shows us Newland scoffing at the long engagement as old-fashioned. Even before pressing May to hasten their marriage to avoid Ellen, Newland repeatedly indicates his desire for a shortened engagement.[66] The purpose of the long engagement is to allow the betrothed the opportunity of becoming more familiar with each other and to prevent badly matched marriages. Mrs. Welland expresses this purpose when she says that "[w]e must give them time to get to know each other a little bit better."[67] Newland enjoys flippantly flouting convention when he asks May to hasten their marriage. When Newland finally succeeds in convincing May to hasten their marriage, his impulse is no longer to flout convention, but to escape his passion for Ellen in the security of convention.

As Newland urges May to hasten their marriage, May responds with thoughtful consideration of their well-being with each other. Regardless of the social cost to her, May offers to release him of their engagement, because she suspects (rightly) that his desire to marry quickly indicates an attempt to flee from another love. May unequivocally says that "I couldn't have my happiness made out of a wrong—an unfairness—to someone else. . . . What sort of life could we build on such foundations?"[68] Unlike Newland, May believes her decision concerning whom to marry is freely made and between equals. Moreover, consideration for the other's happiness and honesty is the foundation upon which one's happiness depends. Despite potential social disapproval, May is willing to break their engagement and experience unpleasantness herself for the sake of their mutual well-being and honesty. Newland briefly marvels at May's bold pronouncement, but assures her that his only reason for hastening their marriage is to avoid "foolish conventionalities."[69] Yet, Newland's decision to marry May represents his escape into convention and an unwillingness to defy opinion.

In this instance, we see that May is more adept at negotiating when to honor social conventions and when not to risk social disapproval. Since May understands the purpose of the long engagement (to protect young people from marrying someone unsuitable), she understands that it may be worth risking social disapproval to break an engagement. She knows that her happiness cannot utterly be subordinated to the collective interest of society to avoid unpleasantness. Moreover, May understands that the social disapproval of a broken engagement also serves the useful function of making sure that

couples do not break their engagements for light reasons. Breaking an engagement is not a catch-22, because soon enough, May knows, society would recover from the shock of a broken engagement and, in fact, would retroactively approve of the decision. It seems that May's education, in spite of her lack of varied experiences, prepared her with much greater maturity and circumspection than Newland's education.

Newland, however, does the reverse. He enjoys flouting some conventions to playact at cosmopolitanism but desires to avoid temporary social discomfort. Unlike May who weighs the merits of social convention with her interests, Newland, when it suits him, pretends that conventions are inflexible and cannot be broken if it would be inconvenient to him. The way in which Newland persuades Ellen out of seeking a divorce illustrates this point. Although Ellen is successfully reincorporated into the social body, but her family is not willing to support her if she seeks a divorce. Her family, Newland included, selfishly prefers to avoid public unpleasantness and temporary discomfort to themselves rather than to help Ellen seek legal freedom from her husband. The main risk, as Newland sees it, is that the rumors that Ellen had run off with her husband's secretary might be publicly discussed. Regardless of whether the rumor is true, the talk would be enough to ruin Ellen and disgrace the family. Newland makes no attempt to ask Ellen if the rumor is true and shies away from it so as not to have to confront its veracity. He tells her that her freedom is not worth the nasty gossip because "one can't make over society."[70] Motivated by his private desire to avoid knowing the truth behind Ellen's escape, Newland blathers that "[t]he individual, in such cases, is nearly always sacrificed to what is supposed to be the collective interest."[71] As Wharton tells us, Newland reaches for "stock phrases" to avoid confronting the possible unpleasant truth that Ellen may have had an affair with her husband's secretary.

Newland's rationale that it is right that the individual sacrifices himself for the common good is echoed throughout society. Here Wharton takes aim at some of the worst motivations to invoke social conventions and how society's indifference can extract great harm on individuals. Under the cover of the apparently sacred mantle of the collective good, Newland appeals to society for the sake of hiding himself from unpleasant truths. Just so, other New Yorkers also want to ignore the fact that there might be unhappy marriages or justifiable and forgivable reasons for someone like Ellen to flee her husband. The outpouring of compassion for Ellen's misfortune, and the generosity on behalf of the best families—the Mingotts, Wellands, Archers, van der Luydens—for the sake of restoring Ellen to the social body evaporates even before her desire for a divorce is well-known.[72] Society maintains a false appearance of well-being at the very real expense of curbing individuals from being able to talk about their misfortune, misery, and loneliness. Moreover, the reluctance of society to allow for human unhappiness undermines

many of the advantages of living in a society with strong families and tight communities.

Since Newland sees Ellen's suffering as exotic, he becomes insensible to Ellen's suffering and overlooks the ways that he could have relieved her burdens. Instead, he regards Ellen as someone who had a "mysterious faculty of suggesting tragic and moving possibilities outside the daily run of experience."[73] Newland fails to consider Ellen as a person in need. Instead, he takes pleasure in filling in the gaps in his knowledge of Ellen's past with romantic and fanciful details. Newland believes that her rumored affair with her husband's secretary must be true, because it fits the story of a mistreated wife fleeing her cruel husband in the arms of a dashing rescuer. Newland prefers to see a fiction in her life than to find out the truth.[74] The readers do not learn the particulars of Ellen's unhappy marriage, her escape, and whether the Count's accusation is true, because Newland is, at first, unwilling to ask directly, valuing her legal freedom less than the social unpleasantness a divorce case would stir. Secondly, as I add, caught up in this fantasy version of Ellen's unhappy marriage, Newland fails to have true sympathy with her misfortune. By coloring her misfortune with exotic hues, Newland is unwilling to confront honestly the unhappiness Ellen fled. Given Newland's rosy image of Ellen's life, it appears hard for him to imagine that she could have wanted to flee it. Unable to make Newland sensible to her suffering, Ellen is isolated and lonely. Newland does not value her freedom as highly as she or understand why she would leave behind so stimulating a social life in search for freedom.

Much of Newland's unhappiness is due to the fact that in old New York there is not much a respectable gentleman could do. Like Ralph Marvell in *The Custom of the Country*, Newland is "a dilettante" as every young man his age was cultivated to be.[75] Business was not respectable for young men of his class. So the law provided a profession for lackluster ambitionless young men to while away the years with petty tasks and reading the newspaper. He was not encouraged to be hardworking, industrious or interested in public life. Yet, Wharton provides an example of how one couple brings together society and intellectual activity, which suggests that it is possible.[76] Professor Emerson Sillerton is from a respectable family, but chooses to become an archaeologist. He married the equally respectable Amy Dagonet. Together, they regularly enjoy hosting outlandish guests and traveling to unusual places in the world. Society views the Sillertons' habits as incomprehensible, but tolerates their eccentricities.[77] Newland does not see the Sillertons as a potential model for his own marriage. By passively visiting art galleries and reading the latest books, he prefers an abstract membership and inclusion in artistic and literary circles. He even stops reading poetry and literature aloud to May, because he did not enjoy hearing her air her opinions as opposed to the ones he used to feed her.[78] He regrets, but accepts that artistic and social

circles do not overlap in New York, and is unwilling to take a vested interest or lead in society to incorporate literary company.

Newland's literary friend, Ned Winsett, a writer turned journalist for a woman's magazine, tells him that he ought "to go into politics" or to emigrate.[79] Unlike Newland, Ned recognizes that Newland could achieve much for the sake of his city. Ned sees Newland's social station as an advantage and opportunity that ought not to be squandered in resigned idleness. Newland waves aside Ned's suggestion as unthinkable. Public life was customarily frowned upon among New York society. Newland accepts this point uncritically and duly shows contempt for active life. It was not considered respectable for gentlemen to enter into political life where one might be soiled in the "muck."[80] As he saw it, the country was "in possession of the bosses and the emigrant, and the decent people had to fall back on sport or culture."[81] Ned chides Newland and points out that Newland's class represents the last links between old world culture and the new world and that, by their inactivity, they are allowing the former to wither and die. After this conversation, the next chapter demonstrates exactly how little New York's best contributes to culture and how trivial their activities have become. At Reggie Chiverses's country house, New York's finest engage in holding trite romantic conversation, placing goldfish in the beds of unsuspecting sleeping guests, pretending to be burglars to scare old aunts, and playing in pillow fights.

Newland looks for some way to free himself of the drudgery of his conventional life and marriage, but he does not know what to do. Among New York gentlemen, should a husband become bored with or disappointed in his wife, it is socially permissible for him to pursue extramarital affairs. Affairs are governed by social conventions that require the usual "game of precautions and prevarications, concealments and compliances" to maintain the appearance of a happy marriage.[82] Larry Lefferts has conducted many affairs while maintaining the perfect form of a happy marriage. Provided that a married man takes the proper precautions, he may reasonably expect his fellow gentlemen to help him maintain decorum, good form, and an unsuspecting wife. The ignorance of wives and hypocrisy of husbands maintains the superficial pleasant appearance of New York marriages.

Consequently, Newland decides upon the most conventional of options—an affair—instead of taking either of Ned Winsett's suggestions to relieve his discontent. An affair with Ellen, who appears exotic and unconventional, promises to bring drama and excitement to Newland's life. Yet, he also realizes the conventionality of an affair. The ease with which affairs are conducted with the unofficial approval of society and the deception it requires sickens him. Since society poses no objection to having an affair, the only other obstacle comes from Newland's sense of morality. Newland thinks Larry Lefferts' easy affairs are contemptible, but believes that his

affair with Ellen will be different. With this thought, Newland confronts "the dread argument of the individual case."[83] The fallacy of the individual case is that Newland believes that Ellen's and his situation is uniquely different from other individuals and so "they were answerable to no tribunal but that of their own judgment."[84] Newland believes that they are unlike any other pair of individuals attracted to each other but unable to be together. Consequently, their situation transcends ordinary morality. Newland struggles to redefine it in terms more fitting to their (supposedly) unique situation. Transcending those conventional categories of unfaithful husband and kept mistress is harder than he thinks. Although Newland tries to justify an affair so that it is not a deception, Ellen is not fooled. She bluntly asks if he means for her to be his mistress. Uncomfortable with the word mistress, Newland tells her that he wants to flee to a "world where words like that—categories like that—won't exist" and where they can be two human beings in love.[85] Newland lives up to his name in his quest to make his passion for Ellen into a search for a new country. Ellen disparages the idea of finding such a country and tells him that people have tried and found that "it wasn't at all different from the old world they'd left, but only rather smaller and dingier and more promiscuous."[86] There is no new country to be found where an affair is not a deception and nowhere to flee where they can escape their betrayal.

Ellen knows that Newland and she cannot be happy together. She argues that "morality is superior to romantic self-fulfillment."[87] Sexual desire will pass, but it is not easy to establish trust with the people one cares about. Her husband's secretary and she had fled in the hopes that they would find greater happiness together. But that relationship ended badly, because it was built on passion, which inevitably fizzles. Ellen anticipates that the same pattern would play out with Newland. Ellen explains to Newland that she must leave New York so that she does not repay the kindness of her family with deception. Ellen remembers how the family rallied around her when she came back to New York. For their kindness to her then, Ellen does not want to deceive them even for the sake of being with the person she loves. It is a great wrong to break faith with those people they care most about—their family, friends, and neighbors—because the individual good is partially based on keeping promises with those whom we care about.[88] Wharton is critical of the pursuit of happiness, which may be used to justify all individual acts of dishonesty and betrayal so long as the individual can claim that he did it in the name of happiness. The individual's good can be served through only living morally with others. Trust is an enduring basis for a relationship. Ellen's concept of morality is more sophisticated than society's, which is concerned solely with maintaining the formal appearance of morality.

In Newland's case, deceiving May requires great self-deception on his part. Newland's quest for self-fulfillment is his self-deception and devaluation of his wife. Since May is not the moldable wife that he wanted, he is

disappointed in her. Consequently, he is often surprised by her flashes of independence. Indeed, it may be that Newland was attracted to Ellen precisely because she appeared more vulnerable and in need of a male protector whereas May is strikingly capable and assured. For example, consider May's excellence at archery—she hits the target. As noted above, May has different opinions of the books that he read aloud. May surprised him when she told him that she would free him from their engagement if he loved someone else. Newland regards her independence of thought as a onetime event that exhausted her intellectual powers. He imagines that "she would probably go through life dealing to the best of her ability with each experience as it came."[89] This near bestial evaluation of May's lack of inner life is most uncharitable and also prevents Newland from recognizing how much his wife understands.

May is not nearly as naïve as Newland supposes her.[90] May knew about Newland's premarital affair despite her parents' attempt to shield her knowing. In addition, unlike Larry Lefferts' wife in the case of her husband, May suspects that Newland may be having an affair with Ellen. May proves most adept, even cunning, at separating Newland from his would-be lover, Ellen. Suspecting that she may be pregnant, May confides to Ellen that she is pregnant. Consequently, Ellen breaks off her rendezvous with Newland. Only after Ellen's farewell banquet does May reveal to Newland that she is (definitely) pregnant. Not only has May fibbed to Ellen, she lets Newland see that she has done so. Newland stays with May and takes up his responsibility to be a father. Not until after May dies does Newland finally realize his wife's sympathy for him. Dallas tells his father that just before his mother died, she told him that she knew Newland would always be there for their children "because once, when she asked you to, you'd given up the thing you most wanted."[91] The revelation that "someone had guessed and pitied" him for sacrificing his love for Ellen and that it was his wife moves Newland deeply.[92] Newland realizes the extent of his wife's sympathetic regard for him and even that he had enjoyed the marriage of tender companionship he had, in his youth, so greatly desired.

The novel's final chapter shows Newland twenty-six years later in his library where "most of the real things of his life had happened" including May's announced pregnancy, his eldest son's christening and first baby steps, and his daughter's engagement.[93] Newland who feared that life held little for him found that life with May presented many real events. Newland became a liberated gentleman. Newland had scoffed at Ned Winsett's suggestion to enter politics, but at Theodore Roosevelt's prompting, Newland runs for and wins a year in the state legislature. Ned Winsett could not persuade Newland with his proposition either to go into politics or to take leave entirely of the United States and emigrate. It took a gentleman of spirit and leadership, such as Roosevelt, to inspire Newland to be a man of leader-

ship. He is not reelected, but he does not disappear from the public stage and continues to take an active role through civic engagement.

Through Newland, Wharton chronicles gentleman emancipation. Newland moves from being an onlooker of life to a participant. Instead of becoming a relic in the old museum, Newland works to establish the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[94] The curious fact of old New York was that it prevented gentlemen from being active in society—society more broadly conceived than just New York's best families, but the whole of the city. Newland reflects that young men "were emancipating themselves" from the traditional occupations and freely pursuing politics, archaeology, architecture, landscaping, and historical preservation.[95] It becomes decent for young men to be interested in politics, be educated in the sciences, and have occupations outside of law and business. Although Newland favored the fine arts, the younger generation of Americans favors the practical fusions of art and life. Like his father, Dallas enjoys art, but he incorporates that interest into his occupation as an architect. In his youth, Newland had all sorts of stunted desires and interests. He had been just an onlooker with regard to traveling, art, theater, and books. Looking back, Newland considers the limited horizons in which he had expected to languish, and finds that "his small contribution to the new state of things seemed to count."[96] Newland is proud of his life.

SOCIETY'S BENEFICIAL RESTRAINT

It is easy for us to see that Undine's desires for base pleasure, material goods, and status will lead to unhappiness. That her pursuit of happiness will end badly we have little doubt. In contrast, in *The Age of Innocence*, Wharton presents Newland who is a more attractive and sympathetic figure struggling to find happiness within society's expectations. At first, May appears dull and conventional and Ellen appears to be a much better intellectual and emotional match for Newland. Newland appears to be in the right—he wants a tender and compatible spouse and places much emphasis on having such a spouse for his happiness. Why should his youthful mistake—his marriage to May—mar his whole life? If his marriage fails to give him the happiness he desires, then is he justified in seeking a more promising companion? Yet, as Wharton shows us, Newland has just as mistaken a notion of happiness as Undine. Just as Undine divorces to upgrade her material circumstances, Newland considers leaving his wife, his family, friends, and country to be with Ellen. It is likely that if Newland had abandoned May for Ellen, their affair would have fizzled, and eventually they would have sought alternative lovers.[97] If so, Newland's life would have resembled Undine's life and her string of husbands. Instead, Newland accepts his responsibility—as husband and father and accepts a role as a leader of society. In so doing, Newland

finds that he really begins to live his life—the "real" events of his life that happen in his library as opposed to his dreams of being with Ellen. Newland does not gain the kind of happiness he imagined, but the happiness he has is real and he is proud of it. The pursuit of happiness does not justify breaking trust, because it is through living morally with others that our own lives gain wholeness and in which contentment is possible. Put above every consideration, the vain pursuit of happiness would have led Newland away from the things that give him real lifelong satisfaction.

In contrast to Tom Wolfe and Percy, Edith Wharton more forcefully demonstrates the individual's obligation to society to live morally above pursuing happiness. Newland and even Undine live in structured social orders, and, in Newland's case, Wharton shows how society helps to guide the individual to living well. In disagreement with Wharton, Wolfe disapproves of structured societies precisely because he suspects society's guidance to be misleading and to encourage individuals to pursue false goods. Wolfe argues that the strength of the United States is as a decentralized society in which individuals, if they have the fortitude, may leave one social group for another group. Like Wolfe, Walker Percy little regrets the passing of traditional society, but he is more ambivalent than Wolfe about the benefits of "rootedness" of traditional society. Whereas Wolfe objects to traditional society in principle, much of Percy's rejection of the Southern way of life is based on his critique of Southern stoicism. Percy depicts communities favorably—although he focuses more on the self's realizing itself as a searcher and finding a fellow searcher as the key to living well. Moreover, in contrast to Wolfe, Percy identifies scientific attempts to overcome unhappiness to be a greater threat to living well than the social pressure on the individual that Wolfe criticizes. In response, Wharton might reply that Wolfe's decentralized societies and Percy's community of searchers who live with their discontent aggravate how the pursuit of happiness leads an individual astray to look outside the social contexts and obligations that she thinks best provides individuals with satisfying lives. For Wharton, opting out of society and living aside from society is unmanly and a neglect of one's responsibility to seek preservation of society and its reform.

For Wharton, happiness does not come as a result of the unalloyed satisfaction of desire that individuals seek. The right to the pursuit of happiness persuades individuals to seek contentment outside of social life and justifies their destructive actions in overcoming the social constraints that nurture the order and continuity necessary for living well. As Undine's example shows us, her quest for self-gratification prevents her from knowing and enjoying the things that she gains. Individual life cannot be meaningful or even lived well apart from social life. Chasing after happiness harms what chance individuals have of a good life. At the prospect of becoming a father, Newland

learns to accept his responsibility and to care for his children as part of his good life—a lesson that Undine fails to learn with the birth of her son.

According to Wharton, whatever existence is to be had outside of society—outside of the bonds of human trust and social restraint—cannot be happy. Morality is antecedent to the pursuit of happiness. Without honesty to others and responsibility to our families and societies little can come of our pursuit of happiness. Our social relationships bind us to one another and give our lives wholeness and stable identities that we need to have any measure of satisfaction in our lives. Undine Spragg tries to restrain her desires, but the individual's resources are too impoverished without society's support. Likewise, Newland and Ellen know that their affair is wrong and a betrayal of trust, but their mutual desire overtakes their resolve and they plan a tryst. May's intervention reminds Newland and Ellen of a social responsibility greater than themselves—the obligation the present generation has for the care of the future generation.

Wharton should not be thought to claim that the individual must subsume herself to the claims of society and the greater good at the expense of individual happiness. Individuals are parts of social wholes, and each part may be made into a whole by keeping faith and trust with those whom they share their lives. Yet, Wharton downplays individual happiness—regarding it as always suspect—in the clash between the individual and society. To see a robust depiction of the struggle of the individual and society in which the human heart is given its full weight, I will turn to Nathaniel Hawthorne in the next chapter.

NOTES

1. Millicent Bell presents a clear and well-organized description of the early developments in Wharton scholarship in the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–19.

2. No less than the Columbia trustees who awarded Edith Wharton the Pulitzer Prize in 1920 believed her novel upheld traditional values. When the Pulitzer jury selected Sinclair Lewis's unquestionably satirical *Main Street* for the award, the Columbia trustees deemed that Lewis's work did not satisfy the award's qualifications—"the American novel published during the year which best presented the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest American manners and manhood" quoted in Richard Grenier, "Society & Edith Wharton," *Commentary* 96 (1993): 49. Consequently, they overruled their jury to bestow the award upon *The Age of Innocence*.

3. See, for example, Edmund Wilson, *The Wound and the Bow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947). An early admirer of Wharton, Edmund Wilson argues that her novels are marked by a Puritan grimness that "we must face the unpleasant and the ugly" and that the conflict between the individual and society inevitably ends with characters "beating their heads against their prison or suffer a living death in resigning themselves to it" (198).

4. Parrington is not completely insensitive to Wharton's satire of old New York society with which he readily identifies her, but interprets her satire as good-natured, poking fun rather than serious criticism of social practices. In reference to *The Age of Innocence*, he says that "though she laughs at the deification of 'form' by the van der Luydens of Skuytercliff, and the

tyranny of their rigid social taboos, she loves them too well to suffer them to be forgotten by a careless generation," in Vernon L. Parrington, "Our Literary Aristocrat," *Pacific Review* 2 (1921), 157.

5. Parrington, "Our Literary Aristocrat," 159. For a long time, Wharton was associated with a discredited past and unpopular elitist view that prevented her from being counted among America's best literary authors.

6. See Jennie A. Kassanoff, *Edith Wharton and the Politics of Race* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Kassanoff argues that feminist scholars have been too quick to identify Wharton with their liberal causes. In contrast, Kassanoff contends that Wharton shared the concerns of many of her class that the foreign and poor would "overwhelm the native elite," that American culture would reflect the gauche tastes of the masses (Kassanoff, *Politics of Race*, 3). See also Elizabeth Ammons, "Edith Wharton and Race," in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*, ed. Millicent Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 68–97 and Hildegard Hoeller, "Invisible Blackness in Edith Wharton's Old New York," *African American Review* 44 (2011): 49–66.

7. See R. W. B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton: A Biography*. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1975). Lewis helped to revitalize her reputation with his Pulitzer Prize–winning biography that depicted Wharton as a sympathetic, energetic and erotic personality. See also Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), a biographical analysis of Wharton's writings that sparked interest in the new sympathetic Wharton.

8. See, for example, Gloria C. Erlich's *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

9. Millicent Bell observes how Wharton's personal life prompted an "identification" with Wharton and also that she "began to be seen as one of feminism's foremothers—who, though talented and rich, suffered the persisting ordeal of all women struggling for personal and professional self-definition in a male-dominated world" (13).

10. See Elizabeth Ammons, *Edith Wharton's Argument with America* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980); Carol Wershoven, *The Female Intruder in the Novels of Edith Wharton* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982); Wendy Gimbel, *Edith Wharton: Orphancy and Survival* (New York: Praeger, 1984), Judith Fryer, *Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), and Katherine Joslin, *Women Writers: Edith Wharton* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

11. A better attempt is made by Robin Peel. Peel holds that Wharton accepted the conservatism of her "Old New York principles," and rejected the rise of modernism in art, literature and politics at the turn of the 20th century in *Apart from Modernism: Edith Wharton, Politics, and Fiction before World War I* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 2005), 11. Peel argues that Wharton's writings served as an outlet for her to question and critique her inherited conservatism. Publicly, Wharton resisted the rapid changes in society, but in her writings, she "explore[d] and interrogate[d] a range of political beliefs, some progressive and radical, which are presented in a far more liberal and subtle way than her public posture of . . . American Toryism would lead us to expect" (12). Peel rightfully sees how Wharton presents a range of perspectives in her novels and questions both traditional society and the new social order coming into being during Wharton's lifetime. But Peel only finds coherence in Wharton's views by making Wharton into a passive explorer of these ideas in her writings. Peel creates a dual image of Wharton as the public conservative and the insightful novelist that leaves us with two Edith Whartons.

12. Edith Wharton, *The Custom of the Country, (*New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 5 and 15.

13. Wharton, *Custom*, 15.

14. Van Degen is called "an inventor of amusements," at which "he's inexhaustible" (Wharton, *Custom*, 115).

15. Wharton, *Custom*, 19.

16. Wharton, *Custom*, 35. Undine was plagued by the idea that "[t]here was something still better beyond, then—more luxurious, more exciting, more worthy of her!" (34).

17. Wharton, *Custom*, 51.
18. Undine recognizes that old world traditions are "stronger than any effort she could oppose to them" (Wharton, *Custom*, 322).
19. Wharton, *Custom*, 377.
20. Wilson, *Wound and Bow*, 24.
21. See Harold Bloom's introduction to *Edith Wharton,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publications, 1986), 1–3; Janet Malcolm, "The Woman Who Hated Women," *New York Times Book Review,* November 16, 1986, http://www.nytimes.com/1986/11/16/books/the-woman-who-hated-women.html?pagewanted=all. Elaine Showalter, "Spragg: The Art of the Deal," in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*, ed. Millicent Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 87–97. Elaine Showalter argues that Elmer Moffatt is portrayed more kindly than Undine, because his artistic sensibilities distinguish him from Undine, who cannot understand how Elmer enjoys the art he collected. Showalter concludes that Undine is "utterly without aesthetic sensibilities, and for Wharton this is the unpardonable sin" ("Art of the Deal," 94). For Wharton, Showalter argues, art holds the possibility of transcending social constraints, which block the individual from achieving the object of his desires. Elmer Moffatt transcends through his love of art life's disappointments whereas Undine finds no solace when denied what she desires.
22. Ammons, *Argument with America*, 98. See also Wolff, *A Feast of Words,* 249. Undine defender, Carol Baker Sapora, makes the case that although Undine is ruthless and unlikable, Undine seeks material success in marriage the way men do in business. According to Sapora, "men do not like seeing their tactics reflected in a woman and they do not admit to recognizing the baseness of their standards when turned against them" in "Undine Spragg, the Mirror and the Lamp in *The Custom of the Country*," in *Memorial Boxes and Guarded Interiors,* 281.
23. Cahir points to one instance in which Undine and Moffatt reminisce about their short courtship and marriage in Apex, and Undine speaks admiringly of Moffatt. After Undine tells Moffatt how she had admired his strength and the way he flouted Apex conventions, Wharton says that "[s]he had never spoken more sincerely. For the moment all thought of self-interest was in abeyance, and she felt again, as she had felt that day, the instinctive yearning of her nature to be one with his" (Wharton, *Custom*, 362). Yet, Cahir concludes, "[i]n the end, however, we wonder if Undine has lost even this brief whisper of humanity" in Linda Costanzo Cahir, *Solitude and Society in the Works of Herman Melville and Edith Wharton* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 40.
24. Wharton, *Custom*, 243.
25. Wharton, *Custom*, 243. In her uncanny ability to imitate the people she is with, Undine resembles Woody Allen's character Zelig (from the film *Zelig*) who can physically transform himself to resemble physically whomever he is with.
26. Wharton, *Custom*, 246.
27. Wharton, *Custom*, 22.
28. Wharton, *Custom*, 23
29. Wharton, *Custom*, 345.
30. Wharton, *Custom*, 147.
31. Wharton, *Custom*, 151.
32. Wharton, *Custom*, 356.
33. Wharton, *Custom*, 67.
34. Wharton, *Custom*, 107.
35. Wharton, *Custom*, 128.
36. Wharton, *Custom*, 16. More than once, Undine is admonished to "go steady" in her spending (11).
37. Wharton, *Custom*, 286.
38. Wharton notes that "she could not always resist the present pleasure" (*Custom*, 128).
39. Wharton, *Custom*, 148.
40. Wharton, *Custom*, 148–49.
41. Wharton, *Custom*, 27.
42. Wharton, *Custom*, 376.
43. Sapora, "Mirror and the Lamp," 274.

44. Wharton, *Custom*, 39.
45. Wharton, *Custom*, 347.
46. Wharton, *Custom*, 94.
47. Wharton, *Custom*, 136.
48. A trifling inconvenience could put "crease in the smooth surface of existence" and so mar Undine's present pleasures (Wharton, *Custom*, 144).
49. Wharton, *Custom*, 129.
50. Cahir, *Solitude and Society*, 38–39.
51. Cecelia Tichi, "Emerson, Darwin, and *The Custom of the Country*," in *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*, ed. Carol J. Singley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 96.
52. Tichi, "Emerson, Darwin," 96. Elmer Moffatt's gauche manners and lack of class grate on Undine's nerves and she reminisces fondly of Ralph and Raymond's grace of manners. Yet, it is her ambition to become an ambassador's wife that suggests that another divorce is in her future. Although the novel ends with the observation that divorced women cannot be the wives of ambassadors, Cahir argues that the ending is more ambivalent than many commentators believe. Instead of believing that Undine has finally met an unbreakable social rule, Cahir argues that given Undine's history of overcoming the "seeming impossible" (i.e., her marriage to Raymond) she will find a way to become an ambassador's wife (*Solitude and Society*, 38).
53. Wharton, *Custom of the Country*, 15.
54. Wharton, *Custom of the Country*, 376.
55. The story opens at the old opera house that was favored by conservative New York for "being small and inconvenient, and thus keeping out the 'new people' whom New York was beginning to dread and yet be drawn to" in Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence.* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), 3. For example, Julius Beaufort, a wealthy English émigré banker with no known background, marries into one of New York's finest families.
56. Wharton, *Innocence*, 6.
57. Mrs. Archer is very precise about the term aristocracy. She remembers that it denotes class and rank and does not conflate it with wealth. As descendants of the first Dutch governor of Manhattan and other French and British aristocratic families, the van der Luydens have rank. The families that newspapers call aristocratic are really descendants of Dutch and English merchants (Wharton, *Innocence*, 41). Mrs. Archer, I believe, gives voice to Wharton's concern that it should be understood among her readers that there are few if any real aristocrats in America. Old money does not make an aristocracy.
58. Wharton, *Innocence*, 126.
59. Wharton, *Innocence*, 253.
60. Pamela Knights, "Forms of Disembodiment: The Social Subject in *The Age of Innocence*," *The Cambridge Companion to Wharton*, ed. Millicent Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 41.
61. Wharton, *Innocence*, 27.
62. Wharton, *Innocence*, 37.
63. Wharton, *Innocence*, 39.
64. Wharton, *Innocence*, 25.
65. Wharton, *Innocence*, 105.
66. See Wharton, *Innocence*, 25 and 56.
67. Wharton, *Innocence*, 26.
68. Wharton, *Innocence*, 125.
69. Wharton, *Innocence*, 126.
70. Wharton, *Innocence*, 93.
71. Wharton, *Innocence*, 93.
72. Mrs. Archer, Janey and the local gossip, Mr. Sillerton Jackson, mine Ellen's past for evidence portending her unhappy marriage. They cite her unconventional childhood and wearing a black dress at her coming out party. Mrs. Archer writes off Ellen's desire for a divorce as the act of "a wayward child" (121).
73. Wharton, *Innocence*, 96.

74. Kathy Miller Hadley convincingly argues that by focusing on Newland's point of view, Wharton ironically draws attention to Ellen's and May's "untold stories" in "Ironic Structure and Untold Stories in *The Age of Innocence*," *Studies in the Novel* 23 (1991): 262.

75. Wharton, *Innocence*, 4.

76. It is noted that Catherine Mingott or Julius Beaufort could have brought about a "fusion" of art and society if they had had interest (Wharton, *Innocence*, 85).

77. See Carol J. Singely's discussion of Professor Sillerton as a model for Newland in "Bourdieu, Wharton, and Changing Culture in *The Age of Innocence*," *Cultural Studies* 17 (2003): 511–12.

78. See Wharton, *Innocence*, 245.

79. Wharton, *Innocence*, 103.

80. Wharton, *Innocence*, 104.

81. Wharton, *Innocence*, 104.

82. Wharton, *Innocence*, 253.

83. Wharton, *Innocence*, 254.

84. Wharton, *Innocence*, 254.

85. Wharton, *Innocence*, 241.

86. Wharton, *Innocence*, 241.

87. Sarah Kozloff, "Complicity in *The Age of Innocence*," *Style* 35 (2001): 284.

88. It should be observed nowhere it is suggested that Newland's obligation to May arose from their wedding vows—that he ought to be faithful because he vowed to be so. The problem with basing honesty on wedding vows is that only Newland would be obliged and Ellen would not be. Wharton's point is to expand honesty to a broader social context. The obligations of honesty do not depend on formal vows, promises, or contracts.

89. Wharton, *Innocence*, 156. Looking at May's face, Newland imagines that "he would always know the thoughts behind it, that never, in all the years to come, would she surprise him by an unexpected mood, by a new idea, a weakness, a cruelty or an emotion" (245).

90. See Hadley, "Ironic Structure," 268–69 for a description of May as a capable and empowered figure instead of the helpless innocent Newland imagines her to be.

91. Wharton, *Innocence*, 296.

92. Wharton, *Innocence*, 296.

93. Wharton, *Innocence*, 287.

94. See Michael Nowlin, "Edith Wharton's Higher Provincialism: *French Ways* for Americans and the Ends of *The Age of Innocence*," *Journal of American Studies* 38 (2004): 92.

95. Wharton, *Innocence*, 287.

96. Wharton, *Innocence*, 288.

97. Indeed, Edith Wharton wrote two alternative endings for *The Age of Innocence*. In one version, Newland and Ellen have an affair that they regret and Newland returns to May. In the other ending, Newland and May's engagement is broken, Newland and Ellen marry, but their passion cools. Either way, Wharton shows that the couple cannot be happy together precisely because they have so little in common. See Cynthia Griffin Wolff, "Introduction," in *The Age of Innocence*, by Edith Wharton (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), xxiii–xxiv.

Chapter Five

Hawthorne's Hope for Friendship and Happiness

For Nathaniel Hawthorne, political communities should protect the mystery of the human heart as the foundation of liberty and happiness. It depends on a broad middle ground between the public and private in which it is up to individuals to share their hearts and lives with each other in friendship. This is harder than it sounds. Hawthorne's stories from America's past and also from his contemporary society illustrate how the middle ground in which friendship and happiness flourishes withers in the extremes of the public and the private. Hawthorne's writings also provide models of friendship that cautiously, if nonetheless hopefully, present how happiness may be known.

More than Tom Wolfe, Walker Percy, and Edith Wharton, Nathaniel Hawthorne shows that the pursuit of happiness antedates America's political founding and can be traced to the Puritan founding. Treating the private and hidden with suspicion, the Puritans intrusively seek to make the individual's inner life transparent for the sake of achieving an ideal society. The Puritans violate Hester Prynne's heart by compelling her to wear an external sign of her sin, the badge of the scarlet letter, which isolates her from society. If the Puritans practiced excessive social intrusion into individual lives, Hawthorne's contemporary society as depicted in "The Custom-House" sketch that introduces the main story of *The Scarlet Letter* depicts the deficiency in which individuals enjoy little community with each other. Bonds of self-interest are too weak to promote the kind of society in which individuals may enjoy the dual blessings of community and individual liberty. In the absence of stronger bonds than self-interest, Hawthorne fears the United States will come to resemble the decaying and isolated society of the Salem custom house where individuals, so well supported by the federal government, take little interest in each other.

Either error leads to individual isolation, helplessness, and unhappiness. Both societies, Hawthorne argues, fail to recognize that the heart's mystery provides the basis of our moral and political freedom, because the inner self remains incompletely known and partially veiled from others. Political health is served by acknowledging the sacredness of the human heart and limiting the reach of society, but also encouraging individuals to freely form private relationships and friendships to mediate the individual's relationship to society as a whole. Yet, as Hawthorne shows in *The House of the Seven Gables*, the happiness that is possible in America may still be despised for falling short of an imaginary ideal. Happiness is possible within horizons.

In the custom house sketch that introduces *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne presents the relationship between author and reader as a model of friendship and serves to highlight the shortcomings of other relationships in the story. Hawthorne prepares the reader to see that the Puritan and the custom house communities fail to recognize the mystery of the individual and how it must be shared with others for the sake of living well and happily in society. On the one hand, the Puritan community errs by trying to make every heart visible to society. On the other, the denizens of the custom house live isolated and distant lives. Both societies discourage the personal friendships that Hawthorne believes are needed to live well and are essential for maintaining a free society. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne shows that it is beyond the right of society to make the individual's heart visible, but that the individual's good depends on partially sharing the mystery of his heart with others. It is easy to see that the Puritans violate the heart by trying to expose it entirely to society's view. Less obviously, in Hawthorne's America represented by the custom house, individuals are too independent and shielded from each other. They risk missing out on freely forming these relationships with each other. Sharing the heart poses the risk of loss of freedom, but the individuals must be inclined to share their hearts and lives with others' hearts for the enjoyment of common social goods and also the good of the individual. This requires a delicate balance of both revealing and leaving hidden aspects of the heart. The pursuit of happiness cannot be pursued independently of others, but only by seeking friendships with others. Through his discussion of friendship and the veiled inner self, Hawthorne seeks to become the reader's friend, and, in so doing, he teaches his readers how to befriend another. The relationship between Hawthorne and his readers serves as a standard in *The Scarlet Letter* by which we may judge both the Puritan society described in the tale as well as the custom house.

As I shall argue more fully below, the message of *The Scarlet Letter* is incomplete if Hawthorne's custom house sketch and his relationship to the reader as a friend are left unexplored. The political import of Hester's story and her badge of shame is that societies as well as individuals must learn to respect the privacy of the human heart. In their utopian zeal for moral recti-

tude, the Puritans go too far in their punishment of Hester to make her secret sin transparent to public scrutiny, but fail entirely to make Hester repent. Society lacks the right to expose completely the heart and rob it of its mystery, and its ineffectual and clumsy mechanisms and methods further demonstrate its lack of right. The attempt to do so, however, causes much harm and damage to the heart as the example of the scarlet letter's failure to reform Hester shows. The need for political and social privacy is an easy lesson of *The Scarlet Letter*. But, as Hawthorne shows in the custom house sketch, privacy of the heart and the individual as protected through our nation's doctrine of individual rights can create a deadening cocoon that renders individual lives too distant, isolated, and unhappy. Consequently, Hawthorne's argument for friendship is important for the sake of avoiding the fate of the custom house's independent and utterly private inhabitants. By befriending the reader, Hawthorne shows the reader how friends share their inner selves with each other, but that the revelation is partial. Knowledge of another's heart—even among friends—must always be incomplete.

In order to develop Hawthorne's argument for friendship, I will briefly discuss how Hawthorne presents himself as a friend in "The Old Manse" and "The Custom-House." Then, I will turn to how juxtaposing the sketches and main story of *The Scarlet Letter* helps illustrate how the Puritan community's violation of the heart and the custom house's extreme individualism both render individuals lonely and unhappy. Hawthorne criticizes his society for narrowing human life by failing to direct human beings beyond their private selves and, as a consequence, causing increasingly brutish individual and social behavior. We will see how Hawthorne presents friendship as a correction of these societies. Finally, I will turn to *The House of the Seven Gables* in which Hawthorne depicts the limited, fragile, yet meaningful happiness that friendship makes possible and the spirit of reform that risk despising it in favor of an imaginary ideal. The friendship and love that emerges between Holgrave and Phoebe are the best proof that happiness within horizons is possible in America.

THE AUTHOR AS FRIEND IN "THE OLD MANSE"

Frequent autobiographical sketches and direct appeals to the reader mark Hawthorne's stories.[1] In the custom house sketch, Hawthorne observes that "when he casts his leaves forth upon the wind, the author addresses, not the many . . . but the few who will understand him, better than most of his schoolmates and lifemates."[2] Although Hawthorne seeks friends who will understand him through his writing, he knows they will not be the closest of friends and he clarifies that he shall keep "the inmost Me behind its veil."[3] He contrasts himself with other authors who divulge so much of themselves

that they seem to be writing for the "one heart and mind of perfect sympathy."[4] In effect, such authors write only for themselves and not to seek friends. Friends are sympathetic hearts and like-minded, but not identical souls. Moreover, Hawthorne warns against revealing too much of the self. Self-revelatory authors expose themselves almost indecently to the public, because the public sees more than that it has a right to see and the author violates the self through public exposure. In short, the author misunderstands the nature of friendship itself and also the particular character of friendship between an author and a reader. For Hawthorne, the kind of friendship self-revelatory authors seek with the public is not possible. The public cannot reciprocate friendship to the author and the author remains as friendless as before he wrote, but having sufficiently devalued the sacredness of his own heart, now stands defenseless.

Foremost, Hawthorne stresses the importance of how the author must respect the sacredness of his own heart and that of his readers'. The heart, as Hawthorne understands it, is something mysterious, personal, and special that should not be lightly revealed or easily known. Not only are there limits to society's gaze, but individuals must also respect certain limits and honor certain procedures for approaching the heart of another equally mysterious being. By his example and through his stories, Hawthorne shows how an author befriends a reader and shares himself cautiously, slowly, and partially for the sake of preserving the reader and his inner freedom.

The full title of the sketch is "The Old Manse: The Author Makes the Reader Acquainted with His Abode."[5] The sketch's title promises a virtual visit to the author's residence, but Hawthorne delays the anticipated event of entering his study so as to slowly acquaint the reader with himself and introduce the reader to his "circle of friends."[6] The sketch is an exercise in delaying the gratification of the reader—the reader gains entry into the Old Manse's study only in the final paragraph. At which point, Hawthorne treats his reader with greater familiarity and invites the reader to sit down and make herself comfortable. Just as he used metaphorical degrees, detours, and digressions to delay the reader's access to his study, Hawthorne suggests so should individuals slowly approach one another in friendship.

After a quick summary of the sketch, I will discuss the contrast Hawthorne draws between how Ralph Waldo Emerson and he investigate the individual through their writings and how their different approaches influences their readers. Hawthorne's indirect and meandering tour and treasure hunt at the Old Manse is an intentional departure from Emerson's more direct approach. By looking unmediated at the individual self, Emerson encourages his follower to treat him as a source of truth that can be plumbed for hidden treasure. In contrast, Hawthorne turns his readers away from looking into himself—in fact, he brags about how little he reveals to the reader. Instead, Hawthorne directs the reader outward and invites the reader on a

treasure hunt to look for new material for Hawthorne to base a novel. Hawthorne and the reader come up empty-handed on material for a novel. But the treasure seeking itself turns out to have been the real treasure. In the process, Hawthorne cultivates friendship based on mutual respect and awareness of the other's inner mystery that must be cautiously approached and partially revealed so as to preserve the right and dignity of the other person. Moreover, he provides a glimpse of his understanding of qualified happiness.

Throughout "The Old Manse," Hawthorne's pretenses and excuses to delay going into the Old Manse become comical. He sets up the reader to desire to go immediately to his study—the heart of the house—by telling the reader about his "most delightful little nook of a study."[7] The reader may suppose that the first stop on the tour will be the study, but Hawthorne postpones. As a guest, the reader "is entitled to all courtesy in the way of sightshowing."[8] Treating the reader like tourist, he takes the reader to see the Concord River and then a nearby battleground. Lost in a reverie about the land's original Indian inhabitants, Hawthorne exclaims that the Old Manse has been forgotten and promises to take the reader back—but through the orchard first. After seeing the orchard, Hawthorne takes the reader to the garden to admire the vegetables. Still Hawthorne does not yet take the reader to his house. Instead, he delays to enjoy the fine weather outdoors. Here Hawthorne recalls a memorable rainy day in which he searched through old papers stored in the Old Manse's attic. At this point, Hawthorne confides to the reader that he seeks treasure at the Old Manse—material upon which to base a work. The reader is now a co-treasure seeker. Nothing inspiring, however, is found among the dusty old books and papers. Hawthorne recalls a sunny day in which his friend, Ellery Channing, and he go fishing.

Rainy or sunny, indoors or outdoors, Hawthorne comes up short on writing material. Hawthorne excuses himself from "babbling" so long and deferring seeing the study—yet he digresses once more to tell the reader that as he writes this sketch he has left the Old Manse for a custom house.[9] The happiness he knew at the Old Manse was temporary and qualified. It was temporary because his family and he depart from the sweet surroundings of the Old Manse for Salem (where he took up the position of a customs official). It was qualified because in the Old Manse he suffered writer's block and did not find the "treasure of intellectual gold" upon which to work a novel.[10] The only fruits of his warm and rich life at the Old Manse are the tales and short stories in *Mosses from an Old Manse*. The material for a longer, weightier work that would secure Hawthorne's literary reputation remains yet out of his reach. After revealing to the reader the burdens of a writer's heart, Hawthorne welcomes the reader into his "circle of friends," which suggests that friendship provides a more complete kind of happiness.

Despite Hawthorne's evident sadness at leaving the Old Manse and failing to write a novel, Hawthorne uses his relationship to the reader as an

example of how knowledge of another person must be mediated so as to preserve both the self and the other's inner freedom. The scatterbrained, circuitous amble through the Old Manse property served both to conceal Hawthorne's true concerns but also to prepare and warm the reader up, so to speak, to have sympathy with him. Readers often expect to be given full access to the author's innermost thoughts for the sake of pleasant and easy consumption. Hawthorne emphasizes that he is not like other authors who "serve up their own hearts, delicately fried, with brain sauce, as a tidbit for their beloved public."[11] This comic line gently reveals how the sketch serves as re-education of the reader to encourage him to revere the proper process and limits of becoming a friend. As a serious point, however, Hawthorne refuses for his inner self to be the subject of mere amusement for his readership. A readership that expects that authors give their readers total access to their minds and hearts lacks the necessary heightened awareness and jealous protection of the mysterious and ultimately impenetrable character of the individual heart that is the basis of liberty in a democratic nation. Equality of the individual does not mean that the individual is knowable to all and so transparent. Political liberty is poorly supported and easily undermined if citizens do not recognize this. The dangerous tendency to assume that an individual is knowable demystifies the individual, robs her of her inner liberty, and opens up an avenue for manipulation and control. For Hawthorne, our political liberty depends on the belief that the individual is distinctive, partially hidden from view, and so beyond direct control of the state.

Hawthorne selects Ralph Waldo Emerson's followers as representatives of this dangerous tendency to scan the interior of the individual. As the preeminent American literary figure of the 1840s, Emerson attracted many admirers and followers. Hawthorne intentionally draws a sharp distinction between Emerson and himself.[12] Hawthorne, of course, does not have followers. Like a "beacon burning on a hill top," Emerson attracted many followers looking for guidance on how to live who sought in his intellectual prowess deliverance from their troubles and bewilderment.[13]

While reluctant to criticize directly Emerson, Hawthorne observes that the many of the people who flock to Emerson pick up superficial aspects of his teachings.[14] Originality as a philosophic concept is one of Emerson's most admired teachings. But his followers pretend to originality and approximate it through the shallow means of odd dress and manners—thus failing to understand Emerson's argument concerning originality. Hawthorne enjoys the irony that the great original American thinker attracts so many imitators. These imitators and petty pretenders believe themselves to be "important agents of the world's destiny" and yet are "bores of a very intense water."[15] However comical they may be, Hawthorne recognizes a great danger in Emerson's imitators. They believe that Emerson laid the heart bare for all to see and that they can change the world based on Emerson's insights. Oddball

dressing and strange habits are no matter, but trying to change the world is another story. Hawthorne traces their error to their leader and observes that "the heart of many an ordinary man had, perchance, inscriptions which [Emerson] could not read."[16] He fears that those influenced by Emerson will trample over the hearts of ordinary individuals in revolutionary and utopian zeal. In contrast to Emerson, part of Hawthorne's project will be to teach his readers that the hearts of individuals are harder to read than might be supposed.

Emerson can be faulted for revealing too much of himself to his followers. Individuals flock to Emerson's side to pry and rummage among his thoughts. His followers view Emerson as a cask for golden thoughts inside. From the way Emerson writes, he gives the impression of holding little back and so encourages his followers to view him as an instrument for conveying truths. By teaching his followers that human beings can be known completely and transparently, Emerson demystifies himself and turns himself into a container for ideas that others can use for their own purposes. Emerson's followers, more consistent than Emerson, apply that lesson to their teacher. Because Emerson made himself appear transparent, his followers little value Emerson as a person but value only what can be manipulated or forced into view for their own purposes. Emerson's teachings distort human relationships.

In contrast, Hawthorne boasts of "how little [he has] told" of himself.[17] He has been a hospitable host but has not taken the reader "wandering . . . through the inner passages of [his] being."[18] Whereas Emerson's followers looked for "glittering gems" within the self, Hawthorne invites the reader to search for treasure on the grounds of the Old Manse.[19] By including the reader in his search for literary treasure in the Old Manse, Hawthorne mediates his relationship with the reader. He keeps the reader at a distance but also joins with him in a common pursuit. That Hawthorne and the reader come up empty-handed is beside the point. (The search for material for a novel provides a fitting pun—the word "novel" can also mean originality.)

Only the Old Manse, a symbol of convention, home life, and society, proves to be a treasure. Private life and the ordinary domestic comforts provide the right kind of conditions for the individual to share his life with others. The Old Manse's hearth may be conventional, but Hawthorne wants to show the reader the good of living in "the system of human society" even as he brings the reader into his "circle of friends."[20] The hearthside is a happy scene in which the individual lives more freely through convention rather than being stifled by it and where convention preserves and provides continuity to human experience. Unlike Emerson's followers who make exterior shows of being unusual for the sake being original, Hawthorne shows his reader that such actions are misguided. Emerson's followers seek original ideas over enduring thought. Originality is so often reduced to external show-

manship. The task is for convention—and political orders, as Hawthorne will later emphasize—to encourage the right kind of social relationships through which the individual can share his heart with others.

"The Old Manse" ends with a praise of convention and home life as the best environment for encouraging friendships and happiness (as does *The House of the Seven Gables*). Hawthorne goes so far as to claim that "all the artifice and conventionalism of life was but an impalpable thinness upon its surface, and that the depth below was none the worse for it."[21] The inner mystery of the individual is not squashed by all conventions but preserved and enhanced through social living. The distinction between the individual and society must be understood for the sake of showing that there is something particular to the individual—his heart, as Hawthorne calls it—that is not a creation or convention of society though it may be shaped by it. The heart must be understood as proper to the individual for the sake of illustrating in *The Scarlet Letter* the monstrous violation that the Puritan community perpetrates upon Hester. By drawing the reader away from the airy heights of novel speculation that characterize Emerson's followers, he leads them toward consideration of the seriousness of the conflict between society and the individual heart that becomes the focus of "The Custom-House" and *The Scarlet Letter*.

"THE CUSTOM-HOUSE"

In "The Custom-House," Hawthorne relates how he found literary treasure for the writing of *The Scarlet Letter*—his most famous and, arguably, his finest novel—in the literal second story of the building.[22] The main story of *The Scarlet Letter* is about a political order that tries to limit private life by making the heart transparent and so eliminate wrongdoing for the sake of social well-being. The Puritans do not trust what was hidden in the soul. They see only how the heart's mystery allows for wrongdoing without seeing how its mystery and freedom are also the basis of individual well-being. By compelling Hester to wear the scarlet letter, they try to make her invisible sin in her soul physically visible on her person and so coerce repentance. Obviously, their effort to make visible the invisible fails. Attempting to eliminate evil in the soul by curtailing private freedom is a remedy worse than the disease. So ill-quipped and unsuited are society's methods and ways for making the heart visible that the Puritans inadvertently pervert the relationships among individuals and cause more wrongdoing.

"The Custom-House" serves as counterpoint to Hester's story. It highlights the dangers that individualism poses to Hawthorne's contemporary America. In "The Custom-House," he presents a society of extremely private and isolated individuals living and working in a weary and decaying environ-

ment. Like his contemporary Alexis de Tocqueville, Hawthorne predicted that Americans would tend to become more individualized, private, and isolated.[23] To be clear, the extreme individualism of the custom house is an exaggeration of tendencies Hawthorne sees in his present day and not an accurate reflection of American life. Based on his observations of his fellow Americans, "The Custom-House" presents a snapshot of what Hawthorne believed American society would resemble if its extreme individualism remained unchecked.

In contrast to the Puritans, the individuals working in the custom house lead private lives unconnected to each other or to others outside of the custom house. Nothing draws the men of the custom house outside of themselves to the society of others. The mode of gaining their offices makes them distrustful of each other. Federal offices such as customs officials were awarded based on the spoils system. The Whig-appointed officials view Hawthorne, a Democrat, with mistrust. In the absence of meaningful connections to other human beings, many of the men of the custom house appear to have lost much of their humanity. Individuals left within the narrow confines of their own souls become less human and more animalistic. Isolation makes the men of the custom house powerless, fearful, distrusting, and subject to and trembling at political processes with which they are not involved.

Commercial activity has moved to other ports and so the wharf is lethargic. The employees of the custom house are often asleep; their speech is distinguished by a "lack of energy."[24] Lethargy also characterizes their relationships to each other; they are uninterested in each other's inner lives. Although Hawthorne comes to feel affection for them, this affection does not lead to reciprocal friendship. The old men do not come to sympathize with him and know him in no other capacity than by his official functions and not as a writer. Nor, he speculates, would they have "cared a fig the more for [him]" if they had read his writings.[25]

In an environment that permits individuals to pursue the private life of his choice without hindrance, we might expect rich, colorful, and diverse inner lives to be the result. Instead, the custom house is a static and prevents the creation and sharing of anything new. The old men live in a decaying present and lack ways to create a dynamic and lively society. Most notably, the custom house lacks the society of women. Hawthorne notes that its slovenly appearance reveals "a sanctuary into which womankind, with her tools of magic, the broom and mop, has very infrequent access."[26] That women are needed to clean the interior of the custom house may seem trivial or insulting, but we should see that women are bearers of change and life; their society and skills are integral to a healthy community. Cleaning implicitly suggests dissatisfaction with existing conditions. Women are agents of change. Without women, the single sex society of the custom house is metaphorically barren. We see that the old men's conversation is sterile. Their

conversation is limited to the "thousandth repetition of old sea-stories, and moudly jokes."[27] Though they are advanced in years, these men are not venerable sages, full of the wisdom of years. Instead, they have "gathered nothing worth preservation from their varied experiences of life."[28] The old men of the custom house have nothing new to say nor can they build or create anything new from what they have.

Nevertheless, Hawthorne is free to do as he likes. His job is not terribly demanding. There is plenty of time for writing. Once again, however, Hawthorne is stymied by writer's block. Nothing fires his imagination. The custom house lacks the "genial atmosphere which a literary man requires, in order to ripen the best harvest of his mind."[29] As Catherine Zuckert observes, Hawthorne's inability to write in the custom house illustrates that "[t]he absence of external restraint does not produce more life or liberty."[30] Zuckert continues that while Hawthorne's fellow employees "do not attempt to suppress his poetry or regulate his imagination, their utter lack of sympathy and complete materialism work as well if not better than Puritan restrictions."[31] Pushing Zuckert's argument slightly, the custom house's freedom and privacy more effectively stifle Hawthorne's art than the Puritans' restraints on Hester. Hester has her needlework. She indulges her elaborate and fanciful imagination. Albeit subservient to public uses, Hester has an outlet for her imagination and contributes to the needs of her society (ornate formal wear) whereas Hawthorne's art has little place in the custom house.

Hawthorne provides profiles of some of his coworkers to illustrate how in the absence of flourishing relationships, Americans may become more bestial and either turn to animal pleasures or reduce life to the demands of business. The Inspector cuts a particularly grotesque figure that is almost insensible to the misfortune of those nearest to him. He had three wives who all died and about twenty children of which most have preceded him in death. Yet, Hawthorne reports that the Inspector showed no sign of lingering sorrow and occupied his time recalling past meals with the most elaborate relish. Hawthorne detects more regret and unhappiness at a goose that proved too tough to eat than the death of so many family members. Like an animal, the Inspector lacked self-awareness. Similarly deficient in self-awareness, Hawthorne presents a "man of business" who understands the operation of the custom house better than anyone else and keeps its operations moving.[32] His integrity is irreproachable and his efficacy and skill in discharging the business of the custom house undeniable. Raised from a boy in the custom house, the "man of business" knew nothing of matters beyond the custom house's interest. In short, he was the perfect businessman who lived to work and had little other use for his life. Both the Inspector and the businessman live reduced, narrow lives that, if not unhappy, certainly lack the capacity for greater human well-being.

These profiles do not tell the whole story. Hawthorne also shows the reader how resilient the soul is and unlikely to wither away. Instead, aspects of the soul have fallen into decay or have been isolated because social avenues that bring individuals together have atrophied. An old general works in the custom house who displays flashes of a once vibrant personality. Hawthorne sees only the ruins of what might have been and what is therefore humanly possible. With kind imagination and "affection," Hawthorne speculates that the old general's portrait was "marked with noble and heroic qualities" that he had earned.[33] The old general's heart "was never the kind that flashes and flickers in a blaze, but, rather, a deep, red glow, as of iron in a furnace."[34] Hawthorne supposes that the old general's spirit could be reawakened. Other small examples and gestures of unseen inner depths may be glimpsed. A Naval officer provides Hawthorne with some literary talk. The Collector's junior clerk occasionally chats about books and is rumored to write poetry. A former seaman and now inspector (not to be confused with the one described above) frequently moved Hawthorne "to laughter and admiration by his marvelous gifts as a story-teller."[35] The custom house has not eradicated the warmer human sentiments and artistic imagination, but malnourished them and provides too few occasions for their revelation or development. Within the custom house there is the potential for friendship.

Community weakly exists in the custom house. It is a collection of individuals who happen to be together through self-interest and the capricious turns of the spoils system. Although Hawthorne chides officials of the custom house for "lean[ing] on the mighty arm of the Republic," he observes that he little better and as an employee "his own proper strength departs from him."[36] Officials of the custom house may lead private lives, but not free lives. The old men of the custom house are enslaved to their comfort and ease supplied by the Federal Government. The Federal Government does not give freedom, but independence from others in the form of material comfort. Though the custom house denizens are independent and free in their private lives, they are not happy. Presidential elections expose the sham ease of the custom house and are events to be dreaded. The old men of the custom house felt "the periodical terrors of a presidential election."[37] Fear is the strongest passion operating within the custom house.

In the beginning of his employment at the custom house, Hawthorne's appointment rouses concern among its employees that he might replace them with employees of his party. As Whig appointees, the custom house employees feared Hawthorne, because as a Democratic appointee, he had the power to fire them. As a matter of natural and partisan right, Hawthorne claims, the old Whigs knew they should give way to younger men and to Democrats. The old Whigs "dreaded" Hawthorne since he could metaphorically "bring every one of those white heads under the axe of the guillotine."[38] Regardless of natural and partisan right that enables Hawthorne to fire the old men of the

custom house, he decides not to fire them. He develops a fondness for them. One-sided fondness and affection, however, are not sufficient conditions to build a community. Once the old men became assured of retaining their positions, they resume their slovenly ease. Despite Hawthorne's concern for them, their concern for Hawthorne as a person extends only so far as he has power over their jobs. Once they are secure that Hawthorne will not fire them, they resume their animal ease and gentle indifference to him. The phlegmatic habits of the custom house belie the fear that underlies it. Without public spiritedness, fellow-feeling or friendship underlying a community, the custom house employees enjoy little concord or pleasure in each other's company.

Later in the main story, Hawthorne contrasts how presidential elections in his day that are accompanied by panic and terror whereas celebration and public spiritedness surround the Puritans' election day. The celebration surrounding the election day illustrates how the Puritans are bound together by an overriding sense of purpose and mission to see the new government thrive. Consequently, they employ all arts that could "give majesty to the forms in which a new government manifested itself to the people."[39] Dimmesdale's final sermon takes place on election day to commemorate the event as a public holiday. Election day brings together the diverse inhabitants of the New World to mark the beginning of a new political year. A large, colorful crowd of townspeople, remote forest settlers, sailors and even some Indians gather to witness and celebrate the procession of the city's political leaders. The newly arrived Puritans brought with them a weakened, but still festive remnant of the resplendent Elizabethan traditions that accompanied political events.[40] They retained celebrations and magnificence intended to dignify and establish the new government such as formal, ornate dress and processions. Hester though censured by the community is included in the festivities. Her fine needlework contributes greatly to the elegance of the magistrate's robes. Although the Puritans enjoy a more austere commemoration, we see that children are given a holiday from school, artisans such as the blacksmith wash and wear their best clothes, and music accompanies the simple procession. Even though juggling and theatrics are not permitted, sports such as wrestling and sword fight retain a role since they are thought to engender desirable qualities such as courage. The Puritans' election day permits room for merrymaking and unites diverse peoples together under the same government. In contrast to presidential elections in Hawthorne's time, these mirthful celebrations accompanying the political procession illustrate the lost sense of festivity and common purpose in political life. Contemporary elections in our day as well as Hawthorne's have become opportunities for partisan one-upmanship.

When Zachary Taylor won in 1848, the incoming administration ejected Hawthorne from the custom house. As a victim of the spoils system, his

criticisms of the incoming Whig administration's housecleaning may seem like a case of bitter grapes and general partisanship. Presidential elections serve less to bring Americans together and more to function as a favorable moment for the winners to unleash vengeful passions on their fellow citizens. Relying on the power of the Republic, the Whigs used their victory as an opportunity to do what they otherwise lacked the nerve to do. There is a "bloodthirstiness that is developed in the hour of triumph" in which people "grow cruel, merely because they possess the power of inflicting harm."[41] Coming under the guillotine is a mere metaphor for losing one's job, but Hawthorne observes that the Whigs as "the victorious party were sufficiently excited to have chopped off all our heads."[42] During the French Revolution, the guillotine was used to purify France of its enemies. Hawthorne links the American passion for reform and the spoils system with the same spirit of purging that leads to the guillotine. The spoils system is a bloodless replacement for executions, but it does not extinguish the bloodthirsty spirit behind reform movements. He hints that it might take very little vengeance to move to more literal means of purging society. Individuals fired up for reforms tend to care more about their causes than for individuals and overlook gross injustices to particular individuals for the sake of an abstract future society. When individuals are isolated from and indifferent to each other and utterly focused on their private affairs, little remains to temper baser impulses and they become more vicious in their treatment and regard for each other. Hawthorne feared the apparent growing divisiveness in the United States and saw that American society might dissolve into brutality.

THE SCARLET LETTER

Before turning to how the main story of *The Scarlet Letter* illustrates the human heart as the basis of liberty and happiness, I will give a short summary of the story's events. After the summary, I will examine the key relationships depicted: Hester and the Puritans, Hester and Pearl, Hester and the Puritan leaders, Chillingworth and Dimmesdale, and Dimmesdale and Hester. Through consideration of these, properly speaking, faulty and impaired relationships, I argue that Hawthorne shows the reader not just the flaws, but also the potential and the room for friendship.

The main story of *The Scarlet Letter* begins at the prison door in which a crowd of serious-looking Puritans wait for Hester Prynne, the adulteress, and her newborn child to leave the prison. As the price for remaining within the Puritan community, Hester wears the fabulously ornate and embroidered letter "A" in red and gold thread as a badge of her adultery. Before her release, Hester must stand on a public scaffold with her child, living proof of

her crime, while Reverend Wilson and Reverend Dimmesdale admonish her to reveal the name of the child's father and her co-sinner. Hester refuses.

Hester's backstory is that she had been sent ahead of her husband to the newly founded city of Boston. On his journey to join Hester, her husband was rumored to be lost at sea. From the scaffold, Hester recognizes her husband in the crowd who has concealed his identity and assumed the name Roger Chillingworth. During a private interview, Chillingworth presses Hester to disclose the name of her lover. Again, Hester refuses. Chillingworth vows to discover the identity of her lover—"to read [guilt] on his heart"—and gains her promise not to reveal his true identity to anyone.[43]

Hester and her daughter, Pearl, find an abandoned house away from the town and near the border of the forest. Shunned by society, Hester finds a niche for her to earn her living through her needlework. Despite the Puritans' distain for embellishments and preference for simple dress, they need her skill to provide finery on their clothes for public ceremonies. Hester's exquisite needlework beautifies official robes of state, funeral gowns, and baby clothes, but not for wedding gowns. Except her magnificent red bade, Hester wears plain and course clothing. Pearl, however, is dressed in finest clothes ornamented with her mother's splendid needlework. At the age of six, Pearl's impish and wild behavior raises concerns about Hester's parenting skills and some of the community believe it might be best for the child to be removed to another's care.[44] Hester visits Governor Bellingham's residence where she privately pleads her case to keep her child to the governor and other leading members of the community. With Dimmesdale's advocacy, Bellingham grants, or rather, honors Hester's right to keep her child.

Meanwhile, Chillingworth has found his victim, Arthur Dimmesdale, Pearl's father. Under the pretext of assisting the ailing minister as a physician and friend, Chillingworth lives in the same quarters as Dimmesdale. Through their frequent conversations, Chillingworth probes his heart mercilessly. For his part, Dimmesdale is unable to recognize Chillingworth's evil purpose. While enjoying a stainless public reputation, Dimmesdale suffers under the weight of his guilt and his hypocrisy. Brought to the brink of confession many times, nevertheless, Dimmesdale does not.

At night and alone, he stands on the scaffold where Hester stood in public. By chance, Hester and Pearl pass by and join him on the scaffold. In this moment, Hester realizes the anguish Dimmesdale has suffered. She determines to tell Chillingworth that she will no longer hide his identity. but still keeps her silence about Chillingworth's the true identity. Here it becomes apparent that Chillingworth's long, dark task has impoverished his humanity and he is more fiend than human. In the privacy of the forest, Hester meets with Dimmesdale to reveal her secret to him. Dimmesdale forgives and they reconcile. They plan to escape Chillingworth, leave the Puritan community, and return to Europe to start a new life as a family.

Relieved by the intention to flee, Dimmesdale returns to the city and writes his final sermon for the election day—the day of their planned escape. On the election day, Hester learns that Chillingworth has discovered their intentions to flee and that he intends to follow them. Dimmesdale realizes that he cannot escape Chillingworth or his guilt by leaving the community. He concludes his sermon by taking his place on the scaffold with Hester and Pearl and then dies. In the epilogue, Hester and Pearl journey to Europe where they stay for many years. While Pearl remains in Europe, Hester returns to Boston and resumes wearing the scarlet letter. Her house on the border of the forest becomes a place for other troubled individuals to seek comfort, advice, and friendship.

Hawthorne published *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850—an auspicious year in American history in which Congress attempted to preserve the union through the Compromise of 1850 and its fugitive slave provisions. Yet the Compromise could not resolve the divisive issues surrounding slavery itself nor could it hide the growing rift in American society. Hawthorne's literary contemporaries explored possible ways to reclaim unity. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* aim for "transcendent unity" and betray more than a hint of utopianism.[45] In contrast, Hawthorne did not seek to create a unity nor did he hope for a utopian future.[46] Hawthorne deliberately returns to America's past to depict the Puritans as a failed utopian model of unity in order to caution against contemporary efforts that seek transcendent and abstract wholes. In the antebellum period, Brook Thomas observes, it was common "to read the Puritan past teleologically" and to see in the Puritan concept of citizenship the seeds of freedom yet to come.[47] Thomas notes that George Bancroft's *History of the United States*, a common history book, popularized the image of the Puritan settlements as the beginnings of American democracy and freedom. The romanticized picture of the Puritans' strong and unified community reflects a longing in antebellum America for such unity that was obviously lacking amid regional strife and discord. Hawthorne, however, approaches these overriding concerns for American fragmentation and need for unity by striking out in a different direction and looking at the United States' past, but with a critical eye. Though democratic, the Puritans were weak on individual freedom. Democracies do not necessarily establish liberal policies and can be quite oppressive, even authoritarian. The kind of unity the Puritans enjoyed came at a terrible price to the human heart and is not a desirable model for the United States.

This is why at a crucial point in the story Hawthorne tells the reader that the "scarlet letter had not done its office."[48] As mechanism to reveal Hester's heart and to induce her to repent, the scarlet letter fails. The Puritans thought they could bring "iniquity . . . out into the sunshine" but failed to see that part of the human soul remains inaccessible and utterly private.[49] The attempt to

peer into the inner life of another, however, proves to have detrimental effects both to the individual and to society. The scarlet letter is supposed to punish Hester, to redeem her, and to signal the community's authority over her. Even as the badge of shame marks Hester and distinguishes her from everyone else, it holds her in the community and aims to compel her to recognize her sin. It backfires and instead frees Hester from the Puritan community's values. The Puritans are doubly shortsighted. Watching Hester caring for the poor and the sick, the Puritans come to consider her a great comforter and many venture to interpret the letter A as "Able."[50] They mistake Hester's external appearance and behavior for repentance and piety. Since the Puritans think they have brought Hester's private sin into public view, they overlook the danger she poses to their community.

Wearing the scarlet letter radically frees Hester's thought. She "assumed a freedom of speculation" that if the Puritans had realized, they would have regarded it "a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter."[51] Hawthorne, however, is not beating the drum for freethinkers. Hester is unmoored from the Puritan's values, but is not opened up to new truths and possibilities. She has no new community or even a friend with whom to share ideas. Instead, she is trapped between feeling hopeless and impassioned for radical change. Alienated from others, she views her fellow Puritans as obstacles to social transformation. Contemplating whether women can be happy in society as it is, Hester speculates on how to tear down society and start over. Hawthorne notes that Hester could have become like Ann Hutchinson, another Puritan discontent, and founded another sect. He adds that Hester's effort "to undermine the foundations of the Puritan establishment" would have been more violent and destructive than Hutchinson's.[52] The colony only banished Hutchinson, but Hawthorne supposes that Hester would have received death for her effort. Hawthorne leaves it to the reader to imagine what kind of violence Hester might have wrought upon the Puritans. But these moments of zeal for reform often gave away to despair. She contemplates murdering Pearl and committing suicide.

What prevents Hester from leading a rebellion among the Puritans is Pearl, her daughter. Hawthorne relates that "[p]rovidence" gave Pearl to Hester for Pearl's care and education.[53] Pearl both reminds Hester of her sin and aids her redemption because Pearl is lovable whereas the scarlet letter is not. Both the scarlet letter and Pearl come about due to Hester's transgression. The scarlet letter, however, is imposed by Puritan law and Pearl by providence. The scarlet letter is both the attempt of the law to mark Hester outside the community and also demonstrate their authority over her. As observed above, the scarlet letter cannot regulate Hester's thoughts. In fact, it inadvertently opened her to the widest sort of freethinking. As a piece of artifice, the scarlet letter attempts to do clumsily what Pearl accomplishes

with greater ease and grace. Pearl both marks the fact of Hester's transgression and connects her to society.

Pearl brings Hester back into society in two ways. First, she provides Hester with a constant and understanding companion. Like the scarlet letter which Hester always wore, she never went anywhere without Pearl by her side. As the daughter of an outcast mother, Pearl is excluded from the society of other children and shares her mother's loneliness.[54] Pearl understands her mother's plight in a way that others do not. In her childish fashion, Pearl defends her mother. She becomes angry at the children who taunt her mother and throw stones at them. Hawthorne reports that Hester took "comfort" in watching her daughter defend her.[55] Secondly, Pearl connects Hester to another human being, Dimmesdale. Only after the night in which Pearl holds the hands of both her mother and father on the scaffold does Hester understand the extent of Dimmesdale's suffering. The remembrance that Dimmesdale is the father of her daughter awakens in her concern for his fate.

The Puritans err to think they could make the private public. Mistaken as they were in this respect, the Puritans are not a malicious people. Hawthorne often goes out of his way to show readers the sympathetic heart of the multitude and of the officials who condemned her. As Hester stands on the scaffold, she receives sympathy from the "larger and warmer heart of the multitude."[56] The officials who judged Hester are "good men," but they are not suited to judge upon "an erring woman's heart."[57] When Hester fears that Pearl will be taken from her, she visits Governor Bellingham at his house and with other public officials present. Hester knows that making her case to Bellingham in a private interview at his home will be more likely successful than in public. This episode reveals the difference in how these men conduct themselves in private than when they carry out their public duties. They are still stern and have the same concerns for morality, but they deliberate and are more open to persuasion. Moreover, the impulse to remove Pearl from Hester's care is motivated—at least in the case of Bellingham—by genuine interest in Pearl's well-being.[58]

The men are persuaded by Dimmesdale who argues that the relationship between a mother and child is sacred. This argument piques Bellingham's interest so much that he interrupts Dimmesdale and asks him to "[m]ake that plain."[59] Dimmesdale, however, does not, because he cannot make plain the sacred. Instead, Dimmesdale imagines the damage they would cause by interfering with God's means of punishing and rehabilitating Hester. Bellingham is satisfied with Dimmesdale's arguments and Hester keeps custody of Pearl. Dimmesdale makes an extraordinary argument that cannot be made in the public square. He affirms that there are certain relationships among individuals that are beyond the reach of the public and are sacred.

Lest it be thought that Hester passively turns to Dimmesdale to plead her case, she establishes the ground on which Dimmesdale makes his argument

and offers the relationship between priest and parishioner as inviolable. Hester asks him to make her argument because as her former priest, he knows better what is in her heart. Bellingham and Wilson accept Hester's point. By agreeing that there is a special relationship between priests and parishioners, they accept in principle that there are relationships among individuals that are private and that the Puritan community has little right to disturb. Hester's and Dimmesdale's joint argument represents a move from the conflict between the individual and society to creating a space for relationships among individuals that enjoy some measure of immunity from full public disclosure.

Despite their belief that they can bring sin into sunshine, the Puritans show more restraint and respect for the individual heart than Chillingworth, who viciously probes Dimmesdale's heart without restraint or sympathetic feeling. In the interview with Governor Bellingham in which Hester pleads to keep her daughter under her care, Chillingworth suggests to Reverend Wilson that they examine Pearl to discover within her character her paternity. Reverend Wilson recoils from this suggestion. He responds that it would be "sinful" to find out by that method and that it would be better "to leave the mystery as we find it."[60] Although religion motivates the Puritans to be suspect of mysteries, here is a rare instance in which religion restrains them. Unwittingly, the Reverend Wilson observes that there are methods of searching the soul of another individual that harm the searcher too. His principles and practice may be inconsistent, but his practice points him in the direction of truth.

Chillingworth's scientific mind, however, knows no such boundaries. Dimmesdale is subject to Chillingworth's unchecked torments upon his soul. Hawthorne shows us how Chillingworth's scientific outlook leads him to misunderstand the true causes behind human relationships. In the first interview between Chillingworth and Hester, Chillingworth claims it was his mistake to marry her since he knew that she did not love him. In his desire for happiness, he believed that nevertheless she could warm his heart.[61] The twin pursuits of study and learning had occupied his maturity. Not until late in his life did he realize that he was lonely and he wanted the comforts and happiness of marriage that he observed in other couples.[62] Chillingworth chalks up the failure of their marriage to make him happy to the incompatibility of his age with Hester's youth. We can have sympathy for Chillingworth who desired the happiness of companionship and friendship of a wife, but we should see that he erred from the beginning. Chillingworth speaks of his quest for happiness as an empirical scientist, or more precisely, a chemist, looking to combine the right elements. He speaks of the failure of his marriage as a poorly mediated experiment to combine unlike elements such as youth and decay or oil and water. As a man of science, Chillingworth betrays his preference for material causes and his disposition to treat hearts (such as Hester's) as objects to be manipulated for his use. Hester's love formed no

necessary part of his happiness, and certainly he did not either consider or care whether she needed love to be happy. It should come as no surprise then when he claims that he will discover the name of Hester's lover "as I have sought truth in books; as I have sought gold in alchemy."[63]

Motivated by private vengeance, Chillingworth poses as a friend so as to access Dimmesdale's heart and succeeds in plumbing its depths better than the Puritans could touch Hester's heart by imposing the scarlet letter.[64] Outwardly, Chillingworth and Dimmesdale have the appearance of friendship. They are both learned men among the Puritans and converse on varied subjects freely as friends might. Chillingworth, however, treats Dimmesdale as a subject of study to be probed scientifically for the "dark treasure" of his soul.[65] He abuses his knowledge of Dimmesdale's heart, perverts friendship, and uses his knowledge to exert a tyrannical hold over Dimmesdale. Believing that he has penetrated the mystery of Dimmesdale's heart, Chillingworth maliciously manipulates him. By declaring his sin publicly on the scaffold, Dimmesdale escapes Chillingworth's hold over him.[66] However successful Chillingworth may have been, he cannot unveil entirely Dimmesdale's heart.

The cruelty of uncovering the inner heart involves a loss of freedom not only for the victim but also for the perpetrator. Although Chillingworth exploits Dimmesdale, the damage to Chillingworth's soul may be greater. Chillingworth might be utterly lost to himself. Under the illusion of scientifically seeking the truth, Chillingworth succumbs to a "terrible fascination" that "never set him free again."[67] No longer is Chillingworth able to turn away from the project he set for himself. While talking with Hester, Chillingworth experiences a rare moment of inward reflection. With horror, he realizes that he has turned into a "fiend."[68] Hester implores him to expunge his hatred. Instead of accepting Hester's advice, Chillingworth claims that events have followed a "dark necessity."[69] Although he attributes his fatalism to his faith, his determinism relates more to scientific materialism than to Calvinism. He relieves himself of any responsibility and freedom to act otherwise.

Dimmesdale errs as well. Fixated on his own sin and hidden secret, he distrusts everyone and alienates himself from the possibility of real friendship. He cuts himself off from the only kind of relief that a friend can offer another—a sympathetic ear and heart—and fails to recognize a true enemy in Chillingworth. Dimmesdale has some inkling of the damage his suspicion of other people has cost him when he exclaims to Hester "[h]ad I one friend,—or were it my worst enemy" to share his secret.[70] A friend might have kept him from the despair he feels. Being true to a friend is like being true to yourself, because a friend is someone whom you love like yourself. What Dimmesdale wants is to share his secret without exposing his whole soul to the public. It is common to tell our friends things about ourselves that we do not want everyone to know. But the Puritans have made this middle option impossible. Instead, he is stuck between keeping his secret absolutely private

and telling everyone. Dimmesdale understands this when he wishes for a friend to whom he could have shared his secret. To Dimmesdale's request for a friend, Hester tells him "[s]uch a friend as thou hast even now wished for . . . thou hast in me."[71] The passage of seven years in which the sin festered in Dimmesdale's soul and Hester remained indifferent delayed their friendship.

Friendship awakens in us concern for the good of our friends. Moreover, it liberates and empowers us to act on behalf of a friend. Seeing Dimmesdale suffer through Chillingworth's concealed manipulations enables Hester to act because she recognizes that his suffering is, in part, her responsibility, and, more importantly, she has the means of correcting her past mistake. Hester understands that she made a choice—she was not forced or fooled into concealing Chillingworth's identity from Dimmesdale despite the potential harm Chillingworth could and did inflict on Dimmesdale.[72] While in her prison cell, she reasoned that agreeing to conceal Chillingworth's identity would prevent Dimmesdale from suffering the same sort of public ruin and shame that she experienced. Hester now sees how she wronged Dimmesdale and also sees a way to help him.

In contrast to Hester's visions for social reconstruction and murderous and suicidal despair of achieving it, the opportunity to rectify her previous error calls forth her willingness to act. Abstract contemplation of social betterment arises from Hester's feelings as a victim. She despaired that she cannot bring out the "mightier change" needed in the nature of women to start the revolution in relations between the sexes.[73] No greater change, however, is required than a change of heart. Instead, she courageously confronts Chillingworth, tells Dimmesdale who Chillingworth is, and makes it possible for Dimmesdale to escape Chillingworth's manipulations. It is Hester's particular relationship to Dimmesdale that gives her the wherewithal to act on his behalf and ameliorate past wrongs.

Though at opposite extremes, both the Puritans and the custom house fail to negotiate how individual happiness and social concord depend on combining the private and the public. Hawthorne's solution is friendship, because friendship mediates society and the individual to preserve and enhance freedom. Hawthorne teaches the appropriate way to approach the human heart so as to preserve and respect that mystery. As a result of "discovering" the record of Hester's story in the custom house, Hawthorne pretends to have incomplete knowledge of events and of the character's thoughts.[74] Given the purported partial information Hawthorne has of the story, at best, he serves as a guide. While providing some guidance about the truth of some viewpoints, he enables the reader to choose among them. In addition, by allowing the reader the freedom to form her opinions of his characters, Hawthorne also respects his characters' inner hearts as if they are real persons. Two examples

will demonstrate how Hawthorne makes use of ambiguity and conflicting reports.

A frequent technique of Hawthorne's is to survey public opinions and avoid the interior of the character altogether. Public opinions offer insight into the truth and perhaps an aspect of it that the reader could not have known if given unmediated access to the heart. The chapter titled "Another View of Hester" begins with a decidedly public view of Hester in which Hawthorne reports how society's view of Hester shifts. If one of the formerly ill she nursed tried to greet her on the street, she would point to her scarlet letter as a wordless way of refusing conversation. Hawthorne tells us that "[t]his might be pride, but was so like humility, that it produced all the softening influence of the latter quality on the public mind."[75] This perception of Hester as humble, Hawthorne implies, was probably unmerited. We never see directly into Hester's heart to know whether she acted from pride or humility although we may suspect the former. Hawthorne does not force us to have a particular opinion, but shows us her actions and so we are free to choose her motivation and our own opinions. By showing the reader the various opinions held in the community, Hawthorne pairs reader and author in joint observation of Hester's dynamic personality.

After Dimmesdale dies on the scaffold, Hawthorne reports differing accounts given by witnesses to the same event and says that "[t]he reader may choose among these theories."[76] "Most" report seeing the mirror of Hester's scarlet letter printed on Dimmesdale's chest, but they disagree on how the letter came to be on his chest.[77] "Some" believe Dimmesdale carved it himself. "[O]thers" believe that Chillingworth's necromancy made it appear, and yet "others" believe that the "awful symbol" was of spiritual origin and revealed outwardly the remorse of his "inner heart."[78] A minority of witnesses claim to see no mark whatsoever on Dimmesdale's chest and note that he never confessed to sleeping with Hester. Hawthorne recognizes that not all the Puritans' opinions are alike. All the varied opinions present in the marketplace must come from somewhere and the Puritans cannot fully suppress freedom of thought connected to private life. By incompletely revealing to us his characters' hearts, Hawthorne keeps to us his promise at the beginning of the novel to violate neither our rights nor his own. In short, he is a true friend and teacher.

Another model for friendship emerges in the final pages of the novel with Hester's return. Indeed, we see the hope for how to bring about change in the Puritan society. Upon returning, Hester freely resumes wearing the scarlet letter. She finds a new place for herself in society beyond the public uses of her needlepoint to which she was previously limited. She becomes a friend and a teacher to those suffering and seeking guidance. Hester finds a way short of dramatic social transformation or giving up hope and seeking death. She "comforted and counseled" those who sought her and gave them the

vision and hope that "a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness."[79] The kind of relationship Hester envisions based on "mutual happiness" of both men and women is friendlier in which the happiness of both spouses matters.[80] This differs from her marriage in which Chillingworth believed that he could be happy with Hester even though he knew she did not love him.[81] Hester befriends those who seek her and shares with them her hope for a new kind of society; thereby she teaches them and lays the foundation for change. By voluntarily returning and resuming her wearing of the scarlet letter, Hester carves out room for friendship.

The Scarlet Letter does not have a happy ending that unites Dimmesdale, Hester, and Pearl as a family. The first chapter ends by characterizing the story as "a tale of human frailty and sorrow."[82] It is, however, a tale of hope. Hawthorne hopes that the pitfalls of the Puritans and the custom house can be avoided and reaches out to his readers to say "let us hope" that "some sweet moral blossom" may come of this tale.[83] The custom house and the Puritans are extreme in their treatment of the heart and allow for few ways for individuals to become friends. By keeping the heart either wholly private or public, these societies prevent their members from communicating with other hearts. Both the custom house and the Puritans suppress the possibility for friendship and happiness. Society should encourage freely made connections and relationships among its citizens. There are limits to society's reach so as to allow for the proper degree of freedom left to the individual for her to have flourishing friendships. A good society allows for intercourse between the private and public in which our hearts are our own, but yet we can freely seek out those few who will understand us. *The Scarlet Letter* is Hawthorne's gesture of friendship to the reader in which he shares his hope that the joyless and decaying future of the custom house may be avoided.

THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES

The House of the Seven Gables, published a year after *The Scarlet Letter*, however, has a happy ending.[84] It is more than a conventionally happy ending, it is a fantastical happy ending—a past injustice is righted, lovers overcome a bitter feud between two families, and the good guys inherit a fortune. It sounds like a Hollywood ending. Just to make sure there is no mistaking the matter, Hawthorne affirms that the story concludes with "this present happiness."[85] Happiness achieved. A happy ending is possible in *The House of the Seven Gables* because it is happiness within horizons and mindful of our limitations. The trouble is that Americans want perfect happiness and imagine that if only the right circumstances were in place, complete, lasting happiness will follow. Happiness on earth is fragile, imperfect, and subject to

the vicissitudes of life. We are born into situations not of our choosing and the past can exert a tenacious hold on the present. The fragility of happiness is not a defect, but rather a sign of its preciousness. The person of faith may hope for better in the hereafter, but Hawthorne shows that we can be happy here if we understand what kind of happiness is possible in the present. Make no mistake; Hawthorne does not suggest that we should settle for mere contentment in the present. The "mutual happiness" that Hester hopes for is a real possibility. In Hawthorne's America, individuals are free as they were not under the Puritans, but not isolated as custom house portends. Under these circumstances, Holgrave and Phoebe discover their love and friendship for each other. The happiness that American liberty makes possible is tremendous and joyful because it enables individuals to share their lives and hearts with each other in friendship. Happiness is not dependent on some set of ideal social circumstances nor is it precluded by a troubled past. Happiness is up to us to find in each other in the present.

Although the Puritan way of life faded away and the American Revolution ushered in a new form of government, the reforming spirit of the Puritans lives on in their descendants—albeit without their religious zeal.[86] Like the Puritans, the secular reformers of Hawthorne's day aim for a perfected society (although they advance different theories about how the ideal society may be achieved). Chasing visions of a future perfect society causes us to miss the present and neglect the relationships closest to us. Reformers focus on benefiting humanity so as to evade the humbling experience of receiving help from another particular person. Instead of remaking society, Hawthorne asks that we aim smaller and nearer to ourselves. After a summary of the story, I will show how Hawthorne criticizes reform movements on the grounds that they repeat the mistakes of the Puritans. The happiness that reform movements offer comes at the same price to human liberty and the sanctity of human heart as the Puritans extracted. The desire for reform, however, signals restlessness and unhappiness that Hawthorne takes seriously. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Holgrave, a young reformer, learns that it is not a set of ideal conditions that make for happiness, but being transformed by the love of another.

The Pyncheon house, the titular house of the seven gables, stands on ill-gotten land.[87] Generations before the story's main action, a Puritan patriarch, Colonel Pyncheon, wishes to buy a plot of earth belonging to Matthew Maule to be the site of his family estate. When Maule refuses, the Colonel takes advantage of a witch hunt to dispose of him. At his hanging, Maule curses the Colonel that "God will give him blood to drink."[88] Unfazed, the Colonel easily buys Maule's land and employs Matthew Maule's son to build his house upon it. When the house is finished and opened to the public, the Colonel is discovered dead in his chair with a slight drizzle of blood from his mouth. So begins the village legend that Maule's curse is at work. It is also

discovered that a valuable deed to a large tract of land that would have made the Puncheons very wealthy is missing. Generations of the Puncheon family continue to search for the missing deed as the key to reviving the family's fortune.

The main story starts with Hepzibah, an old maid and one of the few remaining descendants of the Puncheon family, opening a cent shop to make ends meet. Her brother, Clifford, returns home after thirty years in prison for the murder of their bachelor uncle. Hepzibah is, perhaps, alone in the belief that her brother is innocent and that their cousin, the very respectable Judge Puncheon is responsible. The Judge inherited their bachelor uncle's wealth and repeatedly offers financial assistance to Hepzibah, who consistently refuses it. A country cousin, Phoebe, a lovely young woman, comes to live in the house. A daguerreotypist, Holgrave, rents rooms. Unbeknownst to the Puncheons, Holgrave is a descendent of Matthew Maule. Although Phoebe and Holgrave appear to have little in common, after many talks together as they work in the garden, friendship and soon (unacknowledged) love springs between them. Given his long imprisonment, Clifford's mental health is fragile and in many ways he reverts to childish ways. Hepzibah endeavors to bring comfort to her brother any way she can, but he prefers Phoebe's company as she is lovely and better able to amuse him with her musical talents.

In his youth, Clifford stumbled across the deed concealed in a wall and boasted of finding riches in the house to his cousin Jaffrey, later the Judge. As an old man, the Judge (mistakenly) believes that Clifford's youthful boast referred to wealth belonging to his bachelor uncle who had a habit of squirreling money in the house. He reveals to Hepzibah that he used his influence to have Clifford released so that he could compel Clifford to reveal its whereabouts. Hepzibah protests on the grounds that the effort might break Clifford's mind entirely and destroy the fragile contentment he possesses. Luckily, the Judge dies of the same sudden affliction that carried away his ancestor. Holgrave reveals a secret compartment in which his architect ancestor had hidden the lost (and now worthless) deed. Free from the Judge's influence, the story ends happily. Clifford is exculpated for the murder of his uncle. Phoebe and Holgrave's love and friendship put to rest the old feud between their families. And Hepzibah and Clifford inherit the Judges' immense wealth. Together with Uncle Venner (a philosopher of sorts), they move to the Judge's estate in the countryside.[89]

In the author's preface, Hawthorne claims that the moral of the story is that "the wrongdoing of one generation lives into the successive ones."[90] Injustice ripples through the years, but unlike water ripples that fade away, injustice does not lessen the further removed the event is in time. The original injustice Colonel Puncheon perpetuates on Matthew Maule ripples and only increases through the generations. Matthew Maule's son Thomas (architect of the Puncheon house) hides the land deed in a compartment behind the

old Colonel's portrait. The Maule family keeps this secret. The Pyncheon family wastes years trying to recover a deed that had long been rendered worthless (given that other settlers had established their claims to the land). Moreover, the present-day story of Holgrave, Phoebe, Hepzibah, Clifford, and the Judge stems from this event. Hawthorne's moral is incomplete. We are not wholly captives to the past. The way out, however, is not through broad social reform.

Holgrave, the descendant of the wronged Matthew Maule, is a reformer, eager for change, contemptuous of the past, and in love with humanity. As additional proof of his radical tendencies, he associates with "men with long beards."[91] Like all reformers, he knows what is wrong with society and knows how it ought to be corrected. Holgrave takes issue with how the past influences the present and exclaims that it "lies upon the Present like a giant's body."[92] The hold that the past has on the present is so tenacious that we are "slaves . . . to bygone times" unable to free ourselves from its grip.[93] Unsurprisingly given Holgrave's personal history, he objects to how houses are bequeathed to later generations. Instead, he believes that most of society's ills would be solved if every generation constructed its own houses. Additionally, all buildings like political institutions, churches, businesses, and other associations should be constructed of flimsier materials so that they crumble every twenty years or so. The occasion of the crumbled buildings would be a prompt to the public "to examine into and reform the institutions which they symbolize."[94] Holgrave does not seem to be moved by any particular cause and does not mention any specific social and political ills that especially need correction.[95] He uses the Pyncheon house as a prime example of an old house that contains so much past human misery that the only way of cleansing it is to destroy it. Knocking down the past is not enough, because we can make the same mistakes again. That is what happened to the Puritans. Holgrave's reform eclipses the Puritans' because he would not replace the old ways with a new way. Instead, rebuilding every generation's homes and public buildings leads to perpetual impermanence. The future would be free from the past. It would be free in the sense that it would lack a stable identity. Such a plan, however, is not reform but no form.

While Holgrave's theory begins like any garden-variety nineteenth-century polemic against property, the target of his umbrage is the Pyncheon house. His suggestion that houses should last no longer than one generation would relieve him of the particular secret that he has (that his ancestor hid the deed in the house). Relief from his secret appears to be the reason for his interest in reform more so than any political or social cause. Nevertheless, we should take serious Holgrave's motivations. A secret burdens him and he knows no way of relieving himself of it—other than destroying the house. More alarmingly, Holgrave's personal past is so difficult to bear that he is attracted to radical reform movements precisely because they offer a total reboot from

the past. The past does not trap Holgrave, but he is trapped within his heart. As Hawthorne shows, the real answer to Holgrave's heart trouble is to share his secret—to share the burden he carries—with a friend.

Holgrave needs a friend, but it is not easy for him to see other people as potential friends. Here Hawthorne highlights another wrinkle to Holgrave's reforming spirit that hinders his ability to look for friendship. Holgrave combines a "magnanimous zeal for man's welfare" with a "recklessness of whatever the ages had established in man's benefit."[96] In these respects, Hawthorne stresses that Holgrave is not unique, but representative of his fellow Americans. At first, the American reforming spirit appears benevolent ("magnanimous") if also overhasty to bulldoze over the past ("reckless"). As Aristotle observes, magnanimity is a virtue, but a problematic one.[97] The magnanimous person enjoys giving help to others but dislikes receiving help from others. Receiving help appears to be a sign of an inferior position. Benefiting another person implies that one is in a superior position. Consequently, it is not easy to be magnanimous in America in which Americans take pride in being equals. Hawthorne's insight is that Americans have developed a rather novel solution. Through the general workings of social improvement, no one in particular is helped, but everyone is in general benefited. It is a rather tidy trick.

This sleight of hand, however, has negative implications. At bottom of Holgrave's reformism is contempt for the present, which includes not only buildings, but people as well. When magnanimity is severed from serving anyone in particular and combined with reckless desire for wrecking institutions, it can result in a fearsome disregard for particular persons in favor of visions of perfected tomorrows. Not surprisingly, Holgrave displays startling indifference to the people he shares a roof with. Holgrave adopts a detached, almost scholastic perspective on the drama that unfolds in the Pyncheon house and toward the people around him. He treats Hepzibah, Clifford, and even Phoebe like artifacts to be studied. He fancies that he can "read [Phoebe] off like the pages of a child's book."[98] He declares Hepzibah "dead" and Clifford "another dead and long buried person."[99] Holgrave is not hard-hearted though. Hawthorne notes that Holgrave would have rendered any service to them, but that he had not "made common cause with them."[100] He views his common cause with humanity not with particular people.

Whenever we lose sight of how people are persons like ourselves, there is a risk that we will seek to manipulate and control. Already Holgrave demonstrates an inclination toward manipulation that illustrates his disordered approach to other people. Holgrave is practiced at mesmerism, a form of hypnosis. He displays his skill to Phoebe by making one of the chickens sleep.[101] Soon he tries his skill on her and makes her sleep.[102] As Phoebe sleeps, he is tempted to expand his influence over her and make her will his own. (To his credit, he decides against it.) In fact, Holgrave's interest in his current occu-

pation as a daguerreotyptist is motivated by a desire to take pictures of people so as to expose the inner life of the subject. He claims that sunlight not only reveals the surface of things, but can "bring out the secret character with a truth that no painter would ever venture."[103] The main difference between Holgrave and his Puritan ancestors is that he relies on techniques and technologies to achieve what the Puritans aim for through law and custom.[104]

Yet, Holgrave is not the villain of this story. The custard is not set for him. His focus on remaking society is a diversion from his unhappiness. Holgrave's biography reveals that he is a wanderer. He boasts to Phoebe that he was a "self-dependent" boy.[105] Before the age of twenty-two, he traveled widely in the United States, spent time abroad in Europe, and held various occupations, including giving public lectures on mesmerism.[106] His current occupation as a daguerrotypist is no more permanent than the last several. In many ways, Holgrave greatly resembles the Americans Tocqueville describes who are restless in the midst of their prosperity.[107] Unlike Tocqueville's restless individuals who seek happiness in material well-being, Holgrave's frenetic and shiftless wanderings are a sign of a hidden unhappiness. At the bottom of much of his fellow countrymen's tendency to roam, Hawthorne sees evasion of self-reflective inquiry. Holgrave knows that his family is not innocent of wrongdoing and bears some moral responsibility for the enmity between the Pyncheon and Maule families. Despite all his attempts to make a new beginning on his own, he fails. He returns to the Pyncheon house and rents a room. His plan, as he tells Phoebe, is to study the house as a symbol of the past so as to "hate" it even more.[108] This plan, however, is also fated to fail. He refuses to face forthrightly with the secret guilt and shame he feels.

Real freedom from the past's grip will require receiving a benefit from another person and sharing his heart with another person. And yet Holgrave's attraction to Phoebe initially begins on the conceited premise that she is a soundboard for his ideas. But Holgrave is not as clever as he thinks he is. Hawthorne notes that Phoebe's nature was "deceptive in its depth."[109] Wrapped up in talking about his future plans, he "poured himself out as to another self" and sometimes "forgot Phoebe while he talked to her."[110] As Holgrave speaks with her, the more he is "beguiled" and changed by their relationship.[111] Phoebe's kindness and lightness of spirit marvel Holgrave and he can hardly believe that she belongs to the Pyncheon family.[112] Through Phoebe, Holgrave slowly learns that individuals, while shaped by their families, have attributes, characteristics, and thoughts that cannot be reduced to their blood and past. The individual adds something to himself. The addition that every individual makes to himself signifies the mystery within the heart that Hawthorne believes should be well-guarded from intrusion by the state and from individuals. So the individual is more or greater

than the sum of their past. Moreover, as Holgrave discovers that Phoebe is more than her past so too is he more than his past. The dead hand of past is, in fact, pretty frail.

Phoebe, however, is not a passive listener. She disagrees, argues, counters, and chides Holgrave. In short, she does the office of a friend and teaches him how to be a friend. He comes to care about her opinion. She listens to him read aloud a short story he wrote about the Pyncheon and Maule history.[113] Anyone who listens to a friend's fictional writings is a true friend indeed. Phoebe points his flaws out to him and the limitations of his human sympathy. She calls him out for behaving like a theatergoer who observes Hepzibah and Clifford on a stage and that she wishes that he would "feel more like a Christian and a human being."[114] In this way, Phoebe reminds him of the humanity of the persons he coldly observes in the Pyncheon house and admonishes him to help those nearest to him. After an argument, Holgrave worries that Phoebe despises him and asks to part as friends. Phoebe is surprised at his reaction. She knows that friends have little arguments all the time that do not endanger their friendship and that her annoyance will pass readily.[115] Holgrave, it seems, has rarely, if ever, cared so much for friendship of another person that he feared losing that friend.

Holgrave declares his love for Phoebe with the dead body of the Judge sitting in another room. Within that moment, the shared knowledge of the Judge's death "bound them to each other."[116] Sharing a secret does more than relieve one person of a weighty burden; it can also draw individuals together. A shared secret establishes a common foundation that is not quite private and certainly not wholly public in which individuals can more freely grant and accept access to their hearts. The secret of the Judge's death created a temporary shield or umbrella from public view. During that short interlude before the Judge's death is revealed to the public, Phoebe and Holgrave speak frankly to each other of their hearts, their limits, and what they can do for each other.

Holgrave opens up to Phoebe. He tells her that before her arrival, he sat with the body overcome by guilt. As Phoebe had accused him, he had treated the events of the house like a theatergoer who was waiting for another terrible event to unfold on stage.[117] Indeed, Judge's purpose in coming to the house was to probe Clifford's broken memory for the location of the wealth he thought was concealed in the house. Fortune or providence, not Holgrave's intervention, spares Clifford from the Judge's questioning. Holgrave sees the extensive damage that his ancestor's revenge caused and to which his silence contributed. He had been so focused on reforming society that he had missed the good he could do for those nearest to him. In this dark realization, Holgrave despairs. Yet, when Phoebe enters the house, his "black moment [becomes] a blissful one."[118] In spite of the past and in spite of the dead body next to him, Holgrave is happy, because he has a friend.

Phoebe, as Hawthorne is careful to show, is no mere prop for Holgrave's happiness. She questions his declaration of love on the grounds that they are too dissimilar to be together. Phoebe shares neither his radical politics nor his restless wandering spirit. She knows that she would be unhappy if she followed him. Holgrave bends to her. Impetus for reform and progress, Holgrave claims, comes from "men ill at ease."[119] Instead, he claims that her "poise" will steady his restless spirit and he will be happy within the "ancient limits" of a conventional life.[120] Conventional life, however, does not mean a humdrum existence. Indeed, Hawthorne shows that the conventional life Holgrave and Phoebe share conceals the radical transformation that their friendship has begun. For a moment, their love "transfigured the earth, and made it Eden again" and they were like Adam and Eve.[121] The moment passes, but their love and friendship opens up new possibilities that Holgrave's old reform plans could not have. Like a new Adam and Eve, they are free not to follow the path of their ancestors but to carve out a new life together. In this way, Holgrave and Phoebe do make a new beginning, but a new beginning that has elevated and transformed the past.

After reconciling their feuding families, Holgrave and Phoebe are young and have their future ahead of them. Through Clifford Pyncheon, the most unfortunate character in the story, Hawthorne, provides more somber example of the limits of human happiness. Americans believe happiness is a right, but happiness cannot be brought under human control. Misfortune and cruel suffering can derail the most promising of lives. As a young man, Clifford was beautiful and sensitive to the pleasures of beauty and refinement. His bachelor uncle had named him heir to his wealth. But his cousin, Jaffrey Pyncheon (later the Judge), framed him for murder and disposed of the will that named him heir.[122] Clifford was wrongly convicted of the murder, imprisoned for thirty years, and released an old, broken man. While some people may have internal resources to bear up under extreme misfortune, Hawthorne observes that Clifford lacked entirely such a resilient soul.[123] He did not profit at all from his suffering and is ruined in mind and body. As a free man, Clifford resumes pursuing happiness through sensation and pleasure and "so miserably fail[s] to be happy."[124] Clifford's story is not idiosyncratic; rather he is an everyman of unhappiness. Hawthorne says "almost everybody is" like Clifford to some respect.[125] He represents all human beings who were "made only for happiness" but live as castaways from the "Island of the Blest."[126] A perfect happiness is not in store for us, but as Hawthorne shows, the happiness of a castaway is finding another castaway.

Before his imprisonment, Clifford sought happiness in beauty and pleasure. Upon his release, he intends to pursue the life of pleasure interrupted so many years ago and to enjoy fine meals, the smell of flowers, and the sight of a pretty young woman. Despite Hepzibah's and Phoebe's best efforts to attend to his comforts, he demands with childish rage "I want my happiness!"

and claims that he has "waited for it."[127] Clifford demands happiness like a right that he has been denied. He knows that most of his life is behind him and that there are pleasures, like romantic love, that he will never know. The long pleasant summer evenings in the garden in the company of Phoebe, Hepzibah, Holgrave, and Uncle Venner are not enough for him. Clifford, like Holgrave, is restless and fears that he is missing something yet that could bring him greater happiness.

It is too late for Clifford to have the kind of happiness he wanted, but as Hawthorne shows, it is not too late for him to have the happiness that comes from cultivating friendship. Just as he did as a young man, Clifford, as an old man, misses out on developing relationships with those nearest to him in favor of cultivating his taste for the beautiful and the pleasant. He cannot bear the unpleasant and the ugly, which reveals a cruel streak in his personality. Clifford finds it difficult to look at Hepzibah for long, as she has grown old and unattractive, or to hear her voice, which with age has decayed. Despite Hepzibah's loyalty in believing him innocent and her undiminished affection for him, Clifford believes that he "owed her nothing."[128] He prefers the lovely Phoebe to his sister's company. Not because he loves Phoebe as a person, but because she is a beautiful young woman.

Since it is unpleasant for Clifford to think about what he has lost, he finds it easier to revert to childhood. Clifford oscillates between immersing himself in the pleasures of a child (like blowing soap bubbles and watching hummingbirds) and emerging from his childlike state only to realize that he is old, broken, and that the happiness he wants is out of reach. Acting as a child may offer Clifford some relief, but his behavior privately pains Hepzibah. Her brother is an adult playacting as a child. Moreover, it poses another obstacle to building friendships because he is stuck in a childlike relationship with those around him. Friendship depends on equality or at least on reciprocity and Clifford has little to give. The toll of caring for Clifford without receiving any kindness from him wears on Hepzibah. When Clifford decided to stay in bed all day in response to Phoebe's absence, Hepzibah does not try to persuade him otherwise as she knew there was no amusement she could offer him.[129]

Hawthorne does not say if Clifford would have been happy if his life had not been derailed by his imprisonment. He hints that Clifford's cruel streak that we see in him would have been more thoroughly developed. Although Clifford did not gain any insight from his long suffering, he was spared losing his ability to love others. Had Clifford not been imprisoned, Hawthorne tells us that his love of beauty and pleasure would become so refined as to "file away his affections."[130] His focus on abstract beauty and pleasure might have distracted him from truly forming friendships. Fortunately, Clifford's heart is still quick with love for his sister.

But Clifford does not realize it until the death of the Judge. Clifford realizes that his pursuit of beauty and pleasure as means to transcend his present misery are unsatisfactory distractions. And he realizes that the person he most wants to celebrate with is his sister. Hawthorne does not give us a direct look into the change in Clifford's heart, but gives two signs of Clifford's changed heart in his deeds. As the first, Clifford tells Hepzibah to wear whatever she wants (in preparation of going out of the house), because nothing will make her beautiful. This is not insult. Clifford's comment means that he accepts her and loves her as she is and not as she otherwise could be. The second sign is that Clifford casts off his childish ways and acts with maturity. With uncharacteristic decisiveness, he decides that they will take a train far from the house. Hepzibah, who is disoriented and no doubt in shock, goes along with him. In this way, the roles are reversed between Clifford and Hepzibah. Clifford cares for his sister during her time of need. Clifford's commanding powers fade once they disembark the train and Hepzibah takes charge again. Nevertheless, a more equitable and mutual relationship develops between brother and sister. Clifford is made almost whole again. He never quite recovers his mental powers entirely but his character and personality shine through nonetheless. Even in this flawed state, Hawthorne expressly affirms that Clifford was "evidently happy."[131] As with Holgrave's desire for a perfected future, Clifford's desire for a perfected experience of pleasure and beauty causes him to neglect the relationships nearest to him. With Clifford, Hawthorne reiterates that happiness is limited in this fragile world and that the best security is to seek happiness with others. The happiness that Clifford comes to know is greater and more substantial than the pleasure he sought as a youth.

HAWTHORNE TEACHES FRIENDSHIP

What Hawthorne shows in *The Scarlet Letter* is that no society can truly remake itself free from death, corruptibility, jealousy, pride, and human weakness. Those bright, happy visions, in reality, end up looking a lot like the errors from the past. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne shows how fixation on an idealized future can cause us to become indifferent, callous, and manipulative toward people in the present. Yet, he also points us toward the American Revolution as successful in making meaningful changes. Throughout *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne highlights how the American Revolution changed our manners, habits, and political institutions to become more democratic in character and less monarchal. Our justice system became less influenced by religion and more secular.[132] Our society became less genteel and more democratic.[133] And our politics became less exclusive and more shaped by broad, decentralized, populist politi-

cal parties.[134] The advantage of the American Revolution was its incomplete and unfinished character. As Hawthorne observes, often the changes the Revolution introduced simply presented new problems.[135] Nevertheless, small changes over time like "patch-work" is how Hawthorne believes lasting improvements are made.[136]

The United States does not offer a vision of a comprehensive good. The pursuit of happiness is left up to the individual. Americans are freer than ever, but not necessarily happier. If anything, Americans are more restless. Holgrave travels, picks up any number of trades and occupations, and plans grand futures that will likely fizzle out.[137] Hepzibah describes Holgrave as the sort of person who "lived off the scent of other people's cooking," but who turns away from eating it.[138] Just so, Americans often live from the scent or promise of things rather than the enjoyment of them. The Puritans were less free, but enjoyed a great deal more confidence in their shared purpose and goals. They knew what they wanted to do. Americans, on the other hand, do not know what they are supposed to do. The potential that American liberty holds is that we do not have to sort out what happiness is on our own. *The Scarlet Letter* ends with hope. Hester hopes for a future in which individuals will have the liberty to find mutual happiness. *The House of Seven Gables* ends with Clifford and Hepzibah, Holgrave and Phoebe, and Uncle Venner moving to the Judge's house in the countryside to begin a new life together. Uncle Venner's inclusion is interesting because he is described as a "patched philosopher."[139] Hawthorne notes that his clothes are patched, but we may suppose Uncle Venner's philosophy is just as patched. He offers no comprehensive explanation of the good life, but his opinions are stitched together piecemeal. The happy life is the life shared with friends engaged in the search to find out how we should live.

Friendship makes us at home with dead bodies in our homes.[140] Past wrongs and secrets weigh on every human heart. Holgrave discovers how to be at home with his past when he realizes that he loves Phoebe. It is hard to feel at home when there is a dead body in the house. But this is precisely what Hawthorne calls us to do. Happily, we do not have to do it alone. Friendship, as Hawthorne shows in *The Scarlett Letter*, depends on the sharing of the heart in private. Neither the bright public light of the Puritans nor the isolation of the custom house can foster friendship and happiness. *The House of the Seven Gables* show how we can make a home for ourselves in the present. In his diatribe against buildings, Holgrave said that they represented ideas.[141] Houses are more than symbols. They are places where people share their lives and hearts together. Houses are blends of the public and private in which families live together, but they can be opened to the public and to friends. As Hawthorne models in "The Old Manse," we make frequent decisions about who to invite to our homes and for what reason; even which rooms will be cleaned for presentation and which we will keep strictly pri-

vate. It is up to us to choose whom we want to be friends with and who we want to share our lives with. Happiness is being at home, but it is being at home with the fact that we will always be imperfectly at home.

NOTES

1. Hawthorne's frequent appeals to the reader and his autobiographical sketches have been of periodic interest to scholars. See, for example, Amy Louise Reed, "Self-portraiture in the Work of Nathaniel Hawthorne," *Studies in Philology* 23 (1926): 40–54; Harry C. West, "Hawthorne's Editorial Pose," *American Literature* 4 (1972): 208–21; Mary Gosselink De Jong, "The Making of a 'Gentle Reader': Narrator and Reader in Hawthorne's Romances," *Studies in the Novel* 16 (1984): 359–77; Eric Savoy, "'Filial Duty': Rereading the Patriarchal Body in 'The Custom House,'" *Studies in the Novel* 25 (1993): 397–417; Dan McCall, "The Design of Hawthorne's 'Custom-House,'" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 21 (1967): 349–58; Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "Ambiguity and the Narrator in *The Scarlet Letter*," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 5 (1975): 147–63; Paul John Eakin, "Hawthorne's Imagination and the Structure of 'The Custom–House,'" *American Literature* 43 (1971): 346–58; Carlanda Green, "The Custom-House: Hawthorne's Dark Wood of Error," *The New England Quarterly* 53 (1980): 184–95; James M. Cox, "The Scarlet Letter: Through The Old Manse and The Custom House," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 51 (1975): 432–47.

2. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 3.

3. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 4.

4. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 3.

5. There is much textual support for linking together "The Old Manse" to "The Custom-House." "The Old Manse" introduces a collection of tales and sketches in *Mosses from an Old Manse* that was written while the Hawthornes lived at the Old Manse. The book was published in 1846 just after Hawthorne left Concord and took his post at the Salem Custom House. In fact, at the end of 'The Old Manse," Hawthorne mentions his new post at the custom house in *Mosses from an Old Manse* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 26. In addition, James M. Cox makes the case that "The Custom-House" is a sequel to "The Old Manse" in "The Scarlet Letter: Through The Old Manse and The Custom House," in *Virginia Quarterly Review* 51 (1975): 440. Roberta F. Weldon observes that "parallels in narrative voice, tone, motifs, and themes" serve to link the two sketches in "From 'The Old Manse' to 'The Custom-House': The Growth of the Artist's Mind," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 20 (1978): 36.

6. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 27.

7. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 5.

8. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 5.

9. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 25.

10. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 26.

11. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 25.

12. Hawthorne notes that the Old Manse's previous occupant was Emerson's father and that in the same study in which he has been working Emerson had written *Nature*. See John S. Martin, "The Other Side of Concord: A Critique of Emerson in Hawthorne's 'The Old Manse,'" *New England Quarterly* 58 (1985): 453–58 and Larry J. Reynolds, "Hawthorne and Emerson in 'The Old Manse,'" *Studies in the Novel* 23 (1991): 60–81.

13. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 24.

14. Speaking of his own relationship with Emerson, Hawthorne ups the geographic ante and observes that "the mountain atmosphere of his lofty thought" produces light-headedness that makes it difficult for him to share Emerson's company for very long (*Mosses*, 24).

15. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 24.

16. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 24.

17. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 25.

18. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 25.

19. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 24.

20. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 20.
21. Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 20.
22. Hawthorne seems to have had a fondness for cheesy puns or "dad jokes." The conceit of the custom house sketch is that Hawthorne finds the scarlet letter and a record of the "historical" event while rummaging through old papers in the upper level of the Custom House building. The story discovered in the second story of the custom house building becomes the second story in *The Scarlet Letter*.
23. See, for example, Alexis de Tocqueville's chapter "On Individualism in Democratic Countries" in *Democracy in America*, 482–84.
24. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 6.
25. Hawthorne, The *Scarlet Letter*, 24.
26. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 7.
27. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 13.
28. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 15.
29. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 40–1.
30. Catherine H. Zuckert, "The Political Thought of Nathaniel Hawthorne," *Polity* 13 (1980), 166.
31. Zuckert, "Political Thought," 166.
32. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 22.
33. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 19.
34. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 19.
35. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 33.
36. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 35.
37. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 12.
38. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 13.
39. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 73.
40. Hawthorne assures us that these celebrations were a "dim reflection of a remembered splendor" from their native England and lacked the usual Elizabethan "bonfires, banquets, pageantries, and processions" as well as theatrics, minstrels, and jugglers (*The Scarlet Letter*, 212).
41. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 37.
42. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 37.
43. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 68.
44. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 81.
45. Sacvan Bercovitch, "The A-Politics of Ambiguity in *The Scarlet Letter*," *New Literary History* 19 (1988), 648.
46. Given Hawthorne's clear affiliation with the Democratic Party, his friendship with and advocacy for Franklin Pierce, Hawthorne's political views, particularly with regard to slavery, have received much scholarly attention. Despite disagreements among scholars on Hawthorne's precise views on slavery, scholars generally accept that he had little interest in abolitionists' reforms and was quite wary of them. Hawthorne saw in the abolition movement another utopian project. Some scholars maintain that Hawthorne held a pro-slavery position, or at least an ambivalent view on slavery. See Eric Cheyfitz, "The Irresistibleness of Great Literature: Reconstructing Hawthorne's Politics," *American Literary History* 6 (1994): 539–58 and Allen Flint, "Hawthorne and the Slavery Crisis," *The New England Quarterly* 41 (1968): 393–408. Flint finds in Hawthorne's ambivalence a "tendency to avoid a clear position on important matters" (395). Although Laura Hanft Korobkin maintains that Hawthorne was not pro-slavery, she argues that Hawthorne so greatly feared abolitionists and their frequent advocacy of vigilantism that he committed himself to strict rule of law regardless of individual suffering in "The Scarlet Letter of the Law: Hawthorne and Criminal Justice," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 30 (1997): 193–217. Korobkin argues that *The Scarlet Letter* teaches that "immediate unfairness is *not* the point" but that "we must suffer and obey what appears today to be harsh and oppressive law because in the long run maintaining the community is more important than protesting injustice" (italics in original, 206). Drawing a more sympathetic profile of Hawthorne, Richard Predmore argues that "Hawthorne's early neglect and occasional insensitivity to the wretched and exploited is eventually replaced by interest and ultimately by

sympathetic understanding" in "The Development of Social Commentary in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Works: 1828–1844," *Colby Library Quarterly* 20 (1984): 8. Predmore refers, for the most part, to Hawthorne's increased interest in and abhorrence of northern industrialism, materialism, and exploitation of the politically weak. Yet, despite this sympathetic turn in Hawthorne's sentiments, Predmore qualifies that Hawthorne exhibited little hope in or desire for progress, reform, or social justice.

47. Brook Thomas, "'The Scarlet Letter' as Civic Myth," *American Literary History* 13 (2001): 182.
48. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 150.
49. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 49.
50. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 146.
51. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 149.
52. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 149.
53. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 149.
54. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 84.
55. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 85.
56. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 58.
57. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 58.
58. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 101.
59. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 102.
60. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 104.
61. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 66.
62. Chillingworth realized that his heart was "lonely and chill, and without a household fire" and desired "that simple bliss, which is scattered far and wide, for all mankind to gather up" (Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 67).
63. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 68.
64. Since the Puritans believed the scarlet letter would transform Hester internally, they were less intrusive into Hester's heart. However, it is important to remember that the Puritans wanted to punish Hester whereas Chillingworth wanted to torment Dimmesdale. There is not a strict analogy between the friendship of individuals and the friendship within a society. A political order has the authority and a claim to the power and force necessary to punish a member of its own for transgression. The Puritans used force to accomplish an illegitimate end—to expose Hester's soul to public punishment. As a friend, Chillingworth has no claim to authority over Dimmesdale.
65. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 126.
66. Hester and Dimmesdale have renewed their friendship in the forest, but it is not welcome among the Puritans. This is why they plan to flee to the Old World under false names and, as Hester suggests, "[b]egin all anew" (Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 181). But Dimmesdale knows that would be to live another lie in another society. During the procession, Hester learns that Chillingworth plans to follow them to Europe and would like a nemesis continue his torments wherever they go (Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 224). The room or the middle ground for Hester and Dimmesdale to be together does not yet exist in the Puritan community.
67. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 116.
68. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 156.
69. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 157–58.
70. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 176.
71. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 176.
72. During her confrontation with Chillingworth, Hester remarks that "there seemed no choice to me" to conceal his identity (Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 154). In this case, she refers to how it appeared to her at the time. During her retrospective reflections, Hester realizes that she had a choice.
73. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 150.
74. In fact, according to Hawthorne, his purpose for writing "The Custom-House" is to serve as an account of how "a large portion of the following pages" concerning the history of the scarlet letter came into his possession and to establish him as an editor not author (Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 4). In the attic of the custom house, he claims to find several papers

belonging to Jonathan Pue, a former holder of his position as surveyor of customs, which contained much early history of Salem and the scarlet letter artifact itself. Putting himself in the position of a reporter, he gives readers numerous details intended to corroborate his claim as discoverer and editor. He describes the precise measurements of the scarlet letter, and claims to have shown the scrap of fabric to knowledgeable women who confirmed its particular method of embroidery was a forgotten art. Moreover, the papers and the scarlet letter, Hawthorne tells us, remain in his possession should any inquirer desire to see the proof. See also Daniel Cottom, "Hawthorne versus Hester: The Ghostly Dialectic of Romance in *The Scarlet Letter*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 24 (1982): 49.

75. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 146.
76. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 237.
77. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 236.
78. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 236.
79. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 241.
80. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 241.
81. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 67.
82. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 43.
83. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 43.
84. For more on the optimistic meaning of the ending, see John Gatta Jr., "Progress and Providence in The House of the Seven Gables," in *American Literature* 50 (1978): 37–48. Brook Thomas recognizes a moderately hopeful tone to the ending in "The House of the Seven Gables: Reading the Romance of America," *PMLA* 97 (1982), 209.
85. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (New York: Signet Classic, 1990), 277.
86. Hawthorne sees both continuity and substantive changes as a result of the American Revolution and explores how American manners and habits became increasingly democratic. Catherine Zuckert discusses many of these shifts from aristocratic to democratic habits in *Natural Right and the American Imagination*, 83–90.
87. Unlike *The Scarlet Letter* in which Hawthorne takes pains to fabricate a historical chain of custody for Hester's story, he makes no such pretense to this story's historical authenticity. Instead, in the author's introduction, Hawthorne claims that this story is a romance; consequently he takes full advantage of the genre's more fantastic conventions such as bitter family rivalries, witchcraft, curses, murder, ghosts, and secret compartments. Brook Thomas explores the meaning of calling the story a romance in "Reading the Romance of America, 195–211.
88. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 14.
89. Uncle Venner is not actually related to either the Pyncheon or Maule families. Clifford calls Uncle Venner a philosopher and claims that his "wisdom has not a drop of bitter essence" in *Seven Gables*, 276.
90. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, viii.
91. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 79.
92. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 162.
93. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 162.
94. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 163.
95. Daniel R. Barnes argues that Hawthorne uses Holgrave to parody Orestes Brownson's proposals for reform in "Orestes Brownson and Hawthorne's Holgrave," in *American Literature* 45 (1973): 271–278. See also Catherine Zuckert who compares Holgrave's proposals to Thomas Jefferson's suggestions for revitalizing founding principles every generation in *Natural Right*, 87.
96. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 161. Catherine Zuckert also explores how Holgrave's impulse to wipe the past away is a typical American response to past injustices in *Natural Right*, 87.
97. Aristotle's account of the magnanimous person's character informs my analysis in chapter 3 of book 4 of *Nicomachean Ethics*, 75–80.
98. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 161.
99. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 190–91.
100. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 157.

101. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 157.
102. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 187.
103. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 85.
104. Hawthorne is clear that mesmerism is not an inherently harmful technique. In fact, at the end of the story, Holgrave uses his skill to uncover the truth of the bachelor uncle had died and so exculpate Clifford for his death (*Seven Gables*, 270). Instead of using his skill to control others, Holgrave uses it to reveal the truth.
105. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 156.
106. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 156.
107. See Tocqueville's chapter on "Why the Americans Show Themselves So Restive in the Midst of Their Well-Being," in *Democracy in America*, 511–14.
108. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 163.
109. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 161. In fact, Hawthorne grants his readers little access to Phoebe's inner heart. Her thoughts and her heart remain mostly unseen. During her time at the Pyncheon house, she becomes more mature and reflective (189).
110. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 161–2.
111. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 161.
112. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 164.
113. Phoebe even notes that since the story contains much "trouble and calamity" it should be liked by the reading public (Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 188).
114. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 191.
115. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 193.
116. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 265.
117. See Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 192–93.
118. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 266.
119. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 267.
120. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 267.
121. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 267. John E. Alvis notes that Hawthorne typically employs the image of "a restoration Eden" to signify happiness in *Nathaniel Hawthorne as Political Philosopher: Revolutionary Principles Domesticated and Personalized* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2012), 259.
122. Jaffrey did not murder their uncle. As a youth, Jaffrey had been a spendthrift and so stole from his uncle to keep up with his expenses. On one occasion, the uncle saw his nephew looking through his things and died of the same sudden disease that plagued his ancestor, the Colonel. Jaffrey staged his uncle's death to look like a murder to implicate Clifford. See Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 270–72.
123. See Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 99.
124. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 128.
125. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 141.
126. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 128.
127. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 141.
128. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 100.
129. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 197.
130. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 103.
131. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 273.
132. Hawthorne observes that whereas the Puritans regarded hanging for witchcraft a holy cause we are more likely to recoil from it (*Seven Gables*, 13).
133. Hawthorne notes that Hepzibah's pretenses to gentility are out of line with the times and that the opening of the cent shop marks her transformation from a "patrician lady" to a "plebeian woman" in (*Seven Gables*, 39). Moreover, he observes that in democratic society, society's winners and losers are in constant flux. More pointedly, he notes that "somebody is always at the drowning point" (*Seven Gables*, 39). Tocqueville makes a similar observation in *Democracy in America* that "new families constantly issue from nothing, others constantly fall into it" (483).

134. Hawthorne, however, does not romanticize political parties and observes that it is usually a small group of men who choose the candidate their party nominates (*Seven Gables*, 238–39).

135. Hawthorne notes that the one reason why Clifford is imprisoned instead of put to death is because of his family's prestige. He notes such arguments are more likely to persuade in democratic societies than in monarchical (Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 26).

136. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 159. Drawing from *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, Nina Baym argues that Hawthorne believes that the future will be an advancement for "womanly values" and that he identifies protection of the heart from intrusion with women in "The Heroine of 'The House of the Seven Gables': Or, Who Killed Jaffrey Pyncheon?" *The New England Quarterly* 77 (2004): 607–18.

137. Hawthorne observes that many young men are like Holgrave who have promising beginnings, but then achieve little as they are too restless to commit to doing something well. See Hawthorne, *Seven Gables,* 161.

138. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 79–80.

139. Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 139. Uncle Venner is also commonly considered mentally deficient and he lives by performing errands and accepting scraps from his neighbors (*Seven Gables*, 59).

140. Metaphorically, of course. Hawthorne says that with the dead body of the Judge sitting within, the house was an "emblem of many a human heart" (*Seven Gables*, 257).

141. See Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 163.

Chapter Six

Sharing the Pursuit of Happiness

Now that we have looked at how some of our American novelists depict the pursuit of happiness, we may more fully evaluate how the American regime has served the pursuit of happiness. American novelists are guides on the pursuit of happiness who with a critical eye can present the shortcomings of pursuing happiness in a liberal nation but also present alternatives and correctives compatible with liberalism. In these respects, our novelists serve as more comprehensive guides than happiness research and liberal theory. Happiness studies usefully point to weaknesses in liberal nations and highlight some goods that typically contribute to a happy life. As happiness researchers have found, one of the chief shortcomings of liberal nations is that they provide so little guidance on happiness. For example, we tend to overestimate the extent to which wealth and material comfort contribute to happiness and seek these goods as the chief means of happiness to the exclusion of cultivating and pursuing other nonmaterial goods that constitute happiness. At present, efforts to use happiness studies to influence policy makers and inform policy remain nascent and speculative.[1] On the other hand, liberal theory decries state attempts to define happiness as a major threat to individual liberty. Liberalism hesitates to give a definite shape to what is happiness. Liberalism expects that individuals disagree on what happiness is and that it is beyond the capacity of the state to arbitrate. Nevertheless, liberalism posits that liberty is an essential component in the individual pursuit of happiness. The individual cannot meaningfully pursue happiness except by her free activity. Part of happiness is finding it freely oneself. Given liberty, individuals will use their liberty to pursue happiness differently. The incompleteness of our political order aims to protect the varied ways individuals understand and pursue happiness.

We need guides on happiness that are compatible with liberalism's respect for and protection of the many voices concerning happiness, but that also help us to think critically about what happiness is and how it may be pursued. Although liberal political orders, such as ours, may shy away from state guidance, their doing so leaves open other sources of guidance that flourish outside of our official political doctrine. As we see, our novelists provide insights into prospects for happiness in a liberal nation and also affirm liberalism's commitment to protecting the plurality of voices that arise through the pursuit of happiness. Our novelists anticipate many of the criticisms of liberal nations that happiness researchers have uncovered, but turn to corrections and alternatives compatible with and possible within the United States. Through depicting characters pursuing happiness, our novelists show how our political and social order does or does not facilitate the pursuit of happiness and what individual decisions can contribute to or detract from happiness. In so doing, our novelists provide signposts and other markers to indicate what roads and pathways are or are not likely to contribute to happiness. They bring to light the American tendency to use the pursuit of happiness as a justification for neglecting and breaking social and personal relationships, but recognize that it is through the cultivation of human ties that happiness is known. Furthermore, it is through engaging the reader in an examination of the pursuit of happiness that our novelists avoid the doctrinaire approach of happiness research and provide an example of how the pursuit of happiness can be a collaborative activity.

The deep trouble with happiness studies and liberalism is that their advice is from the perspective of how the individual can maximize her happiness. As our novelists show, that is the wrong way to go about it. We risk becoming like Chillingworth who believed he could be happy by marrying Hester regardless of her feelings. Most happiness researchers would shudder at (and strongly object to) the thought that they advised Chillingworth-like indifference to the well-being of others. I have no doubt that they would not want to be interpreted advising such a disposition toward others. Nevertheless, neither happiness researchers nor liberal theorists provide models and examples of how one should seek the friendship of another person and promote "mutual happiness." Repeatedly, our novelists point us toward other individuals as the surest supports for a happy shared life. But before we can be happy, we must understand that our friends, family, status groups, and neighbors are people like ourselves—a little lost, in need of guidance, and also of a friend. As artists in creating images with words, our novelists have the tools to provide many models for how we may understand happiness with others.

Tom Wolfe's three novels, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, *A Man in Full*, and *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, are examples of the pursuit of happiness in contemporary America. Wolfe approves of liberalism's commitment to political liberty as a necessary condition for the pursuit of happiness, but recog-

nizes that without the courage to strike out on one's own, Americans too often follow popular opinion. For Wolfe, the first step of the pursuit of happiness requires the courage to resist popular opinion. In the absence of strong social classes shaping the individual, Americans seek status within different status groups. The trouble is that there may be disparity between the things that bring status and those that contribute to happiness. In seeking status, individuals desire lesser goods at the expense of goods that might better contribute to their happiness. (Here Wolfe's critique of the pursuit of happiness differs little from the findings of happiness researchers.) This is precisely what happens to Sherman McCoy who pursues status among Wall Street's elite stockbrokers. His astonishing success and overweening self-confidence lead him to believe that he deserves a young mistress and that he can succeed in taking financial risks. Both decisions precipitate his financial and personal ruin. Stripped of his supposed mastery and at the mercy of the machinations of others seeking to gain by his ruin, Sherman learns real self-mastery and so fights to keep his freedom and restore his family. The common link in Wolfe's novels is the importance of cultivating courage within the individual so that she may break from misleading status groups that promote false goals and to seek or create groups more able to contribute to her happiness.

In Wolfe's last two novels, he highlights more robustly the need not only for courage, but the need to find the proper moral and educative support for courage that liberalism inadequately supplies, and ways in which to do it. Wolfe recognizes that for our political liberty to be maintained and meaningfully utilized in the pursuit of happiness, individuals must understand themselves as free and responsible beings. Wolfe turns to ancient thinkers to find understandings of the human being that support moral liberty and courage. In *A Man in Full*, Conrad demonstrates untutored courage and concern for the inner integrity of his soul but is unable to express his unformed opinions until reading the stoic Epictetus. Epictetus teaches Conrad that his soul is like a spark of the divine and so is too dear to be compromised. The soul is worth preserving above material comfort and even personal liberty. True liberty and happiness is found in the care of the soul, because the inner self is the only thing that one has control over. Conrad may not be able to control what happens to him, like being imprisoned, but he can control how he responds. Wolfe tempers stoicism's self-sufficiency with the recognition that human beings need company and friendship in the pursuit of happiness. Conrad does not become a loner, content within the impregnable chambers of his inner self, but rather uses his courage to defend the weak and shares his stoic lessons with others, particularly Charlie Croker. Charlie, like Sherman, pursued to his ruin goods that failed to bring his happiness. Through Conrad and Charlie's friendship, Wolfe shows how friends assist each other. By Conrad's example and stoic message, Charlie learns to care for his soul as the

real seat of virtue and self-worth over the exterior and physical signs of power and strength. Together Conrad and Charlie renounce their former lives to become evangelists for Zeus.

On the other hand, in *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, Wolfe faults our universities for neglecting to provide students with the liberal education that prepares individuals to live as politically and morally free beings. Without preparation to live as a free person, Wolfe recognizes that individuals will have few defenses against popular opinion—especially given our status-seeking behavior. Despite appearing to be proud and independent, Charlotte Simmons finds that her education fails to provide her with the moral courage to resist peer pressure. Furthermore, Wolfe criticizes the kind of philosophic and scientific viewpoints commonly espoused at contemporary universities that deny moral liberty and so transform human relationships into contests for power and control. Charlotte believes that her intelligence and education are tools of domination and power rather than means for developing the moral habits needful to a free person. Charlotte finds the popularity and status she desires, but instead of bringing her happiness, her pursuit of popularity leads to discontentment. Wolfe, again, turns to the ancients, particularly Socrates and Aristotle, to provide grounds for moral liberty. Jojo, a star basketball player, turns toward liberal education for the promise of learning to live as a free being and to seek happiness. *I Am Charlotte Simmons* represents a severe critique of America's university system for neglecting the purpose of a liberal education. Without cultivating our youth to believe in moral liberty of every individual, our society risks undermining our political liberty and opens itself up to manipulation. Jojo, happily, recoils from being manipulated as a student-athlete and finds a surer educational path with Socrates and Aristotle. Like liberal theorists, Wolfe shies away from defining happiness, but suggests that happiness consists of having the fortitude to resist popular opinion and not being afraid to live apart from the crowd. While Wolfe severely criticizes our society for attaching status to false pursuits and ill preparing individuals to use their political liberty, he does not question the pursuit of happiness itself.

We see that Walker Percy, in contrast, focuses on the pursuit of happiness as a goal that prevents us from realizing what our discontent reveals about ourselves. Percy recommends that we see our unhappiness as a starting point for self-reflective inquiry. Additionally, the pursuit of happiness leads individuals to consider themselves in isolation from others. More than anything else, the pursuer of happiness experiences loneliness and isolation from others. Instead of the pursuit of happiness in which individuals restlessly try to become happy, Percy suggests the search in which we look to others not simply as means that contribute or detract from happiness but as fellow searchers with whom we can share our search. Our fellow human beings, neighbors, and friends constitute our greatest resource in our search.

The Moviegoer is Percy's classic presentation of the search. In the story, Binx Bolling turns toward the search and so discovers, with joy, that his cousin, Kate, is a fellow searcher. Binx rejects the pursuit of happiness with which he identifies everydayness—a condition identified with the liberal pursuit of happiness. Everydayness distracts the individual from her unhappiness to pursue happiness by following expert advice, being a good citizen and consumer, and hobbies. Additionally, Binx rejects his Aunt Emily's Southern stoicism that at first appears to offer an alternative to liberalism that accepts unhappiness with noble rectitude, but, as Percy shows, stoicism, like liberalism, refuses to confront unhappiness and discover what feelings of discontent reveal about the self. Instead, unhappiness holds a clue and provides a fortunate beginning point to understanding the self. Moreover, the search can be shared. It is a joint venture that brings individuals together in common activity in which they may discuss and learn from each other. Binx and Kate marry. Percy ends the novel not with happily ever after—their problems are not solved—but with the assurance that Binx and Kate are fellow searchers.

In *Lost in the Cosmos* and *The Thanatos Syndrome*, Percy takes a sharper perspective toward (and warning against) the pursuit of happiness as aligned with scientific attempts to bring happiness under human control and direction. Percy is deeply concerned that scientific attempts to manage happiness and well-being for society will undermine the individual capacity to search with others. Percy fears that despite liberalism's commitment to liberty of the individual to pursue happiness, members of our society, so disillusioned with fruitless efforts to pursue happiness individually, will turn to experts to increase their well-being. In *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy uses the book's self-help format to teach and engage the reader in a joint search. Additionally, in the book's second space odyssey, Captain Schuyler, the leader of Earth's few survivors, must choose either to found a utopian society on Europa (New Ionia) dedicated to scientific well-being or to lead an eclectic society in Lost Cove, Tennessee, that preserves human beings as troubled selves—selves capable of destructiveness but also of leadership, love, and laughter. He must choose, but Percy does not show which outcome he decides in favor of. By focusing on the choice Captain Schuyler faces, Percy highlights that it remains a matter of human choice if we turn to experts in the hopes that they can make us happy or if we turn to each other to find guidance.

The Thanatos Syndrome builds on this theme, but Percy focuses on illustrating how the scientific approach to happiness exposes us to manipulation and deception. Comeaux and Van Dorn succeed in removing unhappiness and increasing well-being, but as Percy shows their solution to unhappiness comes at the cost of our liberty and our capacity for happiness and well-being that satisfies our human longings for self-understanding and companionship. Tom More and his band of friends and supporters may thwart Comeaux and

Van Dorn, but as Percy makes clear, the tendency to seek scientific solutions remains a live threat. Percy's purpose is to show that the search is more compatible with the liberty we cherish than the pursuit of happiness. Furthermore, the search brings real relief from the anxiety of unhappiness through discussion and companionship with fellow searchers.

Edith Wharton provides a unique voice among our novelists as demonstrated by her belief in the usefulness and salutary effect that social structures can have on individuals in attaining happiness. Unlike Wolfe and Percy who rely on individuals to shape their own paths, Wharton argues in favor of traditional social structure and classes to help shape individual lives. Wolfe and Percy depict characters rejecting social groups and joining or forming others. Wharton recognizes the harms and abuses that society perpetuates, but she recognizes much irreplaceable good worth preserving and more harm in their demise. Without social structure, human life lacks wholeness, stability, and some element of rest, or respite from the pang of desires that drive so much restive and fruitless activity in the United States. Much like Percy who warns against the pursuit of happiness, Wharton also recognizes a dangerous side to the pursuit of happiness. Unless understood and cultivated within traditional society that curbs the American characteristic love of comfort and ease and promotes the well-being of the individual through her social relations, the pursuit of happiness becomes the satisfaction of individual desire.

Set in the early 20th century, *The Custom of the Country* depicts Undine Spragg's unrestrained chase after self-gratification. Despite dedicating herself to pleasures and other comforts of life, Undine finds little enduring pleasure in her possessions. As soon as she gains one pleasure, she moves toward another. Undine lets neither person nor tradition stand in her way. Wharton shows us the brutality and futility of Undine's chase by which she uses and discards individuals as instruments in her acquisition of material pleasures. For Undine Spragg, happiness is the ultimate justification for treating every relationship as a means to that end. Undine marries four times, depletes her parents' wealth, indirectly contributes to the suicide of one of her former husbands, and cares little for her son's education and well-being.

The Age of Innocence, set a generation earlier than *Custom*, shows how traditional society can beneficially restrain individuals to do their duty, which may be unpleasant and seemingly counter to happiness, but can serve individual happiness from the perspective of a lifetime. Newland Archer marries traditional May, but falls in love with her more exotic cousin, Ellen. Wharton presents a complex picture of Newland's internal struggle in which she demonstrates awareness of society's shortcomings. Newland's love for Ellen, his recognition of society's cruelty to Ellen and hypocrisy regarding marital affairs, and the ways in which Newland realizes that he had been guided unreflectively by society all contribute to Newland's decision to leave May and follow Ellen. Wharton, however, shows that Newland Archer stays

with May as an act of duty and obligation—realizing his fatherly responsibility—in denial of his immediate desire for Ellen, but that in the end he reflects upon his life with evident satisfaction. Newland's happy life reflections come about as a result of forgoing his immediate happiness in contrast to Undine's frenetic pursuit of pleasures that disappoint despite her unfailing resolve to put herself first. Wharton takes care to show that Newland as an individual enjoys a whole, full, and more satisfying life with May in which he raises a family. For Wharton, the good and happiness of the individual can only be realized through human relationships, such as family obligations, that are protected and safeguarded by traditional society.

While in agreement with Wharton that the individual heart is shaped by society, Hawthorne emphasizes more clearly the dangers that disordered communities can have on the individual and that our best hope for happiness is in friendship. "The Old Manse," *The Scarlet Letter*, and *The House of the Seven Gables* show that for Hawthorne, the mystery of the human heart is the source of our liberty and happiness and that his appeals to the reader in friendship provide a model for sharing our hearts. By learning how to respect the mystery of our inner selves and of those nearest to us in friendship and other private associations, we are better prepared to support political measures that similarly honor the dignity and liberty of the individual. In "The Old Manse," Hawthorne takes the reader on a tour of his grounds and house in which his ultimate objective is to introduce the reader into his "circle of friends." Hawthorne constructs the tour so as to bring the reader by degrees and approximation to the interior of the house and through delays and digressions to his study. Being initiated into Hawthorne's "circle of friends" happens in stages (from outside to inside) and partially (the reader does not see every room in the house, like the kitchen and bedrooms). With tender caution we should approach the inner self of another, both for the sake of preserving the other's freedom and for our own. Only by doing so do we cultivate the proper respect for the rights and dignity of individuals without which we risk the corrosion of our political liberty. Hawthorne's criticism of Ralph Waldo Emerson and his followers is motivated by a concern that those who claim to know and reveal the interior of the individual destroy the mystery of every particular person and open up roads of thought headed toward manipulation and exploitation.[2]

The custom house sketch, which introduces the main story of *The Scarlet Letter*, provides a glimpse into Hawthorne's life as a customs official in Salem and presents his contemporary society in contrast to the Puritan society. It presents a different kind of danger to the mystery of the human heart. Individuals live so freely that they lack a community through which they can enter into the human relationships that are essential for the sharing of hearts. The custom house is marked by lethargy, decay, and intense narrow individualism. With little binding them together beyond the commercial activities of

their common occupation, the custom house employees live lives that are opaque. Despite near limitless freedom with respect to living the private life of their choice and making, there is little evidence among the custom house employees of any richness of thought and robust feelings present in their inner lives. Indeed, Hawthorne experiences a kind of spiritual barrenness beyond mere writer's block that prevents him from composing new works. Maximum personal liberty does not foster the communal conditions for individuals to develop their inner lives through their relations with each other.

Echoing Wharton against unrestrained individualism, Hawthorne acknowledges that communities help shape our lives and are needed for the encouragement of human happiness. Confined within themselves, the custom house employees' pleasures and contentment seem more bestial than human. Here Hawthorne's description of the kind of well-being possible in the custom house resembles Percy's characterization of the self-suppressing, drug-induced well-being crafted by the scientists in *The Thanatos Syndrome*. Hawthorne shows that the custom house employee's effortless tranquility is superficial and easily disturbed by presidential elections. The employees hold their jobs depending on the winning party and so their happiness is subject to distant forces beyond their control that have little interest in their well-being. Moreover, the private liberty of the custom house offers little security against political manipulation. In this way, Hawthorne prepares his readers before reading the main story of *The Scarlet Letter* to see that the corrective to the Puritan's society is not unchecked personal liberty.

While Hawthorne warns against Emerson's thought as dangerous for its potential for abuse, the main story of *The Scarlet Letter* depicts in full what a society dedicated to making the individual transparent would be like. The Puritans recognized that the impetus to sin originates in the hidden interior of the soul and so sought to bring to light and to the surface all the hidden things of the heart. Hester's red badge of public condemnation is supposed to be a sign of her inner self, but Hawthorne shows us that the scarlet letter does not correspond to her interior and does not work upon her to bring about repentance as the Puritans expect. The good news is that the Puritans' plan to expose to plain view the individual heart fails. Human communities do not have the means and knowledge to reveal the contents of the heart nor can they work upon the heart to produce desired and predictable results. The bad news is that the misguided attempt to do so is highly destructive of the human relationships that political orders should foster in the community.

Hawthorne does not leave his reader hopeless and without guidance. Hawthorne shows that even in the faulty Puritan society—and by implication, all political orders will come short—Hester decides to help Dimmesdale by telling him the truth about Chillingworth's identity. Likewise, Dimmesdale helps Hester by showing her that they cannot hope to escape their sins by fleeing for Europe. Though Hester and Pearl leave for Europe, Hester

eventually returns, resumes wearing the scarlet letter, and becomes a consoler and friend to those in need. *The Scarlet Letter* does not have a perfectly happy ending, but a poignant and peaceful conclusion. It acknowledges that human life is marked by sin and frailty as well as goodness and strength, and so earthly happiness is sweetened with a measure of sorrow.

Moreover, Hawthorne uses the telling of Hester's story as a way to teach the reader how a friend approaches and respects the mystery of the heart. Hawthorne teaches by presenting himself as a friend to the reader with whom he shares Hester's story that he "found" in the custom house and through his narration technique in which he provides limited and often partial access to the thoughts of his characters. Friendship is a corrective to the pitfalls of the custom house and the Puritan society. Friendship presents a way for individuals to share their hearts with one another, which is necessary for the development of their inner lives. It provides a way for individuals to relate to others freely of their own initiative and to different degrees of disclosure.

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne gives us a splendidly joyous happy ending. Not only does the happy ending show that happiness is possible, but that happiness is possible in America in a way that it was not under the Puritans. Holgrave and Phoebe's love and friendship provides a model of what the "mutual happiness" that Hester hoped for might look like. Nevertheless, Hawthorne gives some hard medicine about happiness. Happiness is not a right, but something to be hoped for, if imperfectly attained. It is a gift of the moment and one that can be denied, taken away, or lost. Happiness is not in our control wholly. We are born into situations not of our choosing and making and so the past may present considerable obstacles just as the feud between the Pyncheon and Maule families cast a long shadow on later generations. Or we can suffer grave misfortunes such as Clifford's thirty year long imprisonment for a crime he did not commit.

Americans, however, do not want to hear that happiness may be imperfect or even temporary. There is a strong tendency to believe that happiness is a right and consequently that there must be some way of bringing happiness under our control. In many reform movements, Hawthorne spots the same belief that animated the Puritans: that the errors of the past can be washed away and a new idealized society established. These new reformers are no different from their Puritan forebears and will resort to coercive methods to bring about their ideal society. Holgrave shows troubling interest in finding technologies that would enable him to reveal the inner heart of another person. The Puritans made Hester wear a scarlet letter on her breast; the reformers of the future will have more sophisticated techniques of compelling the secrets of the heart into the sunlight. As Hawthorne shows through Holgrave's character, reformers may be also hiding from self-reflection. They want to help society at large so as to avoid helping a particular person and especially to avoid receiving help from a particular person. Instead of aiming

to remake society, we should strive to remake the relationships nearest to us. Friendship opens us to new possibilities and to happiness—for one can be happy with a friend in the present.

Hawthorne provides the most straightforward example among the novelists examined of reaching out in friendship to the reader, but the need to cultivate personal relationships as the means and beginning of happiness is a common theme underlying the diversity of ways to happiness.[3] Through this examination, we have seen numerous and quite different approaches to the pursuit of happiness that nevertheless support the need for companionship and sympathy in the pursuit of happiness. In his fight against opportunistic and mercenary political forces, Sherman McCoy finds examples of loyalty and honor within the legal system and persists in fighting for his freedom for the sake of regaining his family. Newland Archer reconciles himself to his duty to his family and finds contentment and fulfillment by making use of his social prominence both to preserve the past and to push for social reform. Charlie and Conrad become friends and seek to share stoicism's concept of human dignity and integrity with others. Binx and Kate marry in recognition of their mutual need for companionship in their search. We do not know what choice Captain Schuyler makes, but we may hope that he chooses to be with Jane in Lost Cove. Hester returns to the Puritan community and assumes freely the wearing of the scarlet letter for the sake of being a counselor and friend. Holgrave and Phoebe find in their friendship the freedom to overcome a tragic past. Even unhappy characters like Undine Spragg and Charlotte Simmons are unhappy because they expect to gain happiness in a solitary fashion. Charlotte, at least, longs for companionship and we may hope that she will discover in Jojo a true friend. Through their stories, our novelists invite readers to join them in an inquiry into what happiness is and the ways of its pursuit. The relationship between the author and reader provides the template for understanding the role of personal relationships to pursuing happiness. It is through joint inquiry into happiness that individuals embark on their pursuit of happiness.

Our novelists' deepest critique of the Declaration is that the liberty that the pursuit of happiness protects undermines the social relationships through which happiness is cultivated. The personal liberty that the pursuit of happiness protects is popularly construed to be a justification for getting in and out of relationships easily as convenience and pleasure dictate. (Such interpretations of the Declaration forget that the Declaration was a joint undertaking of a people.) The danger, as our novelists agree, is that our official individualistic doctrine will come to inform all of our relationships. It is the application of the Declaration's revolutionary, regime-shattering principles to all human relationships that is so potentially destructive of effectively pursuing happiness. Americans mistakenly seek freedom from social bonds as a means to happiness and often endanger and break relationships and bonds under the

guise of seeking happiness. In the cause of happiness, Americans may reason that their interests are best served by breaking relationships for the sake of chasing after something else. The pursuit of happiness is a socially and politically harmful doctrine that justifies the individuals who want to sever ties with another person whenever that relationship appears to constrain her from pursuing her happiness.

At its most destructive, the pursuit of happiness is the ultimate escape clause. Nothing, it seems, stands in the way or constrain the individual to stick with an enterprise or relationship that she freely entered into, because the individual's present evaluation of what is in her self-interest trumps the obligations and arrangements she may have previously made.

As our novelists illustrate, the intensely individualistic pursuit of happiness produces disconnected, lonely, and unhappy individuals. It is the task of the novelist to expose the pitfalls of this national characteristic to treat the pursuit of happiness as a license for self-gratification and release from social obligation. For example, by showing the excessive independence in the custom house, Hawthorne reveals how a people may isolate themselves through a misunderstanding of how political liberty should support the pursuit of happiness and what political liberty is useful for. In so doing, he emphasizes the extent to which the pursuit of happiness is not primarily about liberty from other individuals, but liberty for the sake of working toward happiness together. Undine enjoys near unlimited liberty to break and reshapes at her will and convenience her relationships; yet her ceaseless motion indicates deep-seated discontentment. At the end of *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, Charlotte seems unable to accept Jojo as an equal, a friend, and companion. Although disgusted with the pursuit of material goods, Binx is a disconnected and isolated person who has a difficult time realizing the importance of friendship and companionship to living well.

On the other hand, Hawthorne also illustrates through the Puritans that isolation may result from too little privacy. In Puritan society, the political order effectively squeezes out mediating human relationships that depend on privacy and secrecy such as the family, friendships, and other private associations that stand in between the individual and society at large. The Puritans tried to construct a society in which the hearts of the individual members were transparent to all. Instead of engendering community and fellow-feeling, the perverse effect of this policy was to alienate Hester and to drive her toward destructive and revolutionary thoughts against her fellow community members. Likewise, Percy shows that if Captain Schuyler chooses in favor of Europa, New Ionia will institute eerily similar policies as the Puritans that aim for transparency and honesty, but result in stifling private human relationships. The individual needs mediating relationships to pursue happiness. These mediating relationships with friends and family strengthen the individual against social pressures (as in the case of Sherman McCoy) and also to

draw her toward others to share her life and inner self (as in the cases of Binx and Newland).

By burdening and weakening the formation and maintenance of meaningful human relationships that constructively shape and limit the individual pursuit of happiness, the Declaration undermines its very purpose—to provide foundation for the pursuit of happiness. As discussed in chapter 1, our regime is intentionally incomplete due to a recognition that part of human happiness is beyond the state's care and influence. Our political order, thus, requires self-reflection for the furtherance of its ends. The state cannot create all the human goods that contribute to happiness and so cannot effectively guide individuals completely or principally along their pursuit of happiness. The state cannot do so primarily because many of those human goods come about by free individuals acting together on their own initiative. The unfinished work of the Declaration is for individuals through their various political and social bonds to inquire into their prospects for happiness. Political liberty serves to protect and to secure individuals against coercion so that they may freely pursue and nourish those relationships that contribute to their inquiry into what happiness is and how it is to be pursued.

Our novelists face the task of finding models, alternatives, and ways for the cultivation of relationships. Despite our novelists' sober, often restrained, sometimes foreboding conclusions—not one novel here examined has an unqualified happy ending—the good news is that the Declaration's dedication to the pursuit of happiness allows happiness to be found in terms beyond itself. It is the unfinished work of our regime to devise ways and models for individuals to pursue happiness as free and equal beings. As our novelists have shown, it is up to individuals to create, form, and seek out the social relationships and friendships that serve their happiness. In the pursuit of his happiness and interest, the individual is drawn to serve the pursuit of happiness of others as well.

Examination of the pursuit of happiness by American novelists reveals a wide variety of concerns for its prospect, such as materialism, self-sufficiency, and loneliness, but also a subtle hope that the way to happiness is not shut and that the ordinary American is capable of using her freedom well to pursue happiness along better avenues. Despite the dangers posed by using the principles of our "parchment regime" to justify breaking social bonds, our political order's incompleteness preserves a very real liberty that rightly used can contribute to the pursuit of happiness. The individual enjoys meaningful freedom to act on her own and in coordination with others for the sake of pursuing happiness. Our novelists point us toward each other as our greatest resource to help us and to guide us toward happiness. They do not offer us a solution, answer, or a resolution to what happiness is and how it ought to be pursued.

Any final solutions to these questions would be attempts to shut down inquiry and would cause our unofficial thought to become static and stationary. Such a development would do harm to liberalism's insights that part of the individual's inner life is free and that much human thought is inherently ungovernable. The United States turns an apparent political problem into strength by building into our nation an awareness of its limitation and inability to provide for the whole of human life and happiness.

NOTES

1. The use of happiness studies to inform policy may be opposed by democratic institutions that give lawmakers little incentive to stray too far from voter preferences in crafting legislation. Furthermore, attempts to inform policy with happiness findings may lead to manipulative policy.

2. It should be stated clearly that Hawthorne does not argue that Emerson's thought supported manipulation of the individual. Rather, he saw in Emerson's thought certain tenets that if expanded upon could lead to more doctrinaire theories and practices among his followers. To a great extent, Hawthorne criticizes Emerson for irresponsibility.

3. Walker Percy's self-help book *Lost in the Cosmos* is another example of the author directly addressing the reader.

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About the Author

Elizabeth S. Amato is assistant professor of political science at Gardner-Webb University. She loves being a professor, studying happiness, reading terrifically thick books, drinking her coffee black, and taking too many pictures of her cat, Pericles. *The Pursuit of Happiness and the American Regime* is her first book.