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THE PROBLEM OF HAPPINESS IN J. CONRAD'S *LORD JIM*, N. HAWTHORNE'S *THE SCARLET LETTER* AND F. DOSTOYEVSKY'S *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT*

Motto

It is more important to retain one's human dignity than just to survive.

G. Orwell

'Where was it that I read of a condemned man who, at the hour of death, says or thinks that if the alternative were offered him of existing somewhere, on a height of rock or some narrow elevation, where only his two feet could stand, and round about him the ocean, perpetual gloom, perpetual solitude, perpetual storm, to remain there standing on a yard of surface for a lifetime, a thousand years, eternity! – rather would he live thus than die at once? Only live, live, live! – no matter how, only live!'

F. Dostoyevsky

Before the main consideration commences, let me briefly talk about general questions on happiness. This article does not, obviously, aim at a systematic review of the development of theories of happiness since it is the domain of philosophy, not literature, neither its scope permits for this. However, a certain general background is needed to clarify terms and make further analysis more lucid.

Happiness is one of the basic human needs and therefore it has been given a lot of attention in various, more or less systematic writings, with the development of our civilisation. The earliest date back to the myths and writings of the ancient civilisations, beginning with those of Mesopotamia (the formation of the first Mesopotamian states dates back to the end of 4000 and beginning of 3000 BC), *Gilgamesh Epic* being most representative of them, through the mythology of ancient Egypt, as well as philosophical, literary and political writings of ancient Greece, Rome, etc., till our times, considering the problem of happiness on various levels: individual, social, religious, political, etc. In the course of time there emerged *felicology* as a branch of philosophy, which systematised all those writings. By virtue of this fact the importance of this problem was recognised not

only as a human desire, but in terms of human knowledge as well – it was given an independent status as a branch of human study.

Literary fiction has a very peculiar function here. In as much as psychology, sociology, philosophy or religion build certain systems and doctrines, dealing thus more with generalities, literature inspects in detail all complexities of realisation of happiness on an individual level, not in a theoretical dimension but in confrontation with real life of an individual, and thus greatly contributes to the quality of analysis and significance of the problem.

That so much about complexities of happiness and problems of achieving it has been written testifies to the structure of our reality. It is a perfect measure of its limitations and imperfectness on every level of its organisation: individual, social, political, etc. It also testifies to how much man wants to improve this reality. It points to the unnaturalness of this state of affairs, from which it would appear that desire for happiness is a natural state for man. In fact, there are several justifications for the above assumption: *psychological*, *metaphysical* and *sociological*.

Psychological – it refers to the fact that the desire to be happy is one of the basic human desires or needs.

Metaphysical – it extends here from ontology, through axiology and epistemology. Each of them has its own form of happiness (see *definition of happiness* below).

Sociological – there are people who do not crave for their own happiness but want to make others happy (either for personal, human, social or religious reasons). Raskolnikoff in *Crime and Punishment* is an illustration here: he does not care about his own private happiness, but the happiness of mankind.

It is difficult to give an overall, univocal definition of happiness since it depends on the point from which it is viewed. Various branches of knowledge have various definitions of happiness. For example, a definition of happiness in political science will differ from that of sociology or theology. Individual (subjective) happiness will differ from social (objective) happiness, etc. There is also a qualitative difference if we consider individual happiness only: the same thing that makes one man happy, does not necessarily make happy another, or, at least, not to the same degree. However, for clarity of our further analysis, we need to make an attempt at a certain general definition. According to *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (1972:vol.1:193), *Gk. eudaimonia*, commonly rendered as “happiness” can generally be defined as “the most desirable or any desirable condition of human life, whether the condition be reducible to terms of pleasure or not”. In the light of the above etymology, we can split the notion of happiness into three categories: *ontological happiness*, *axiological happiness* and *epistemological happiness*.¹

¹ Division mine.

Ontological happiness – refers to biological existence. Every act of existence is an act of happiness. Hence, every occurrence of death is the lack of this happiness. The more biologically perfect creatures we are, the happier we feel ontologically. Every disorder, malfunction, disease, disability or pain diminishes our ontological happiness. Although it is the most easily attainable kind of happiness (it is enough to give birth to someone, to cause him to exist), still it is the most unstable one. In every moment of our existence we may fall prey to fate: become a cripple, fall fatally ill or die, and these limitations are beyond our control and often depend on chance. Besides, this type of happiness is all the more important as it conditions the other two: we can realise axiological or epistemological happiness only as long as we exist. Thus, perfectness of physical existence is here the most desired quality.

Axiological happiness – is connected with realisation of various values, e.g. personal ambitions or desires, ethical, moral, aesthetic, religious, social, etc. Generally, it is more dependent upon us than ontological happiness. Even if we are blind, deaf or disabled, still, we can realise certain values referring both to external reality (e.g. doing good) or internal one (e.g. being honest), etc. Axiological happiness is, however, not so easily achievable as ontological one as it operates on a higher than biological, more complicated level of our existence and is conditioned by many more factors than the first one. Firstly, if we try to stick to a certain system of values, e.g. ethical ones, we usually have to bear consequences of it. Trying to realise one kind of happiness here may exclude another, e.g. Jim in *Lord Jim* finally pays with his life for being honest and truthful to his moral principles, so the axiological happiness that he tried to achieve excludes ontological one. Secondly, we may have doubts what values to choose in order to be happy, to make one's life meaningful. For example, Raskolnikoff's sensitiveness to the misery of others finally leads him to crime and personal tragedy. Thirdly, it is impossible to realise certain values, e.g. it is impossible to make all people happy or to relieve their suffering. Axiological happiness can never, therefore, be one hundred percent achievable, as opposed to ontological one.

Epistemological happiness – is connected with gaining knowledge, experience and wisdom. The wiser, the more educated and experienced we are the better and more consciously we can live. It is also more dependent upon us than ontological happiness; we do not necessarily need to be ontologically happy to be happy epistemologically. But, again, it is more difficult to achieve than ontological happiness. Sometimes one needs a whole life to grow more experienced, often through tragic situations, which makes our experience very costly. For example, Jim, Hester and Raskolnikoff – each had to experience a personal tragedy to understand the complexities of life and, finally, to be able to accept what fate offered them. If Jim knew himself better (that he feared sudden death), he would not have probably become a sailor and would not have had to

bear all further consequences of deserting the *Patna*. Had Raskolnikoff known what the outcome of his crime would be, he would certainly not have committed it. Had the Puritan community been more knowledgeable, mature and experienced, Hester would not have to have gone through such hardships and ostracism.

The optimum attainable happiness would be to combine together the above aspects within one human lifespan. Practically, it does not seem feasible. From this it would stem that man cannot be ultimately happy and that his pursuit of such happiness is a kind of delusion. Even if one knows what values to choose and is physically and mentally fit enough to realise them (like Hester, Jim and Raskolnikoff), fate may complicate stages of this realisation (axiological happiness becomes difficult to attain then – as it becomes evident in the three novels).

Upon this general introduction, let us now proceed to analyse the problem of happiness in the three novels in detail. I will concentrate on the three main protagonists: Hester, Raskolnikoff and Jim. I have chosen the three books because, among other threads touched upon in them, there is that of happiness. The comparison seems interesting as the three protagonists are almost the same age (young), all of them have just started their mature life, they live in three different parts of the world (different cultural circles), each of the protagonists desires happiness, and each of them aims at a different kind of happiness – from routine one (Hester) to more sophisticated (Raskolnikoff and Jim). Finally, each of them experiences tragic situations in their life that seriously complicate its realisation.

Concepts of happiness of Hester, Raskolnikoff and Jim

What is Hester's concept of happiness? In fact, we have to conclude it from the general course of events, as the narrator does not give any direct statements about this. Hester seems to stick to a traditional concept of happiness: love, marriage and a happy family. She is young and pretty and wants to enjoy typical, everyday life, according to basic human values; she needs her average personal happiness to make her life liveable and meaningful. Hester does not aim at realisation of great ideas (like Raskolnikoff) or lofty personal ambitions (like Jim). For her ontological and axiological aspects are the most important, not epistemological one. It seems all the more cruel, therefore, that she has to suffer so much for her basic desires, not only due to fate but, also, due to the Puritan community she lives in.

Raskolnikoff's concept of happiness is totally different. It arises from his great ideas of social reform that tend to perplex him. These ideas are inspired by his mystic compassion for and love of those who suffer from extreme

poverty and, consequently, absolute misery of life. Raskolnikoff does not want his personal happiness, like Hester, he will be happy when others can be made happy, too, through his help. He rejects mere happiness of routine everyday existence. He aims at great exploits – to reform the world. But, according to him, only great acts are worth sacrifice. The problem is, however, that he wants to attain his objective by means of crime – killing Alena Ivanovna, an old, selfish money-lender and use her wealth to save others from starvation and despair (Alena amassed great wealth through usury and she wanted to donate it all to a monastery so that the monks pray for her salvation). Raskolnikoff has a theory according to which such an act may not necessarily be a crime because it is committed not for personal gain but for the benefit of others.

Kill her, [...] take it from her, and dedicate it to the service of humanity and the general good! [...] Shall not one little crime be effaced and atoned for by a thousand good deeds? For one useless life a thousand lives saved from decay and death. One death, and a hundred beings restored to existence! [...] What in proportion is the life of this miserable old woman? No more than the life of a flea, a beetle, nay, not even that, for she is pernicious. She preys on other lives. [...] 'Certainly, she does not deserve to live,' [...] (Dostoyevsky 1997:53).

Raskolnikoff divides people into two categories: “ordinary” and “extraordinary”. The latter are a kind of “superior” ones. For the benefit of mankind, or due to the importance of the role that history entrusted to them, they may commit crimes and, in fact, do commit them and still are regarded to be great people, not criminals.

Nature divides people into two categories: the first, an inferior one, comprising ordinary men, the kind of material whose function is to reproduce specimens like themselves, the other, a superior one, comprising men who have the gift or power to make a new word, thought, or deed felt (Dostoyevsky 1997:194).

And further:

[...] if Kepler's or Newton's inventions had, in consequence of certain obstacles, not been able to get into vogue without the sacrifice of one, ten, a hundred, or even a larger number of intervening human impediments, Newton would have had the right – nay, would have been obliged – to do away with these few, these hundred men, in order that his discoveries might become known to the whole world. [...] all legislators and rulers of men, commencing with the earliest down to Lycurgus, Solon, Mahomet, Napoleon, etc. etc., have one and all been criminals for, whilst giving new laws, they have naturally broken through older ones which had been faithfully observed by society and transmitted by its progenitors. These men most certainly never hesitated to shed blood, as soon as they saw advantage of doing so (Dostoyevsky 1997:193–4).

For him axiological happiness is the most important: if he cannot realise his elevated ideas, the happiness of mere everyday existence does not satisfy him, he cannot enjoy it seeing others suffer. His idea of happiness is based on social grounds therefore, and is totally opposite to that of Hester's.

Jim's idea of happiness is still different. As a sailor, he dreams of heroic actions – saving people in disasters, facing severe storms or quelling revolts, etc., which might bring him satisfaction and fame.

On the lower deck in the babel of two hundred voices he would forget himself, and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature. He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shellfish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men – always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book (Conrad 1993:5).

Jim is not interested in everyday marine routine duties and work, which requires ordinary courage, but in spectacular exploits, those that no one else would venture to attempt.

When all men flinched, then – he felt sure – he alone would know how to deal with the spurious menace of wind and seas (Conrad 1993:7).

And further:

At such times his thoughts would be full of valorous deeds: he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. They were the best parts of life, its secret truth, and its hidden reality. They had a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness, they passed before him with a heroic tread; they carried his soul away with them and made it drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself. There was nothing he could not face (Conrad 1993:15).

This desire for great feats differs from Raskolnikoff's in that Jim is not interested in social benefits of his deeds but in his own fame and satisfaction. Jim's concept of happiness is, then, axiologically based: he wants to realise great values, however, his ambitions have a strongly aesthetic character – that of alluring, noble visions, being far from the actual harshness and crudeness of reality that was to surround him.

We can see, thus, that none of them desires that kind of "happiness" that fate finally brings to them in the course of time. From this beginning to the end, a whole evolution of their concepts of happiness takes place. This evolution is by no means easy for them in personal, epistemological and psychological sense: it is difficult to achieve that stage of consciousness in which, after hardships, one can accept, with humility and peace of soul and mind, "small happiness" that life finally offers, without a feeling of disappointment or bitterness or cynicism. Let us, however, not anticipate facts.

Realisation

Hester begins to realise her concept of happiness through her marriage with Chillingworth – an aged English scholar. This marriage becomes her first failure:

instead of happiness, it brings a deep feeling of disappointment and unhappiness, due to the lack of love for Chillingworth on her part, about which she had told him, still, being a partly decrepit, aged man, whose passion of life was study, not standard family life, he decided to marry her.

[Chillingworth to Hester] [...] *'thou knowest that I was frank with thee. I felt no love, nor feigned any'* (Hawthorne 1983:100).

'We have wronged each other,' answered he. 'Mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay' (Hawthorne 1983:100).

The marriage becomes an unnatural relation between them. Nevertheless, she does not want to renounce her desires for happiness. When Chillingworth sends her to America to establish their home in Boston, himself to arrive some time later, Hester falls in love with a young minister Arthur Dimmesdale, the result of which is their illegitimate child – Pearl. However, she fails for the second time: her desire for happiness brought her to violate the Puritan moral code – she is put to trial and punished: she must stand in the pillory for three hours and wear “A” for “Adulteress” for the rest of her life. This is considered a lenient punishment – Hester barely escapes death. The greatest suffering, however, that follows is caused by the cruel ostracism on the part of the Puritan community that lasts almost seven years. The ostracism manifests itself in several ways: Hester is physically isolated from the community – she lives in a small deserted cottage on the outskirts of the town. She is often used as an object of public exhortation by the clergymen, or as an example in their sermons in church. She is also totally depersonalised – becomes a mere letter, a walking symbol of evil, not a human person, she is even tormented by children that follow her in the street calling out “Adulteress”. This means she has to give up her desire for a normal life.

She could no longer borrow from the future, to help her through her present grief. To-morrow would bring its own trial with it; so would the next day, and so would the next; each its own trial, and yet the very same that was now so unutterably grievous to be borne. The days of far-off future would toil onward, still with the same burden for her to take up, and bear along with her, but never to fling down; for the accumulating days, and added years, would pile up their misery upon the heap of shame (Hawthorne 1983:103).

Even after several years of such life, when she thinks she had already expiated her guilt, and despite the fact that she can share mutual love with Dimmesdale (which she could not enjoy in her marriage with Chillingworth), and that she has Pearl – their child, life is still full of anguish for both of them.

After a while, the minister fixed his eyes on Hester Prynne's. – 'Hester,' said he, 'hast thou found peace?' She smiled drearily, looking down upon her bosom. – 'Hast thou?' she asked. – 'None! – nothing but despair!' he answered (Hawthorne 1983:208).

Perhaps, the situation would change if Dimmesdale confessed but he does not have courage to do it. She suffers a lot and feels deeply unhappy again to such a point that she even thinks of killing Pearl and herself.

Thus Hester Prynne, whose heart had lost its regular and healthy throb, wandered without a clew in the dark labyrinth of mind; now turned aside by an insurmountable precipice; now starting back from a deep chasm. There was wild and ghastly scenery all around her, and a home and comfort nowhere. At times a fearful doubt strove to possess her soul, whether it were not better to send Pearl at once to heaven, and go herself to such futurity as Eternal Justice should provide (Hawthorne 1983:184).

Periods of resignation intermingle with those of humility, acceptance of her fate and revolt against it. The revolt is caused by three factors: by the awareness that life is wasted, by the cruelty of her punishment (humiliation and ostracism) and by her inner feeling that she did not commit a crime, and even if she did, she had already repented for that with her suffering. The culmination of this revolt is when she throws away the scarlet letter from her bosom and arranges with Dimmesdale to flee back to Europe to start a new, normal life, free from humiliation and persecution.

'Let us not look back,' answered Hester Prynne. 'The past is gone! Wherefore should we linger upon it now? See! With this symbol, I undo it all, and make it as it had never been!' So speaking she undid the clasp that fastened the scarlet letter, and, taking it from her bosom, threw it to a distance among the withered leaves (Hawthorne 1983:219).

This act shows how, despite all this period of total unhappiness, Hester still struggles to regain her initial dreams – to live and enjoy life. It also illustrates another stage in her evolution of happiness. This evolution started with her desire to be happy before she married Chilingworth, then there was a period of unhappiness during the marriage, then, again, she revolted against it and decided for a union with Dimmesdale, still seeking her happiness, but it again results in unhappiness and torture. Now she revolts again by trying to convince Dimmesdale to go back to Europe, still hoping to regain her happiness. The evolution, then, oscillates between resignation and a new desire, again and again. Finally, Dimmesdale dies confessing his sin and Hester has to stay in America, Pearl emigrates to Britain and gets married there and Hester lives alone for the rest of her days. Again, she loses.

Raskolnikoff's evolution of happiness: crime, expiation and final peace that he regains is more difficult. This evolution is caused by several factors. It starts before the crime with his great distress that is caused by the feeling of powerlessness: he sees the misery of life of the poorest, yet he cannot help them. Therefore he, finally, decides to implement his idea of happiness: to help others, even through crime – and kills Alena Ivanovna, the money-lender. Up to this point, the evolution of happiness is linear, it goes in a clear, straight direction – he carried out his plan. After the crime, however, it rapidly changes:

Raskolnikoff falls ill due to the crime: he killed not only the “louse” – Alena Ivanovna, but also her sister – an innocent witness to the crime. His post-crime illness is marked by fits of mental disorders and moral remorse (Hester does not manifest such symptoms), intertwined with periods of rebellion against the remorse, and attempts to quell it. This inner fight brings a change in the line of evolution that begins to twist and curve. Raskolnikoff is tossed by distress: he wanted to be a great reformer and became a mere criminal because he killed Alena’s sister, and, also, because of the fact that he feels moral remorse – so he feels like an offender. His feeling of failure is even deepened by the fact that he did not manage to take all the spoil after the murder (he had to flee and did not have time to search the flat), and even the one he managed to take is lying hidden under a stone in the city and cannot be used to support the poor with it. He sacrificed himself in vain and now is at a loss what to do with his life – his ideals that he wanted to live for now vanished, his plight being nonsensical now. All that inner fight brings a deep feeling of doubt, depression and inner isolation. His happiness disappeared, Raskolnikoff feels deeply unhappy. The more so, as he does not know exactly why he failed, what or where his error was. He cannot understand why, acting on behalf of common good, he suffers from such distress, and Napoleon, who committed much worse crimes, did not. What vexes him even more is that, despite all his crimes, Napoleon is still regarded as a hero, while he feels like a mere criminal. Raskolnikoff quotes history to give his demur greater persuasiveness, but this only enhances his distress and feeling of disorientation.

The real ruler [Napoleon] – the man who dares all – bombards Toulon, massacres in Paris, abandons an army in Egypt, gets rid of half a million of men on his Moscow campaign, and gets off scot-free at Vilna by means of a pun; when he is dead and gone, people put up statues for him; everything seems allowable in his case (Dostoyevsky 1997:207).

What remained? Accepting the social situation as it is and trying to find happiness in humble everyday routine? Graduating from university, marriage, family, etc. That does not interest Raskolnikoff, and, besides, he is too poor to seek everyday stabilisation. He almost breaks down. All this complicates his further evolution of happiness. For Hester evolution of happiness was obstructed rather by external factors: fate and cruelty of the Puritan community. She does not seem to suffer so much from moral remorse. She probably felt guilty, but she confessed and expiated it. Raskolnikoff’s evolution is hindered by internal factors: he does not want to confess as there are periods that he does not feel guilty at all, and he does not want to renounce his ideals. This prevents his expiation.

‘Is it a crime to have killed some vile and noisome vermin, an old usurer that was obnoxious to all, a vampire living on the life of the poor? Why, murders of that kind ought to make up for many a crime! I do not even give it a thought!’ (Dostoyevsky 1997:410)

An aimless anxiety in the present – a continual sacrifice – by which nothing could be acquired in the future. This was what was left him on earth. And after eight years² he would be only thirty-two! Vain idea, to think he could commence life anew. For what object? What aim in life? Live to exist? (Dostoyevsky 1997:428)

Raskolnikoff feels totally unhappy. The evolution stops. There seem to be no perspectives of his redemption. Even the court trial and sentence seem to be for him purely external, internally he does not feel redeemed, punishment does not bring any relief. He confessed his crime due to Sonia's suggestion, not because he was convinced he should have done so. Therefore he rebels, even in Siberia. Therefore he rejects Sonia's love and help (she followed him to Siberia out of her own will and settled there to be near to him) and is even cruel to her. His inner disorientation, due to intermingled periods of acceptance of his guilt and rebellion against it, finally manifests itself in total indifference and apathy that point to the total disintegration of his reality.

When she [Sonia] told him the latest news from St. Petersburg, he gave no attention, and even upon announcing the death of his mother, which, no doubt he anticipated, he showed no signs of emotion. He seemed to comprehend his situation thoroughly, and manifested no astonishment at anything in a life so different from his former one. [...] He performed his duties without repugnance. To his food he was indifferent, [...] In prison [...] he could obtain advantages and privileges, but made no effort to do so, simply through apathy and indifference to his fate. Sonia confessed that at first, far from viewing her with pleasure, Raskolnikoff showed a decided aversion and even rudeness towards her (Dostoyevsky 1997:427).

His redemption comes suddenly, but this suddenness is the result of a long process during which his experience grows. After a long period of twists and curves, the evolution of his happiness begins to go forward in a straight line anew. This evolution is caused mainly by Sonia's mystic sacrifice that had the redeeming power.

Let us now analyse the evolution of Jim's happiness. Contrary to Raskolnikoff who exactly knows what he wants and undertakes actions to carry out his concept of happiness, Jim's attitude towards realisation of his idea of happiness is that of an inexperienced youth: he rather dreams of it than does anything to implement it. For him the whole life appears as an alluring illusion that may offer him many an opportunity of becoming an unrivalled hero. The theoretical value of life is very high for him, if not the highest, since neither Hester nor Raskolnikoff ascribe such a great theoretical value to life. Jim tends to identify theoretical value of life with its practical, actual value. He identifies ontological happiness (the fact that he exists) with axiological one, assuming that life will, definitely, allow him to carry out his dreams (realise his axiological happiness). That he is wrong is very quickly proven when Jim, lost

² Raskolnikoff was sentenced to eight years of hard labour in Siberia.

in dreams, is not quick enough to join the rescue team on time during the storm and thus loses his first chance to start to realise his dreams.

'Something's up. Come along.' He leaped to his feet. The boys were streaming up the ladders. Above could be heard a great scurrying about and shouting, and when he got through the hatchway he stood still – as if confounded. It was the dusk of a winter's day. The gale had freshened since noon stopping the traffic on the river and now blew with the strength of a hurricane [...]. The air was full of flying water. There was a fierce purpose in the gale, a furious earnestness in the screech of the wind, in the brutal tumult of earth and sky, that seemed directed at him, and made him hold his breath in awe. He stood still. It seemed to him he was whirled around. [...] *'Collision. Just ahead of us.'* [...] A coaster running in for shelter had crashed through a schooner at anchor [...]. He leaned over. The river alongside seethed in frothy streaks. [...] Jim felt his shoulder gripped firmly. *'Too late, youngster.'* The captain [...] laid a restraining hand on that boy, who seemed on the point of leaping overboard, and Jim looked up with the pain of conscious defeat in his eyes. The captain smiled sympathetically. *'Better luck next time. This will teach you to be smart'* (Conrad 1993:5–6).

The evolution of his happiness takes on a straight progressive line but only in his dreams, not in reality. In real life this evolution starts from failures: the first one is mentioned just above, the second failure is his desertion from the *Patna*. This act is a catastrophe for further development of his happiness. Jim jumps from the *Patna* because, suddenly, he is gripped with panic fear that he may get drowned together with the sinking ship and his life will thus prosaically end.

'Nothing in the world moved before his eyes, and he could depict to himself without hindrance the sudden swing upwards of the dark sky-line, the sudden tilt up of the vast plain of the sea, the swift still rise, the brutal fling, the grasp of the abyss, the struggle without hope, the starlight closing over his head for ever like the vault of a tomb – the revolt of his young life – the black end' (Conrad 1993:71).

Jim, jumping from the *Patna*, managed to save his ontological happiness but lost axiological one, although he was trying to save his ontological happiness to be able to effect axiological one – this is the paradox. From now on he will never regain peace and the feeling of dishonour and guilt will accompany him towards the very death. His ontological happiness seems worthless to him now: he is condemned by the court, loses respect and reputation and feels moral remorse. On the other hand, there are people who ridicule his moral sensitiveness and consider him a fool that he so much and so long feels the effects of his behaviour. These two opposite opinions cause equal distress for Jim, even to the point of aggression. He is extremely sensitive to people's opinions, which puts him into conflicts with them from time to time and causes that he cannot find a place for himself among the human community. He is even angry with Marlow if the latter does not believe that some of his explanations or excuses are not morally convincing.

Up to the moment of his jump from the *Patna* the evolution of his happiness went on progressively in his dreams but was suddenly destroyed by crude reality.

From now on it is full of curves and twists and practically stops. Jim feels restless. For some time he disappears. Through Marlow's intervention he is sent to a remote trading station in Patusan where he wants to find peace and expiation. His efforts create order and well-being in a previously chaotic community and he wins respect and affection of the local people and finally becomes Tuan for them, or Lord Jim. He experiences final expiation and regains his honour when he dies from the hands of Doramin, pledging his life against Brown's gang.

Conclusion

For all the three protagonists the general shape of evolution of happiness looks similar: it has the form of a circle, it is not linear. The circle begins with their dreams and, initially, we may have an impression that the realisation is linear but soon it is followed by various complexities and perplexities, which can graphically be illustrated as curves along the circle. The curves end when the protagonists finally experience expiation and regain inner peace, but the evolution has turned a full circle – they come back to the starting point in their lives – the one of clear conscience in which they naturally were before the realisation commenced. In terms of their primary objectives – they did not manage to achieve what they had dreamt of. If we tried to make the statistics of their happiness and unhappiness, the list would be as follows. For clarity's sake, the term *primary happiness* denotes happiness the protagonists had initially aimed at, *secondary happiness* means the one they had not intended but finally achieved.

Elements of happiness achieved:

Hester – *primary happiness*

- Pearl, her daughter, plus the fact that Pearl's adult life turned out to be successful one (she married happily).
- Love – she enjoys mutual love with Dimmesdale. This love, however, is not projected onto her whole life in the sense that even if their love is successful, it does not bring general and stable satisfaction.
 - *secondary happiness*
- Inner peace (after Dimmesdale's confession).

Jim – *primary happiness*

- None.
 - *secondary happiness*
- Inner peace (for which he paid with his life).

Raskolnikoff – *primary happiness*

– None.

– *secondary happiness*

- Inner peace (being the result of his inner, mystic redemption).
- Love of Sonia (mutual love, in fact, which finally makes them both happy – thus projecting onto the whole of their lives – which was not in Hester’s case).
- Final personal, “cheap” happiness (their life together after the exile).

Elements of unhappiness suffered:

Hester

- Failure of her marriage with Chillingworth (it begins a series of further complexities in her life).
- Transgression of moral law by her union with Dimmesdale.
- Punishment by the Puritan community (pillory, letter “A”).
- Social and personal ostracism by the community.
- Rebellions against her punishment (they cause great distress to her).
- She has to suffer not only from punishment and ostracism but, also, to share with Dimmesdale his moral distress (the tension of his hidden guilt).
- She has to bear all burden of her life alone (Dimmesdale is not much helpful or protective towards her and Pearl. He is afraid to confess and thus lets the community ill-treat them with all its cruelty).
- Chillingworth tries to persecute them.
- Dimmesdale dies upon confession (Hester loses the person she loved and Pearl loses her father).
- Hester tries to settle back in Britain but fails to do so (only Pearl remains there).
- Hester dies rather sad (she experienced moral expiation but psychologically does not feel satisfied or happy).

Jim

- His concept of life and value system collapses the moment he jumps from the *Patna*.
- Jim feels deceived by fate (he thinks that he was trapped by it).
- He is sentenced by the court and loses his officer’s certificate.
- Jim feels isolated.
- He feels disorientated (does not know what to do with himself and his further life).
- Goes to Patusan – a God-forsaken place (where he can redeem his guilt but is completely alone there, the natives do not understand him, the place offers no chance for fame or spectacularity).
- Fails in his love with Jewel (she feels deceived by him).

– Is finally killed by Doramin, in young age (ontological happiness is thus utterly destroyed).

Raskolnikoff

- His concept of happiness is ruined with the two murders he committed.
- Feels trapped by fate (Raskolnikoff feels that his idea and value system got somehow undermined).
- Suffers from post-crime illness.
- Suffers from total disintegration of personality (he does not know how to live on, Raskolnikoff is not able to get out of this situation by himself, he needs Sonia's help).

As we can see, elements of unhappiness largely prevail. For all the three characters the pursuit of happiness results in unhappiness and suffering. This is its irony or paradox. What is also tragic is that all this unhappiness has a destructive bearing upon the whole of their lives. Thus, from the logical point of view, their lives seem worthless: none of them achieved what they had intended. Hester did not manage to attain standard, average happiness, Raskolnikoff did not become a great reformer, and Jim did not become a great marine hero. Yet, finally, all of them seem to have regained inner peace. It is not, however, the peace stemming from the satisfaction that they had managed to carry out their dreams but the peace of humbleness and expiation, of being finally able to come back to the starting point in their lives, the point of “clean moral slate”. On the one hand, they became moral heroes, on the other; this was not the main objective in their lives. Each of them would have probably preferred to live by their own standards: Hester would have preferred to lead an average life and enjoy everyday, routine happiness, Raskolnikoff would have preferred to be a social hero rather than moral one, and Jim would have preferred to do heroic actions that would bring him splendour. Life, however, dictated different terms. Their inner peace may, also, partly stem from the fact that towards the end their experience grows and they become more aware of limitations of life.

We can also see how they rebel against their plight, despite all hardships and despondency. Hester and Raskolnikoff rebel most. They do not want to resign from their happiness so easily, to accept the situation that the fate brought to them. *Sic transit mundus sed non concupientia eius* – we could say. The curves on the circle illustrate this fight. Only Jim from the very moment the chance for expiation (Patusan) emerges does not rebel and accepts his fate. However, Jim suffered least during his life in comparison with Hester's fate (barbaric ostracism) or that of Raskolnikoff (post-crime illness, penal colony). On the other hand, only Jim pays the price of his life for the pursuit of happiness, and for the chance of final expiation. Jim is also tragic in the sense that he is the loneliest character of the three protagonists. Hester has Pearl and Dimmesdale,

Raskolnikoff is also lonely for the most part of the plot, but towards the end he tells Sonia about the murder and then she becomes his confidant and supporter. He finally accepts Sonia's love and the possibility of new life makes him happy. Jim has only Marlow as his confidant who tries to understand him, but in Patusan he is absolutely alone. His love to Jewel is a failure since she does not understand him. This love is destructive in the sense that it does not promote but competes with ethical values (Jewel cannot forgive Jim his moral sacrifice and leaving her alone). It highly contrasts with the love of Sonia to Raskolnikoff, which is ethically constructive and finally brings about his redemption (Przybylski 1964:218–47). It also contrasts with the love between Hester and Dimmesdale, which persists, despite all hardships and cruelty. Their mutual love and forgiveness contributes to their being finally capable of purging themselves of their guilt. Conrad's characters are always lonely and isolated geographically (high seas or far-away lands), psychologically or socially (few understand them). In such circumstances their ideas, values and ethics are tested against harsh reality (Krajka 1981:115–125).

Paradoxically speaking, the three protagonists are happy in the sense that fate offers them a chance of expiation. For Hester this chance is her punishment and ostracism, for Raskolnikoff it is Sonia and her help, and for Jim it is Patusan. What if life had not offered them this chance? How could they expiate? Fate ruins their first happiness but the same fate saves them by giving them a chance to redeem their guilt.

In confrontation with life man loses. One can shape one's life only to some extent. It is true that it is not possible to attain absolute happiness in life. According to Tatarkiewicz (1990:31), the characteristics of happiness are:

*[...] full and permanent satisfaction of the whole life. [...] Full, permanent satisfaction of the whole life – it is a very high standard of happiness, the one of ideal happiness. We cannot, within the bounds of human life, expect full, permanent and complete happiness unconditionally and without any exceptions or intervals in its duration. Even among those whom we hold to be the happiest there seems to be no one who would be satisfied of life unconditionally, without any exceptions or intervals.*³

But nowhere, in the three books do we have a suggestion that the protagonists want absolute or ideal happiness, that they want to be one hundred percent happy in every aspect of life. It becomes important, however, since absolute happiness is not achievable, how much of the remaining percentage we can attain: seventy

³ Translation mine. The Polish original is as follows: *[...] pełne i trwałe zadowolenie z całości życia. [...] Zadowolenie pełne, trwałe dotyczące całości życia – to miara szczęścia bardzo wysoka, miara ideału szczęścia. Szczęścia pełnego, trwałego, całkowitego, bez zastrzeżeń, wyjątków, przerw nie można się spodziewać w warunkach życia ludzkiego. Nie ma bodaj człowieka, nawet wśród tych, których mamy za najszczęśliwszych, który byłby zadowolony bez zastrzeżeń czy bez wyjątków, czy bez przerw.*

percent, fifty percent, forty percent, twenty percent, or nothing. And this difference makes people strive for as much happiness as possible, and we can also see it in the struggle of the three protagonists.

We can also see how happiness is inter-dependent: one type of happiness excludes another. Jim saves his ontological happiness by jumping from the *Patna*, but loses axiological one. Hester – trying to attain her personal happiness, loses moral one (both of them belonging to the category of axiological happiness, so one kind of axiological happiness excludes another in her case). Similarly, Raskolnikoff loses moral happiness trying to effect his ideas (both types belonging to axiological category as well). Along with the development of those complexities, the protagonists' level of epistemological happiness grows: their life experience widens, they grow more mature although we cannot say that this makes them particularly happy. The price they pay for this knowledge is really high. Self-awareness is a precious thing but does not seem to be of a particular value here. The novels do not emphasise this aspect as particularly important.

What do the protagonists think about their plight? Do they feel bitter or disappointed by life? In fact, the authors do not seem to imply this. The novels do not end in a gloomy atmosphere, they do not manifest nihilistic existentialism, emphasising absurdity of human existence. On the contrary, the fact that the protagonists finally regain inner peace, even if they did not manage to attain what they had intended, seems to emphasise the final message of the novels: we need to stick to certain values such as moral maturity, responsibility and honour. From this it would appear that moral heroism is better even if we fail on the way to success than achieving this success by transgressing a moral law. However, the novels are far from being didactic in character. They show how this moral heroism is difficult to achieve from the psychological point of view. This is exemplified by Hester's restlessness when she is tossed by alternate fits of desire and resignation, feeling of guilt and rebellion. The same fight between the feeling of guilt and rebellion is characteristic of Raskolnikoff and, partly, Jim. In *Crime and Punishment* formally it is enhanced by the *polyphonic novel* narration – the protagonist's inner monologue becomes, in fact, a dialogue with himself, full of contradictions, incoherent views and changes of opinion about what he did (Bachtin 1970:7–45). In *Lord Jim* it corresponds to the *point of view* technique of narration where, apart from Jim's views on what he did, which are gradually revealed in his talks with Marlowe, we also have opinions of other people, which finally creates a diversity of voices with none of them prevailing. Therefore it is not possible to formulate a univocal final opinion about the problems presented.

However, the message that we need to stick to certain moral principles even if this moral heroism does not have an objective value (which is manifested by the lack of a univocal final judgement in the novels) but only subjective one is

implied by the authors. In *Author's Note to 1917 Edition* preceding the first chapter of *Lord Jim* Conrad writes:

A friend of mine returning from Italy had talked with a lady there who did not like the book. I regretted that, of course, but what surprised me was the ground of her dislike. 'You know,' she said, 'it is all so morbid.' The pronouncement gave me food for an hour's anxious thought. Finally I arrived at the conclusion that, making due allowances for the subject itself being rather foreign to women's normal sensibilities, the lady could not have been an Italian. I wonder whether she was European at all? In any case, no Latin temperament would have perceived anything morbid in the acute consciousness of lost honour. Such a consciousness may be wrong, or it may be right, or it may be condemned as artificial; and, perhaps, my Jim is not a type of wide commonness (Conrad 1993:2).

As we can see, Conrad recognises the need for but does not seem to trust the objectivity of moral heroism. His, so to say, scepticism is contrasted with Hawthorne's optimism, who finishes his romance like a fable: there is Hester's grave with an escutcheon on it and there is her legend – thus he tries to objectivise the value of her moral effort.

And, after many, many years, a new grave was delved, near an old and sunken one, in that burial-grounds beside which King's Chapel has since been built. It was near that old and sunken grave, yet with a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle. Yet one tombstone served for both. All around, there were monuments carved with armorial bearings; and on this simple slab of slate – as the curious investigator may still discern, and perplex himself with the purport – there appeared the semblance of an engraved escutcheon. It bore a device, a herald's wording of which might serve for a motto and brief description of our now concluded legend; so sombre is it, and relieved only by one ever-glowing point of light gloomier than the shadow: – "ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A GULES" (Hawthorne 1983:276).

The most optimistic seems to be Dostoyevsky whose protagonist – Raskolnikoff – seems to spontaneously manifest his happiness at the close of the novel.

Suddenly he found himself with Sonia. [...] How it happened he knew not, but a strong impulse came upon him, and he threw himself at her knees. He wept and clutched her. At first she became dreadfully frightened, and her face was pale as death. She rose, and, in agitation, looked upon him. But one glance showed her all, and in her eyes shone ineffable happiness. She clearly saw [...] that he loved her – loved her – at last! [...] For him there still remained seven years of much pain and suffering, but so much happiness! He was saved! He knew it, and was conscious fully of his renewed being. [...] Yes; and what were now all these torments of the past! All – even his sin, and the sentence, and exile – appeared to him, in the first transports, as if they had not occurred, or were swept away (Dostoyevsky 1997:433).

What makes it all the more interesting is that the three writers ground this need in three different bases and still come to similar conclusions: Conrad grounds it in the tradition of European civilisation, Dostoyevsky – in religious mysticism (Przybylski 1964:240–245) and Hawthorne – in the personal sensitivity of human nature and creative power of inner human freedom.

Despite the fact that they did not manage to attain their intended, primary happiness, and despite the fact that their suffering and moral heroism do not have objective value, the books arrest our attention. We seem to feel more compassion for the three protagonists than for Job. On the one hand, Job's tragedy and suffering was, perhaps, much greater, on the other, he knew that God, by afflicting him, wanted to test his faith and loyalty. Job's suffering was teleological in character, by virtue of which it had objective, measurable value. Neither Hester, nor Jim, nor Raskolnikoff knew the sense of their perplexities and this makes their fate more tragic and deeply human.

To reverse the situation, would the books have been more interesting if they presented an Arcadian vision of life, with lives of the three protagonists full of easy linear progression during which they attain almost everything without greater effort? From the fact that almost no one writes books about such paradisaic life (although there probably are a few people in the world who can enjoy approximations of such life), we can infer they would not. Would they be boring, then, or out of touch with reality? Would linear happiness be better? Brierly's case in *Lord Jim* shows it does not necessarily have to be; Brierly was most successful in life, progressing along a straight line and still he lost. Finally he gives up such life and chooses suffering. Raskolnikoff in one of his inner dialogues asks himself a question: *What is better: cheap happiness or noble suffering?* From the point of view of ontological happiness, cheap happiness is better because it lets us survive. But is survival everything? For a drowning man or a terminally ill one – it definitely is. But for an average, healthy, physically fit, intelligent human being – it probably is not. There is no explicit answer to it, we must decide on our own.

The three books are, of course, not about intricacies of happiness. It is only one of the threads in these multi-threaded novels. They can be considered on several levels. As far as the mere development of the plot is concerned, for a simple reader *The Scarlet Letter* can be just a novel of manners dealing with trivial everyday human problems, *Crime and Punishment* will be only a detective story, and *Lord Jim* – an adventure book. On the psychological level, for a more refined and sensitive reader, they will present the depths of the complexities of human natures and personalities, on the metaphysical level – they will pose questions of philosophical and, even, theological character that analyse the intricacies of human existence and which are not accompanied by univocal answers. This lack of simple answers, however, makes it possible for the authors to avoid shallow moralising and contributes to the great cognitive value of the novels. For those who conceive of life in terms of simple codes, principles or regulations only and always expect a clear-cut solution, the books will not have much value and may even be misleading. In one of his letters to his friend Dostoyevsky wrote: *Man is a mystery. I must solve it.* But his major novels do not present any coherent view of man. They are deeply ambivalent, full of contradictory views. In another letter of reply he writes:

You think that I belong to that category of people who redeem human hearts, absolve human souls and remove pain. Yes, I receive such letters sometimes. But I know, for sure, that I rather bring disappointment and disgust. I am not the master of lullabies although I have sometimes attempted even that. And there are many people who need only that – to rock them to sleep (Podgórzec and Przybylski (1978:451)).⁴

I am not quoting these words to deride naive or simple-minded people. The human mind is constructed in this way that it seeks unity, clarity and organisation. Without it, no progress of civilisation could be made and chaos and disorganisation would prevail. Each of us would prefer to know that the world exists on some clear and fixed principles, rather than the opposite. Who can, however, fully comprehend life? Is this ambivalence, incomprehensibility and indefinableness of the world and of human existence – is it a drawback or an advantage? For a philosopher, sitting comfortably at his desk over a cup of coffee – it definitely is an advantage, giving him food for thought. For a man at a crossroads of life, who needs to take concrete decisions, it is certainly a drawback. The whole life of the three protagonists may be looked upon as an effort to find harmony, coherence or order within their reality and to overcome contradictions they experience. In Hester's case – it is the discrepancy between her individuality and the social superstructure, which brings about the conflict. In Raskolnikoff's case the discrepancy is bred by his immense sensitivity and overuse of reason that leads him to disaster. In Jim's case – it is the discrepancies of his own nature: aestheticism of his visions of life versus actual, harsh reality. What makes them deeply human is that, being at the crossroads and sometimes losing their orientation and understanding of life, they are, finally, able to surpass their own weaknesses and themselves, and find a way out, even if life has beaten them. Whether this noble effort has any objective value, any significance in the universe, apart from the moral satisfaction that it gave to them is not empirically provable, and will always remain either in the sphere of metaphysical speculation or religious belief.

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⁴ Translation mine. In the Polish version it reads as follows: *Pani uważa, że należą do tych ludzi, którzy zbawiają serca, rozgrzeszają dusze, usuwają ból. Niekiedy piszą mi o tym. Ale ja wiem na pewno, że mój zadaniem jest raczej zaszczepić rozczarowanie i obrzydzenie. Nie jestem mistrzem kołysanek, chociażem niekiedy brał się i za to. A przecież wielu ludziom tego tylko potrzeba, aby ich ukołysać do snu.*

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