"Happiness is a butterfly, which when pursued, is always just beyond your grasp, but which, if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you." (Hawthorne 752)

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The Pursuit of Happiness

Although separated by more than 150 years, *Rasselas*, by Samuel Johnson, and *Rebecca*, by Daphne Du Maurier, are both concerned with happiness. This in itself is unremarkable, as the primary conflict of a novel can often be reduced to the protagonist's discontent; even if it is never reached, the expected conclusion hangs in the back of the reader's mind. In *Rasselas*, the expected ending is the attainment of the ideal (capital-h) "Happiness". Rebecca's goal is to "make a success" of her marriage with Maxim in the shadow of his deceased wife, Rebecca. That neither of the protagonists[1] end up possessing the pure, unadulterated happiness they seek is somewhat beside the point. What is more important, both novels contain a "Happy Valley" — a geographical representation of contentment. The valley itself is unequivocally pleasant in both texts, but does not cause lasting happiness. These valleys might be read as a representation of Romance as a mode. The expected end point of Romance is often a happy ending, but throughout their journey the characters become irreparably altered, so that reaching that true, boundless happiness is impossible. The sort of happiness promised by the valleys is made hollow, and becomes unattainable to the protagonists at the end of their stories. Further, the kind of

[1] I mean the Maxim's wife when I talk about the "protagonist" of *Rebecca*, even though there is a good case for Maxim or even Rebecca as the protagonist. Referring to her as "the second Mrs. De Winter" is cumbersome, and "the mistress of Manderley" seems inaccurate, since she never is enough at home a Manderley to take ownership of the title. Since Daphne Du Maurier leaves her nameless, there is no good alternative.

the happiness promised by the valleys is portrayed as childish in comparison to the mature contentment which is the hero's conciliation prize. Therefore, the most joyful point often comes far before the story's conclusion, destabilising the notion of a "happy ending".

In the abstract, valleys are peaceful. They are protected from harsh winds; they are the polar opposite of the mountain, not very far in connotation from the Hill. At the same time, they are vulnerable — both to attacks and flooding. The Valley is "a neutral zone apt for the development of all creation and for all material progress in the world of manifestation. Its characteristic fertility stands in contrast to the nature of the desert..." (Cirlot 358). They can also be passages from one world to another, as in the "valley of the shadow of death" (Bible, Psalm 23). Valleys can be a refuge from society: Washington Irving's Sleepy Hollow "remain[s] fixed": "Though many years have elapsed since I trod the drowsy shades of Sleepy Hollow, yet I question whether I should not still find the same trees and the same families vegetating in its sheltered bosom" (Johnson, Clifton). However, their primary attribute is tranquility. They are often the home of hermits, "priests and shepherds" (Cirlot 358). They may have a gentle stream or waterfall, but not the rushing water of a canyon. They are a fitting place to look for happiness, although perhaps so bucolic as to be stifling.

Johnson's "Happy Valley" precedes Du Maurier's, so it is likely that her valley is a reference to his. This is particularly likely given Rasselas' popularity: it appears in *Middlemarch*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Little Women* ("SimplyBooks Review"). It seems more than reasonable to assume that Du Maurier would be familiar with Johnson's novel, as would many of her readers. Therefore, her valley subsumes the Happy Valley from

Rasselas. Inscribed in her valley is the entirety of Johnson's tale, and Rasselas' discontent is therefore projected onto *Rebecca*'s narrator. For this reason, we will focus on Du Maurier's novel, considering *Rasselas* as a supporting text.

Although neither valley lives up to its name, *Rebecca*'s valley does provide a real refuge for the second Mrs. De Winter. Indeed, it feels wrong to call it Rebecca's valley, because it is exactly the opposite. It is the only place at Manderley which is natural rather than constructed, therefore the only place where the narrator can feel at home. At the beginning of the novel (after the last chapter, chronologically), she reminisces about the natural beauty of Manderley:

> When I thought of Manderley in my waking hours I would not be bitter. I should think of it as it might have been, could I have lived there without fear. I should remember the rose-garden in summer, and the birds that sang at dawn. Tea under the chestnut tree, and the murmur of the sea coming up to us from the lawns below. I would think of the blown lilac, and the Happy Valley. These things were permanent, they could not be dissolved. They were memories that cannot hurt (Du Maurier 4).

Her happy memories are of the natural beauty of the surroundings of Manderley, not of the house itself. She finds comfort in Nature, which is chaotic where the rest of Manderley is meticulously maintained. More importantly, the natural world is relatively untouched by Rebecca — and her representative, Mrs. Danvers. The house is filled with reminders of Rebecca ; "memories that hurt" are so common that Maxim has sealed the western half of the house (that nearest the sea) in an attempt to keep them at bay. Admittedly, the valley is not completely free from Rebecca's influence. The handkerchief the narrator finds in Rebecca's raincoat has the "vanished scent" of the azaleas in the Happy Valley, as does her wardrobe in the west wing (Du Maurier 133, 188). Maxim says:

> [Rebecca's] blasted taste made Manderley the thing it is today. The gardens, the shrubs, even the azaleas in the Happy Valley; do you think they existed when my father was alive? God, the place was a wilderness; lovely, yes, wild and lonely with a beauty of its own, yes, but crying out for skill and care... (Du Maurier 307)

Although she certainly had a hand in creating the Happy Valley, it is portrayed as an extreme example of Rebecca's influence, mentioned last. The word "even" places the valley further from her than the rest of Manderley. It had beauty of its own before Rebecca, and it will continue to be beautiful after Manderley is cleansed with fire.

Comparing the valley to the rest of Manderley as a unit is unfair, because the house is itself an ecosystem containing many territories: the garden is very different from the East wing, which is distinct from the Wast wing and not at all like the morning room or the library... Perhaps a more equal comparison is between the valley and its polar opposite, Rebecca's cove. Their dichotomy is similar to that of the two wings of the house, although in a more concentrated form. The sea is a reminder of Rebecca's death, and so Maxim takes pains to avoid it. The narrator says: "I began to dread any mention of the sea, for the sea might lead to boats, to accidents, to drowning..." (Du Maurier 135). He seals the half of the house that is closer to the sea:

> 'You can't see the sea from here, then,' I said, turning to Mrs Danvers.
> 'No, not from this wing,' ... 'You would not know the sea was anywhere near, from this wing.'
>
> She spoke in a peculiar way,... laid an emphasis on the words 'this wing', as if suggesting that the suite where we stood now held some inferiority (Du Maurier 79).

He is also reluctant to go to the cove where he killed Rebecca:

> We came to a clearing in the woods, and there were two paths, going in opposite directions. Jasper took the right-hand path without hesitation. 'Not that way,' called Maxim; 'come on, old chap.'

> The dog looked back at us and stood there, wagging his tail, but did not return. 'Why does he want to go that way?' I asked.
> 'I suppose he's used to it,' said Maxim briefly; 'it leads to a small cove, where we used to keep a boat. Come on, Jasper, old man.' (Du Maurier 121)

The fork in the path sets up a binary opposition between the cove and the valley. The cove is on the right, the valley to the left. It contains gruesome truth, while the Happy Valley holds a pleasant lie. The cove is “dark and oppressive”, while the valley is bright and verdant (Du Maurier 126). The narrator says “birds did not sing [t]here as they did in the valley. It was quiet in a different way” (Du Maurier 175).

In contrast to the refuge the “Happy Valley” provides for Rebeca, Rasselas’ valley is a prison. It is Edenic — both in the sense that it provides infinite pleasure free from suffering and that once left it cannot be reentered. It is enclosed by “gates of iron, forged by the artificers of ancient days, so massy that no man could, without the help of engines, open or shut them” (Johnson, Samuel 8). Of course, these gates are for protection as well as containment. However, the valley provides only the “appearance of security and delight”, and its inhabitants are described as “volunteers for imprisonment” (Johnson, Samuel 10). Rasselas’ position within the Happy Valley is not unlike the narrator’s at Manderley: he is surrounded by “soft vicissitudes of pleasure”, but cannot appreciate them (Johnson, Samuel 12). Both are in positions of extreme privilege -- the Mistress of Manderley and a Prince of Abyssinia, respectively. Rasselas cannot be happy without the ability to compare his happiness with the “misery of others” (Johnson, Samuel 34). *Rebecca’s* protagonist cannot be truly happy until she believes Maxim loves her, which in turn is only possible once she knows of Rebecca’s evil.

The falseness of the joy in *Rasselas*' Happy Valley is equated to immaturity. Rasselas sees that others are happy in the valley, but that he is unhappy himself. He therefore rationalises that he is different to the other princes. He compares their state to animals in a field.

> I can discover within me no power of perception which is not glutted with its proper pleasure, yet I do not feel myself delighted. Man has surely some latent sense for which this place affords no gratification, or he has some desires distinct from sense which must be satisfied before he can be happy (Johnson, Samuel 15).

The unsatisfied desire which separates Rasselas from the beasts, seems to be human curiosity. He is not jealous of the animals' happiness, because it cannot be his own: "'Ye,' said he, 'are happy, and need not envy me that walk thus among you, burdened with myself; nor do I, ye gentle beings, envy your felicity; for it is not the felicity of man'" (Johnson, Samuel 15). Similarly, *Rebecca*'s narrator unhappily compares herself to Maxim's dog:

> 'That's what I do to Jasper,' I thought. 'I'm being like Jasper now, leaning against him. He pats me now and again, when he remembers, and I'm pleased, I get closer to him for a moment. He likes me in the way I like Jasper.' (Du Maurier 114)

Of course, this immaturity is far from happiness. Since Jasper is often her companion in the valley, the valley becomes associated with sub-human joy. In her relief at hearing that Maxim has arrived safely in London, she explodes with exuberance:

> And now this lightness of heart, this spring in my step, this childish feeling that I wanted to run across the lawn, and roll down the bank... [Jasper and I] went through the Happy Valley... the moss smelt rich and deep, and the bluebells were earthy, bitter. I lay down in the long grass beside the bluebells with my hands behind my head, and Jasper at my side. He looked down at me panting, his face foolish, saliva dripping from his tongue and his heavy jowl (Johnson, Samuel 169).

The drooling dog is a potent symbol of euphoric ignorance — mildly disgusting to its spectators.

Although they are superficially beautiful, both valleys hide a dark secret. *Rebecca*'s Happy Valley is a welcome distraction from the cove, implicitly concealing the memory of Rebecca's murder. *Rasselas*' valley keeps its inhabitants in ignorance to maintain bliss.

> [It] was built as if suspicion herself had dictated the plan. To every room there was an open and secret passage... Many of the columns had unsuspected cavities, in which a long race of monarchs had deposited their treasures. They then closed up the opening with marble, which was never to be removed but in the utmost exigences of the kingdom, and recorded their accumulations in a book, which was itself concealed in a tower, not entered but by the Emperor... (Johnson, Samuel 11)

This suspicion reveals a fear of knowledge itself. The only book in the valley is kept hidden, and the only stories of the outside lands call them "regions of calamity" (Johnson, Samuel 12). Coupled with its description as immature, this implies that a different happiness could be found with a greater understanding of the world — a mature contentment rather than euphoria. In Du Maurier's novel, *Rebecca*'s secret allies it with *Bluebeard*; Maxim has a very literal skeleton in his closet. However, it is Rebecca rather than Maxim who is the villain, and the revelation of her true nature is what repairs the protagonists' [2] relationship.

Eventually, Rasselas and *Rebecca*'s narrator outgrow the immaturity represented by their Valley. Rasselas escapes from the valley with the help of a flying machine, using exactly the sort of knowledge the valley tries to conceal. His escape is a triumph of mature rationality over enthusiasm. Maxim's wife makes a more sudden

[2] I.e. Maxim and his wife's

transformation. She starts by outgrowing the Happy Valley, settling into a sort of contentment:

> I did not feel in my holiday mood today, and I had no wish to go off with Jasper to the Happy Valley... The sense of freedom had departed, and the childish desire to run across the lawns in sand-shoes. I went and sat down with a book and The Times and my knitting in the rose-garden, domestic as a matron, yawning in the warm sun while the bees hummed amongst the flowers (Du Maurier 197)

But even this attenuated happiness is shattered when Maxim admits that he murdered Rebecca. A key moment of maturation comes just before the climax: Maxim and his wife know about the body found in the cove, but the narrator doesn't know its significance. She says, "I've grown up, Maxim, in twenty-four hours. I'll never be a child again" (Du Maurier 296). Maxim says, "Rebecca has won" and "we've lost our little chance at happiness" (Du Maurier 297). However, the revelation of Rebecca's malice removes the narrator from her shadow, repairing her relationship with Maxim:

> I was free now to be with Maxim, to touch him, and hold him, and love him. I would never be a child again. It would not be I, I, I any longer; it would be we, it would be us. We would be together. We would face this trouble together, he and I (Du Maurier 320).

After Maxim is miraculously cleared of charges, the two should be able to live happily ever after at Manderley. However, Mrs. Danvers burns the house to the ground — the "salt wind" that blows the ashes forming a final reminder of Rebecca (Du Maurier 428). On the final drive to Manderley, the fairy tale ending is symbolically shattered in a dream:

> Frith and Robert carried the tea into the library. The woman at the lodge nodded to me abruptly, and called her child into the house. I saw the model boats in the cottage in the cove and the feathery dust. I saw the cobwebs stretching from the little masts. I heard the rain upon the roof and the sound of the sea. I wanted to get to the

> Happy Valley and it was not there. There were woods about me, there was no Happy Valley. Only the dark trees and the young bracken. The owls hooted (Du Maurier 426).

Her inability to find the valley indicates that she and Maxim will not live in idealised, unfettered happiness. Instead, they settle into a "bare little hotel bedroom, comforting in its very lack of atmosphere" (Du Maurier 4).

In either case, what the Happy Valley offers is impermanent: joy rather than happiness. For Mrs. De Winter, the Happy Valley is an escape from Rebecca's ghostly influence — for Rasselas the valley holds only empty, childish, pleasure. *Rebecca*'s narrator is denied her rightful place as the mistress of Manderly, and leads a comparatively humble life after the narrative is over. In Rasselas' conclusion, "in which nothing is concluded", the main characters resolve to return to the Happy Valley, having failed to discover happiness outside (Johnson, Samuel 219). Johnson's conclusion, like Du Maurier's, seems to be that true, pure happiness is a myth held by the immature. As in the "Roses of Picardy"[3] in the final chapter of *Rebecca,* mature happiness is tinged with tragedy.

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[3] A popular WW I song, which describes love as a flower which endures hardship:
"And the roses will die with the summer time
And our roads may be far apart
But there's one rose that dies not in Picardy
'Tis the rose that I keep in my heart" ("Vintage Audio").

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