



The Problem of Happiness through Two French Novels (of the Extreme)

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FROM the philosophers of Greco-Roman antiquity like Socrates to those of the contemporary era, the idea of happiness remains a question and a quest; and its intrinsic character to the human race fixes it as an existential problem. The subject is the more secular and current as in the contemporary world, where the increase in the standard of living of individuals seems the alpha and the omega of the whole life, and we are encouraged to think well about accumulation-consumption. There exists, today, in our various societies - with the epicenter of the West - an absolute economic order "which proposes as the only prospect of the future happiness through material progress" (Philippe Forest, 1991: 31). So, in view of this idea, the eternal question of whether happiness lies in having comes back while posing with more acuteness. Georges Perec, in 1965, publishes *Les Choses*. In 2012, Grégoire Delacourt publishes *La Liste de mes envies*. Through reading these two novels, we can see that beyond the decades of gap between them, their intricacies are nourished by the intention of answering the preceding question in their own way, which is the title of this reflection. Despite the fact that they have been bestsellers, if we start from the premise that the bestsellers reveal the latent sensitivities of our societies, which would we choose? Happiness suggested in *Les Choses* of Perec or that in *La Liste de mes envies* of Delacourt?

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For any reader who conceives literature as a discourse on the world and its aspirations, the author wants to make himself understood. What the reader could learn as lessons of happiness after reading the last pages of these two fictional texts? To answer these two questions about these works, we have, while articulating the demonstration via three different points, put to contribution the hermeneutic approach.

Starting from the postulate that the whole text is a more or less conscious borrowing made by the author, the first point highlights the fact that the novels on which our study is based have the decor of the consumer society in the sense that Jean Baudrillard (1970) in his sociological essay puts the notion. It is clear that the both novels belong to the radius of all the writings and statements about the consumer society and the debates that the latter arouses. The relationship of events, the stories staged or told remind us of societies where "we attach greater importance to individual wealth, private property, the consumption of goods" (Gilles Bibeau 2009, p. 91). So the two texts are fictional discourses, a coherent set of signals, the comprehension of which requires a detour through materiality first. This extratextual deviation has prepared us to better understand what the authors express in terms of the problem of happiness as it is given, imagined, conceived and modified in the representations of industrial societies. Thus, in terms of consumer model presented as the secret of happiness, Percey and Delacourt come together. What makes them authors of the extreme contemporary is to believe that literature without overcoming suspicion and against the backdrop of formalist without purpose is doubtful to reconnect with the major issues of literary works (Dominique Viart and Bruno Vercier, 2008). Success, wealth, property, and consumption, in short materialism, are the thematic-narrative motifs of the two novels to the point where the reader is caught in fictional worlds, most often describing objects on which the characters fantasize.

Following the establishment of a causal relationship between the texts and the history or context of their appearance, the second articulation emphasizes the universe of signs that are the texts. It was discussed to enter the phenotext in order to highlight the role of their constitutive and structural elements. From the respective titles to the material objects which abound in the two novels, and passing through the epigraphs, we note an investment of the narration by the objects which nourish the dreams, the aspirations of possession or properties of the characters. In both novels, the protagonists are typical of their times. In other words, they are designed at the discretion of the human psychology of progressive societies. Through the prism of fantasized wealth, they see life in pink. We see in the projections of the romantic characters the human daydreams in general about the material possibilities, the sweetness or the

joy of living that fortune would provide. It is a long-standing representation, an everlasting reverie in which one likes to float the mentality of economic progress as the only guarantee of happiness. But then, is it enough to possess to be happy?

The above interrogation has become a classic cliché that hides a popular wisdom, an obvious truth that cannot be challenged, beyond time, regardless of the various improvements in the conditions of human life, and which always presents itself in an ineradicable way as a truth of the gospel, a moral principle that cannot be surpassed, an ontological necessity unalterable by man in his quest for well-being. The final articulation of the study, through the options and principles of simple life of certain characters, the dreams and the desires of others, gives a fresh thought to this almost stereotypical popular wisdom: happiness is not reduced to the simple fact of possessing, of having things materially - even though it is an impossibility to the extent that human desires change with the improvement of life, of production and of consumption. Thus, the novelist Delacourt staged a heroine named Jocelyne. She is a loving, simple woman who only demands sincerity, love, candor, trust, kindness, honesty, and delicacy in a world dominated by lies and chimeras of the principle of economic growth. The philosophy that guides it comes down to the idea that all things are vain and that there is money that never repairs. As for the main actancial figures of Perec, they have the shared consciousness between the sirens of frantic consumption and a life of freedom, carelessness and "little poverty" as Nietzsche argues (2005: 73). The end of the novel testifies to the difficulty of living in the modern world where the perpetual quest for progress eliminates spiritual life.

In the disillusionment of their characters, which are between internal conflicts, social, marital, love, departure in exile, the two novelists agree on the prospect of an evanescent happiness. The problem is the lack of favorable echoes against the desire for simplicity in a world dominated by material goods and the utopias of happiness that they shimmer. Be that as it may, it turns out that "today, the desire for more happiness to live in light continues to gain ground. It can be said without excessive optimism, but based on the mere observation of the facts, that a new thought provoked by the failure of Prometheus is being born with considering ecological and social realities more and more dramatically (Pierre Rabhi, *Op., Cit.*, 40). Perhaps it is time to put a brake on an essentially technical, urban and industrial civilization.

Keywords— novel, extreme contemporary, consumer society, representation, happiness.

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