

Introduction

In the contemporary bible of love language that is *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, Roland Barthes attempts to construct a discourse on the experience of love by embodying the voice of the loving subject. This discourse, necessarily fragmentary and incomplete, draws from literature as well as Barthes' own reflections to offer a theorisation of different facets of love. Yet the fragments do not offer a language of love's joy. Or rather, they suggest the impossibility of such a language. As he approaches love's fulfilment (*Comblement*), Barthes produces a negative discourse of love's joy:

Complements: on ne les dit pas – en sorte que, faussement, la relation amoureuse paraît se réduire à une longue plainte. C'est que, s'il est inconséquent de mal dire le malheur, en revanche, pour le bonheur, il paraîtrait coupable d'en abîmer l'expression: le moi ne discourt que blessé; lorsque je suis comblé ou me souviens de l'avoir été, le langage me paraît pusillanime: je suis *transporté*, hors du langage, c'est-à-dire hors du médiocre, hors du général.

Fulfilments: they are not spoken – so that, erroneously, the amorous relation seems reduced to a long complaint. This is because, if it is inconsistent to express suffering badly, on the other hand, with regards to happiness, it would seem culpable to spoil its expression: the ego discourses only when it is hurt; when I am fulfilled or remember having been so, language seems pusillanimous: I am *transported*, beyond language, i.e., beyond the mediocre, beyond the general.¹

The fulfilment of love silences the lover; it signals a transport to an extraordinary realm that exists beyond language. The language of love, according to Barthes, is a language of desire and frustration and cannot therefore accommodate joy: 'a fulfilled lover has no need to write, to transmit'.² The first-person discourse of love presupposes the absence of the loved object; the *Fragments* thus construct the voice of the loving

subject through his desire for an image of the other. In his section on love's 'ravishment', Barthes describes the act of falling in love as a 'hypnotic episode' where the subject is ravished by an apparition of the other and submits to the captivating image.³ The medieval language of love, which is the object of this book, similarly embodies a wounded subject, 'frustrated by unfulfillable desire for an image (phantasm or *other*)'.⁴ The lyrical language of the troubadours that revolutionises love poetry in the twelfth century is predicated on the deferral of fulfilment in the endless prolongation of desire. And yet it is, as this book will show, the place of birth of a specific discourse on love's joy, or *joie d'amour*, which will be continuously reinvented throughout the European Middle Ages.

The present study on the language of love's joy is grounded in the paradox that love's joy is beyond language. It traces a poetic and vernacular tradition from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries and spanning France, Italy and England, which originates in a lyrical language that, like Barthes' *Fragments*, presupposes the impossibility of a discourse of fulfilment. The troubadours' lyrics of *fin'amors*, which are the point of departure of this book, sing the absence of love's fulfilment and yet the troubadours are singers of joy. They sing of an insatiable desire which becomes joy itself. The troubadour Jaufré Rudel, famous singer of 'l'amour de loin', love from afar, operates a seamless shift from *desiring* a faraway love to *enjoying* it: 'e deziros d'amor de lonh,/que nulhs autres joys tan no'm play/Cum jauzimen d'amor de lonh' (44–46 'longing for a faraway love/since no other joy pleases me as much/as enjoying a faraway love').⁵ Love's joy here is not fulfilment but the enjoyment of desire. It is the phantasmatic nature of *fin'amors*, the form of love exalted by the troubadours, which allows a language of love that 'at once enjoys and defers, negates and affirms' its joy.⁶ This conception of love, as Giorgio Agamben has shown, relies on the medieval theory of phantasm, where the image of the other is first impressed sensorily and 'is then received by the phantasy, or imaginative virtue, which conserves it even in the absence of the object that has produced it'.⁷ The phantasm is stored in the lover's heart and thus outlasts the moment of vision in memory and desire. It is through this integration of memory and desire, of past and future, that the joy of love can exist without the accomplishment of desire. In the words of Jacques Lacan, 'le fantasme fait le plaisir propre au désir' ('the phantasm makes the pleasure proper to desire').⁸ The phantasmatic nature of love, epitomised in the allegorical lover of the *Roman de la Rose* who falls in love with the reflection of a rosebud glimpsed in Narcissus' fountain, is what characterises the language of *joie d'amour*. This book shows how this language of

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phantasmatic *joie d'amour* is first constructed in French and Occitan literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and how it is then adopted and transformed into the interconnected European literary traditions of the fourteenth century. It charts the changing semantics of love's joy – that is, the feeling of the real or imagined presence of the beloved – as it gets translated in new languages, integrated within narratives and confronted with intellectual discourses on happiness. By determining the main features of the medieval language of love's joy, such as its inherent lyricism and ability to arrest or escape linear narrative, its opposition to self-sufficiency and its excessive quality, I am able to trace its continuity and reinvention across different linguistic traditions and alternative vocabularies. Crucially, I show how fourteenth-century authors move beyond phantasm and onto transcendent and metaphysical realms to accommodate love's joy in a poetic and narrative language of desire.

The association of love poetry with desire, or what Lee Patterson has called the 'coextensive' nature of writing and complaint, the 'permanent link between poetry and loss', is deeply ingrained in medieval culture.⁹ But the equation goes deeper than that. In a religious culture where true joy can only be found in a lost Eden or a future heaven, human life – and language – amounts to a long complaint. In his essay on the vernacular language, *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante Alighieri suggests that all postlapsarian language is a form of lament. As he imagines what Adam's first words may have been, Dante sees only one possibility:

For if, since the disaster that befell the human race, the speech of every one of us has begun with 'woe!', it is reasonable that he who existed before should have begun with a cry of joy; and, since there is no joy outside God, but all joy is in God and since God Himself is joy itself, it follows that the first man to speak should first and before all have said 'God'. (I.iv.4)¹⁰

Dante argues that the first human word was one of joy, a joy that belongs not to the uttering subject but to the ultimate other, God. The equation of human joy with God suggests its alterity: if there is no joy outside of God, every human joy is, somehow, other and exterior. Joy represents the complete lack of self-awareness that constitutes prelapsarian fulfilment and communion with the beloved Other. After the Fall, language becomes an expression of sadness and desire for that lost state. Dante's theory of language implies that joy, as union with the divine, does not belong to human language. All language of joy thus suggests an impossibility; it must express its own ineffability and therefore always evokes a form of transcendence, of the human language and of the self. Within the earthly

condition of desire, every joy is a glimpse of a long-lost memory of plenitude and a hopeful anticipation of a faraway, future state of union. The language of joy must therefore also express a form of atemporality as it escapes the linear narrative of human desire.

In his spiritual memoir recounting his experience of being ‘Surprised by Joy’ – and by the Christian faith – C. S. Lewis exposes the non-linearity of joy’s temporality: ‘All Joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still “about to be”.’¹¹ Lewis defines joy as an imaginative experience but one which he distinguishes from ‘fantasies’. Although it belongs to his own imaginative life, joy is not self-constructed; it cannot be controlled nor premeditated. It is triggered by music or books or nature, and through the memory of these triggers. Joy, for Lewis, is out of ordinary life, ‘in another dimension’ and, unlike pleasure, ‘never in our power’.¹² Crucially, and like the troubadours’ joy, it is not satisfaction but an unsatisfied desire. As a desire that is ‘itself desirable’, joy ‘makes nonsense of our common distinction between having and wanting. There, to have is to want and to want is to have.’¹³ Eventually, in this stabbing joy that disrupts notions of desire and fulfilment, anticipation and memory, Lewis recognises a want for ‘something other, outside, not you or any side of you’. Joy points towards the ‘road out of the self’, this ‘region of awe’, this absolute Other.¹⁴ In recognising joy as his desire for spirituality and religion, for ‘something other and outer’, Lewis equates joy to a form of love – one which does not, at first, have a clear object. Like in Dante’s theory of language, joy is both the origin and the desired end of spiritual love and of the human language of desire. In the medieval literature of love surveyed in this book, joy indeed appears to be always past or future, found in the phantasmatic conjunction of memory and desire. But love’s joy, especially when found in actual union rather than phantasm, also escapes or transcends the language of desire.

Roland Barthes, in failing to write love’s *complements*, suggests the excessive and overflowing nature of joy. While the term *complement*, like *fulfilment*, refers to the act of filling in, of becoming full and complete, love’s fulfilment is not about being filled but overflowed. Barthes defines love’s joy not as the satisfaction of desire, but as what exceeds one’s every desire.¹⁵ This form of excess is what Barthes elsewhere names *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is different from pleasure because instead of contentment and self-consistency, it represents a rapture and loss of self.¹⁶ Here too therefore, in the context of human, sexual love, joy acts as a signal of the transcendent. In defining *jouissance*, Barthes in fact repeatedly turns to the fourteenth-century Flemish mystic John Ruusbroec. The mystic

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provides Barthes with a language of joy as transport, excess and annihilation. Ruusbroec belongs to the apophatic tradition of mysticism or ‘negative theology’. The apophatic discourse is a model of theology that accepts the unknowability and unnameability of God and the transcendent and that performs it through a form of ‘unstable and dynamic discourse’ where ‘any saying . . . demands . . . an unsaying’.¹⁷ In the apophatic tradition, the subject typically does not seek to understand and define the transcendent but to love and merge with it in an act of self-transcendence. One key actor of the medieval apophatic tradition is the French beguine Marguerite Porete. In a book that will lead her to be condemned for heresy and burned at the stake, she writes the union of the soul with God as a swimming and merging into joy: ‘et si nage et flue en joye, sans sentir nulle joye, car elle demoure en Joye, et Joye demoure en elle’ (‘and so she swims and flows in joy without feeling any joy, for she dwells in joy and joy dwells in her’).¹⁸ For Porete, as for Ruusbroec, the act of self-loss in union with the Other is an entering into ineffable and excessive joy. Instead of being contained within the body, the joy of love becomes the place in which the soul floats. The mystical joy of union conceptualises a ‘permeable self’: instead of a filling of the bounded self, love’s joy exceeds and permeates the self which is ‘both container and contained’.¹⁹ The language of entering joy used by Porete suggests love’s joy’s excessive nature – it exists beyond the self – as well as the notion of complete union, or ‘coinherence’, which characterises both the spiritual and secular languages of love.²⁰ The present book shows how the secular language of love’s joy shapes its own apophatic discourse of love’s joy, the ineffable feeling of love’s union, and thus presents joy as an important point of convergence between divine and carnal love. As the human feeling of the transcendent, love’s joy works as a hinge between the physical and the spiritual, between erotic and mystical concepts of fulfilment.

The alterity and transcendence of joy – its capacity to exceed the self – is what distinguishes it from both pleasure and happiness. In a 2013 essay, British author Zadie Smith wonders what joy is. It is not, she argues, simply a more intense version of pleasure, but something else entirely, an emotion that ‘doesn’t fit with the everyday’. In her attempt at defining it, she lists the rare episodes which she has identified as joy. The one she describes in most details happens in a club, on ecstasy:

I took the man’s hand. The top of my head flew away. We danced and danced. We gave ourselves up to joy. . . . Was that joy? Probably not. But it mimicked joy’s conditions pretty well. It included, in minor form, the great

struggle that tends to precede joy, and the feeling – once one is ‘in’ joy – that the experiencing subject has somehow ‘entered’ the emotion, and disappeared. I ‘have’ pleasure, it is a feeling I want to experience and own. A beach holiday is a pleasure. A new dress is a pleasure. But on that dance floor I *was* joy, or some small piece of joy, with all these other hundreds of people who were also a part of joy.²¹

While pleasure is a sensory gratification, something one can acquire and have, joy is not had but results from a surrender of the self to the emotion. Like with Marguerite Porete’s sea of joy, the emotion is a place exterior to the self that the subject enters and turns into. For Zadie Smith, this out-of-body experience is not accessed through mystical union but through drugs and communion. In both cases, joy results from an altered state of consciousness and a feeling of union with others. It also comes after a struggle because joy is perceived as a grace, a relief and release from torment. Smith realises that this egoless experience may have only been an imitation of joy when she is confronted with what she identifies as true joys, always caused by the love she feels for her husband and her child. She ends her essay by pondering on this ‘human madness’ that is love’s joy, a joy that rests on something whose eventual loss is a certitude. This is the particularity of joy and what distinguishes it from happiness, whose invention in classical philosophy coincides with a quest for a pleasure that cannot be lost, found in the action of virtue.²² Smith’s writing of joy as a drug-induced state of evasion and intimacy goes against the discourse of happiness as a practice of self-sufficiency and self-help; joy is found in a loss of self, an abandonment to its precarity.

Where Is the Joy? A Review of Literature

The cultural and literary history of joy remains understudied. While the recent and ongoing scholarly activity around emotions has produced a great number of studies on different emotions in medieval culture and literature, joy remains conspicuously absent.²³ Medievalists have thus done little to dispel ‘the popular stigma of a joyless era in which only violence, plague, and suffering took place’.²⁴ More broadly, Darrin McMahon has diagnosed a ‘negative bias’ in the field of emotion history, one that rests on ‘the belief, nourished in Western culture at least, by centuries of Christian reflection, that pain is deep and ennobling, and that pleasure, where not sinful, is often shallow and trite’.²⁵ There is something indecent about the expression of joy: while melancholy has long been heralded as a mark of genius, joy evokes the foolishness and naivety of unreality. Charles

Baudelaire, the quintessential melancholy poet, thus offers, in *Fusées*, a personal definition of beauty that is correlated with sadness: 'Je ne prétends pas que la Joie ne puisse pas s'associer avec la Beauté, mais je dis que la Joie [en] est un des ornements les plus vulgaires, tandis que la Mélancolie en est pour ainsi dire l'illustre compagne, à ce point que je ne conçois guère . . . un type de Beauté où il n'y ait pas du *Malheur*' ('I do not claim that Joy cannot belong to Beauty, but I affirm that Joy is one of its more vulgar ornaments, while Melancholy is its illustrious companion, so much so that I cannot conceive of a type of Beauty in which there is no Misery').²⁶ This glorification of melancholy as the source of beauty and poetic inspiration may be at the root of the intellectual snubbing of joy. Such preconceived notions of the triviality of joy, I argue, ignore its particular power, explored throughout this book, to expand the self beyond its limits and to act as a bridge between human feeling and spiritual transcendence.

It is outside of the field of emotion history, and inspired by similar movements in the fields of psychology, politics and economy, that happiness studies have started to approach the history of positive emotions.²⁷ The eudaimonic turn in literature, as James O. Pawelski and D. J. Moores define it, is an approach that goes against the common critical attitude of suspicion towards the representation of happiness in literature, an attitude that sees happy stories as 'intellectually lightweight because they lack the seriousness of actual life'.²⁸ While the present book relates to this happiness turn in that it argues for the need to take positive emotions at face value, I believe that an exploration of joy cannot inhere within happiness studies. Pawelski and Moores frame their approach within a practical effort to help shape individual and global policies on happiness by producing knowledge on the 'causes and constituents of well-being'.²⁹ In a more recent volume participating in this eudaimonic turn, the editors explain their interest in 'regimes of happiness' as correlated with notions of social success. Regimes of happiness represent different social configurations of the ethical goal of personal happiness, defined here primarily as Aristotelian *eudaimonia* – that is, as a self-sufficient act of virtue that is key to self-determination.³⁰ Such a framework is not fit for the study of joy which either runs counter to or exists outside of patterns of personal and collective productivity.

As I will argue in the first chapter of this book, the philosophical definition of happiness as both an act of human flourishing and the end goal of human desire is in opposition with the language of joy, which is neither an act nor an end, but a gift of love. While joy tests linguistic expression, happiness is the frequent object of scientific discourses where it

is defined, measured and quantified. From that of classical philosophy, it has entered the modern discourses of positive psychology and self-help, which have turned happiness into a 'performance indicator' and an individual responsibility.³¹ The modern industry of happiness markets it as a form of self-fashioning.³² Joy, on the other hand, as Zadie Smith's essay intimates, might be seen as an escape from the injunction of happiness. It is an egoless release, and, crucially, is not found in self-sufficiency but in the love one carries for others. Joy is by definition precarious: it is joy because it is fragile and ephemeral, because it can be lost. Against a theory of happiness as self-development and personal responsibility, this book presents a language of joy which suggests a lack of agency in complete surrender to love and the other.

In opposing joy to happiness, I am indebted to Adam Potkay, the one scholar to have studied the history of joy in literature. He argues: 'Happiness insofar as it harkens back to ancient eudaimonism, is opposed to the loss of self that is always, to some degree, involved in joy.'³³ In his literary and intellectual history of joy, *The Story of Joy: From the Bible to Late Romanticism*, he explores joy's numerous paradoxes, which are grounded in this 'commonplace of European literature', joy's ineffability.³⁴ The story of joy, he shows, is that of the gratuitous and always surprising experience of reunion, or its anticipation. In this joy of union, the boundaries between self and other, between self and world dissolve, so much so that Potkay describes joy's paradoxical nature as both a loss of self and a narcissistic instinct to 'sense everything as one's (non)-self: joy is a feeling of interconnectedness rather than self-awareness.'³⁵ Potkay also advances joy as a fitter object of narrative than happiness, which tends to foreclose narrative possibilities.³⁶ He claims that joy 'requires a narrative context' and is 'enmeshed in storytelling'.³⁷ My study of the medieval language of love's joy instead suggests poetry and lyricism as the privileged vectors of joy. The non-linear, not end-oriented quality of lyrics makes them better suited for the atemporal nature of joy described earlier in this introduction. Instead of uncovering a *story* of joy, I argue that one crucial feature of the language of joy is that it exceeds linear narrative. The present book situates the genesis of the language of love's joy in medieval European literature in the lyrical language of the troubadours. The lyrical language of phantasmatic joy that they construct will influence poets for centuries and pervade even narrative works where love's joy somehow always seems to arrest time in lyrical stasis.

Medieval scholarship has long recognised the centrality of Occitan *joï* in Provençal lyrics and the adoption of the lyrical concept of *joie d'amour* into

narrative poetry. The semantic and literary study of the ambiguous Occitan *joi* and, to a lesser extent, Old French *joie* constitutes an old and perhaps old-fashioned critical tradition.³⁸ This interest, however, has been confined to the French literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The ‘intellectualisation of love poetry’ in the fourteenth century, which sees the integration of philosophical discourse into the vernacular language of love, may have thwarted the recognition of the continued centrality of the joy of love.³⁹ The concept of joy in medieval literature more broadly has thus not garnered significant interest nor has the scholarly tradition on *joie d’amour* been picked up by the field of emotion history or by more recent studies on medieval love literature.⁴⁰ The scholarship that has approached earthly happiness and joy in medieval literature has done so by analysing them through philosophical discourse.⁴¹ Jessica Rosenfeld’s study of the ethics of enjoyment traces the influence of Aristotle’s philosophy of human perfect happiness on medieval European love poetry. Spanning from the *Roman de la Rose* to Chaucer, her study is interested in the ‘enjoyment that acknowledges the overlap between the philosophical pursuit of happiness and the happiness pursued by lovers’.⁴² Rosenfeld’s concept of *enjoyment*, which she chooses as her main object because it encompasses ‘Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, vernacular “joy”, Christian *fruitio*, and even Lacanian *jouissance*’, is helpful in considering the multiplicity of discourses that converge in the writing of earthly love, yet problematic in the way it fuses philosophical happiness and vernacular ‘joy’.⁴³ She argues that the ‘aristotelianizing’ of Boethius in the later Middle Ages allows for philosophical happiness to be more earthly and more human.⁴⁴ This secularisation of happiness does not, however, imply its capacity to become aligned with erotic joy. Quite on the contrary, this book argues, the confrontation of philosophical happiness with love’s joy in the erotic literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries rather results in the opposition of the two concepts. The study of the language of love’s joy is therefore crucial in that it stands at the crux of philosophical, spiritual and secular discourses on love, and on humans’ last end, while, at the same time, forming its own original literary and emotional discourse.

The psychoanalytical trend of scholarship in medieval studies is another field in which the functioning of desire and enjoyment is addressed. L. O. Aranye Fradenburg has studied Chaucer in light of Lacanian *jouissance*, as she explores sacrifice as a form of enjoyment and the pleasure taken in negative emotions.⁴⁵ *Jouissance* in this context is what lies beyond the pleasure taken in suffering for love; it is pure sacrifice and ‘total and destructive loss of self’.⁴⁶ Simon Gaunt argues that the troubadours’

courtly lyric gestures towards *jouissance* and that the fantasised (or realised) ideal of a 'shared death' in love, visible, for example, in Tristan's and Lancelot's martyrdoms, also tends towards *jouissance*. While there is something of this *jouissance* in *joie d'amour*, especially in its fantasy of self-loss in total union with the beloved, psychoanalytical studies of medieval literature have used *jouissance* to explore the themes of sacrificial desire, martyr-like suffering and masochistic pleasure, not joy. My study is thus sensible to the concept of *jouissance*, especially in Barthes' definition as mystical, excessive joy, but suggests that vernacular joy, as opposed to classical or modern theoretical notions such as *eudaimonia*, *enjoyment* or *jouissance*, is the key to understanding medieval conceptions of love's fulfilment. Through an assessment of the European, vernacular languages of love's joy that is cognisant of intellectual discourses on happiness, the present study offers a serious intervention on how we read joy in the period. The multilingual and *longue durée* approach of this study reveals the continuity of the prevalence of love's joy in fourteenth-century European literature and on to the early modern period.

By tracing the literary history of medieval love's joy, what I am uncovering is a cultural and literary language rather than a 'real' emotion. The field of emotion history has often debated the nature of emotion and of its historical recoverability. While it is not my intention here to offer a definition of medieval emotion, my study is indebted to scholars who have highlighted the interconnectedness of the somatic, the affective and the cognitive in medieval affective processes. Historians have shown the complex ways in which emotions were theorised in ancient and medieval thought, nuancing any strict opposition between reason and emotion.⁴⁷ Emotions were thought to be caused either by sensory stimuli or by mental processes and had in turn both physiological and cognitive effects, participating in the activity of the intellectual will. Literary scholar Corinne Saunders has also demonstrated the 'integration of thinking and feeling' in medieval thought and how this integration is key to our reading of emotions in medieval literature.⁴⁸ In the introduction to their volume *Medieval Affect, Feeling, Emotion*, Holly Crocker and Glenn Burger have argued for an approach to medieval emotions which intersects the theoretical concepts of 'affect', understood as a prelinguistic, somatic intensity, 'emotion', which is conscious and socially inscribed, and 'feeling', a term that bridges sensory, affective and cognitive experience.⁴⁹ This last term is favoured by emotion scholar and medievalist Sarah McNamer because 'it serves as a reminder of the integration of the somatic, affective, and cognitive in a pre-Cartesian universe ("to feel" can mean "to know"; see