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ETHICS AND LITERATURE IN *MOMENTS OF UNNOTICED HAPPINESS*
A PERSPECTIVE FROM EVERYDAY AESTHETICS[1]

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the complex relationship between ethics and literature by applying the perspective of everyday aesthetics, a branch of philosophy. Focusing on Francesco Piccolo's fiction work, *Moments of Unnoticed Happiness* (2012), we argue that the protagonist adopts an Aristotelian-based ethical stance, viewing happiness as a path to well-being and finding significance in life. Additionally, the character embraces an aesthetic attitude toward the nuances of daily existence, aligning with the theoretical framework of everyday aesthetics. This framework expands the scope of aesthetic experiences beyond traditional art domains, emphasizing a transformative shift in perception. We use these concepts to illustrate how engaging with the ordinary enhances personal well-being.

KEYWORDS
Ethics, literature, everyday aesthetics, fiction

1. INTRODUCTION

For decades, the relationship between ethics and literature has been a central topic in the analyses conducted by moral philosophers and literary critics. Studies have focused on elucidating, for example, whether fiction acquires its validity insofar as it addresses socially accepted moral codes in its narrated world, or whether the aesthetic quality of a literary piece is the only evaluation standard for making any judgments about it. The results of such studies have given rise to a debate in which ethics and aesthetics seem to be opposed in the appraisal of works of literature.

[1] This paper is one of the outcomes of the research project on *Everyday Aesthetics and Literature*, which was conducted at the Research Center in Communication (CIC) of the Universidad of Medellín in Colombia.

On one hand, texts of moral significance that possess weak aesthetic components are subject to negative evaluation regarding their literary value, as exemplified by critics of the works of author Pablo Coelho (Andrade, 2004). On the other hand, a fictional narrative that deviates from accepted ethical stances, yet boasts noteworthy aesthetic qualities, is often praised, as is the case with the bold expressions found in Charles Bukowski's works (Brie, 2008). Similarly, theoretical frameworks exploring the relationship between ethics and literature have sought to address the question of whether literature enhances readers' ethical understanding of the world. Responses to this question have aligned with the perspective proposed by Nussbaum. According to Nussbaum (1997), narratives not only present vivid imagery that enables readers to envision fictional worlds but also, more significantly, furnish a comprehensive intellectual framework for engaging with the real world. In this view, fictions enrich readers' moral understanding, and provides insights into ethical behavior within society (74).

This perspective, however, is discredited by critics who dismiss it outright for the lack of evidence that proves the recurrence of such improvement because of reading novels (Currie, 2016; 2013). It is also argued that an ethical critique of literature is forced, as the analysis of moral categories is an excessive simplification of the understanding of the fundamental issues of the text (Posner, 1997). From this latter standpoint, literature, as discussed by certain 19th-century authors like Flaubert, Gautier, the Goncourt brothers, Leconte de Lisle, and others, is characterized by what they termed *l'art pour l'art*, as described by Cassagne (1997). Carroll (2000) further labels this concept as an *autonomy argument*, asserting that artworks are valuable in and of themselves, without serving ulterior purposes like moral enlightenment or self-improvement (p. 351).

The current paper sets aside the previously mentioned debate as our purpose is to describe how the ethical attitude of a fictional character is linked to everyday aesthetics. We do not resort to ideas that attempt to explain how literature improves the reader's morality or those that evaluate the quality of a literary text based on its ethical factors. We are on the side of recognizing that literature, in certain cases, as Posner (1997) articulates drawing from Nietzschean ideas, assists us in becoming who we already are: "The characters and situations that interest us in literature are for the most part characters and situations that capture aspects of ourselves and our situation" (p. 20). No ethical virtue or deficiency determines, thus, whether a literary text is aesthetically better or worse. For this reason, neither the author's intentionality nor the effect on readers falls within the scope of this study. The primary focus of reflection will be on *what* is narrated and *how* it is presented.

The approach adopted, therefore, corresponds to an interpretive analysis of the diegetic content of a work of fiction: *Moments of Unnoticed Happiness*[2] (Piccolo, 2012). The thesis stated here proposes that the main character of the story, who is also the narrator, reflects an ethical behavior (which involves making choices and taking actions that reflect a commitment to doing what is considered right and morally upright within a given context or ethical framework) driven by the search for and experimentation of happy moments in his daily life. The protagonist's moral[3] impulse is framed within the postulates of everyday aesthetics, which inquire into the aesthetic experience in daily life, outside the realm of art. Among the proposals of this discipline is an invitation to look at the world in a distinct way, to direct perception habits towards personal well-being and improvement.

Based on these considerations, we suggest that within the examined text, the realms of everyday aesthetics and ethics intricately intersect through the behavior of a character who encounters moments of happiness in his everyday existence. Drawing from Lamarque's (2021) ideas, our analysis incorporates both an internal and external perspective. The internal perspective treats the character's actions as those of a real person within the tangible world. On the other hand, the external perspective highlights the significance of these actions in shaping the narrative structure. Thus, the main character in *Moments of Unnoticed Happiness* (Piccolo, 2012) exemplifies the universal human desire to pursue happiness through his actions. Meanwhile, each narrated situation is framed in a fragmented diegetic structure, intended to convey the ordinary as a source of happy moments. This enables us to analyze the intersection of literature, ethics, and everyday aesthetics, while also considering the aesthetic qualities of a fictional text. Consequently, Piccolo's (2012) book is not judged based on ethical or aesthetic validity; it

[2] For this analysis, the book was read in its Spanish version: *Momentos de inadvertida felicidad.* As of today, an English version of the work does not exist, therefore, all quotes from the text and its title are translations made by the author of this paper.

[3] In our discussion, we distinguish between morality, which relates to broader societal contexts, and ethics, which pertains to personal thought processes and decision-making. However, these terms are often used interchangeably due to an ongoing debate over their precise distinctions. Some philosophers argue that ethics concerns individual conduct, while morality is about conforming to societal norms. Others reverse this distinction, suggesting that ethics operates in the social sphere, while morality involves personal beliefs. Ortiz Millán (2016) contends that no inherent etymological or historical distinction exists between "ethics" and "morality." Their meanings depend on how they are used, and there is no universally agreed-upon singular meaning for either term (p. 115).

is studied as an example of how ideas of everyday aesthetics can manifest in the ethical behavior of a literary character.

2. ETHICS AND EVERYDAY AESTHETICS

The complex relationship between ethics and aesthetics has long been a contentious topic among scholars of philosophy. Traditionally, ethics and aesthetics were viewed as separate fields of inquiry, however, Nietzsche (2000) and Foucault (1991) argue that they are fundamentally linked. While ethics concerns moral behavior and decision-making, aesthetics has been mainly associated with the perception of beauty and art. These philosophers contend that the individual's existence is the *locus* of this connection, as ethical or moral actions within a social context are intertwined with one's ability to appreciate and interpret beauty and art. Nietzsche's (2000) aesthetic approach to ethical thinking becomes evident when he articulates, within his practical conception of philosophy, that "the philosopher's most genuine product is her life, which is her work of art and, as such, is turned both towards the one who created it and towards other human beings" (p. 187)[4]. For his part, Foucault (1991) refers to the notion of the *aesthetics of existence* when he expresses his interest in "the idea of *bios* as the material of an aesthetic work of art" (p. 192). For that reason, the concept of life as a *work of art* represents a pivotal idea where ethics and aesthetics come together.

Nevertheless, in the context of everyday aesthetics, the connection to art from diverse perspectives assumes a secondary role, as the primary focus centers on the aesthetic encounters within everyday life. Simultaneously, the broad notion of *life* becomes more specific in the sphere of *daily* existence. Due to its particular emphasis on the ordinary, the discipline of everyday aesthetics recognizes the intrinsic bond between ethics, and aesthetics. Its principal aim is to delve into the aesthetic dimensions permeating individuals' daily lives. This discipline highlights the potential of commonplace, routine, and seemingly mundane elements—such as spaces, homes, food, work, weather, social relationships, clothing, and urban paths, among others—as apt settings for experiencing aesthetics in everyday life (Light & Smith, 2005; Melchionne, 2017). Furthermore, it also asserts that within the realm of everyday life, specific situations arise where ethical relationships, decisions, or attitudes find their foundation in everyday aesthetics. Regarding this matter, Shusterman (1999) has theorized on the enhancement of life experiences by changing one's relationship with the body. Saito (2007) has proposed an ethical-aesthetic way of life that is sensitive to the daily decisions made by

[4] All referenced quotations from sources in languages other than English are the author's own translations.

the people. Mandoki (2006) has demanded recognition of the *aesthetic pain* caused under the conditions of capitalism. Berleant (1999) has emphasized the intrinsic value of each person from a social aesthetics standpoint. Haapala (1999) has proposed that place is the central stage for ethics and aesthetics, and Leddy (2012) has suggested a kind of religious reawakening, alike to Heidegger's call to listen to Being.

The perspectives of these two latter philosophers serve as guiding principles for the analysis we undertake here. As noted above, Haapala (1999) advances the notion of *place* as the space in which the differentiating components of ethics and aesthetics lose their boundaries and come together in unison: "When living in a place -or more existentially, when living a place- we are rooted to our surroundings in such a way that both our aesthetic and moral judgments are determined by the deep ties that we have developed" (p. 254). The concept of place emerges within the domain of everyday life, encompassing spaces characterized by routine and familiarity. Specifically, these spaces include, among others, the home, office, school, workplaces, the city, and the neighborhood. Within these immediate settings, individuals, from an ethical standpoint, ascribe significance to their existence in relation to the world, thereby imbuing it with meaning: "I have a place in the sense that I have a relationship to humans, to different things and events around me. My place is meaningful and significant for me because I have construed different kinds of relations to entities surrounding me" (Haapala, 1999, p. 258). The ethical and aesthetic value of a place is validated as the individual is existentially bound to it: "My place defines my way of existing and any change in the place has some consequences for my existence" (Haapala, 1999, p. 263).

It is crucial to recognize that the aesthetic component is inherently subjective, devoid of conformity to standardized norms that establish the aesthetic quality of places, objects, relationships, or attitudes towards the world. Rather, it takes into consideration *appreciative judgments* (Margolis, 1980) that arise from the multifaceted personal circumstances of the individual: "The actual (the minimally describable) properties of an object are 'filtered' through the personal tastes and sensibilities of the agent judging" (p. 223). On the other hand, the ethical component manifests itself significantly when the place becomes an integral part of an individual's existence, particularly if it facilitates the pursuit and attainment of personal happiness and well-being. The emphasis, therefore, lies in acknowledging Aristotle's (2003) conception that the goal of his ethical proposition is the realization of happiness. In the context of everyday aesthetics, nonetheless, Aristotelian thought is reinterpreted through the insights of Leddy (2014). Leddy proposes that while Aristotle (2003) considers happiness as a contemplative activity centered on truth (p. 245), "one could see it more pragmatically as an activity in which the contemplative aspect might well be aesthetic" (Leddy, 2014, p. 39).

Within the scope of the theory of everyday aesthetics, however, the appreciative judgments described by Margolis (1980) are further elucidated in Leddy's (2020) exploration of the concept of wonder. Leddy (2020) posits that when "objects, places, events, or relationships elicit aesthetic qualities such as beauty, grace, or elegance, it is because they have been experienced with a sense of wonder, which arises from their *aura* condition" (400). The aesthetic qualities are not intrinsic to the objects themselves, but rather, as Leddy (1995) alleges in an earlier work, they are "experienced properties" (p. 7). Different from Benjamin's (2003) approach to the concept of aura, which presents it as "the feeling of uniqueness, authenticity, and inaccessibility traditionally associated with original works of art" (pp. 47-48), Leddy (2020) assumes it as the possibility of establishing a relationship with everyday life through aesthetics. In this relationship, the everyday is perceived in an impressive, fascinating, or interesting way through wonder. That is, the aura arises to the extent that the entity is experienced with wonder, and wonder surpasses, in this case, its mere relationship with the strange, to delve into the component of admiration. Thus, to admire implies a special liking for something or someone that stands out for their extraordinary qualities. The condition of extraordinary arises to the extent that the thing is experienced aesthetically, not because it loses its character of habituality or commonality. This is the effect when someone becomes captivated by the contemplation of a well-cultivated garden, the shadows of trees on the street, or rabbits in an urban garden. These phenomena frequently appear in Leddy's everyday journey (Leddy, 2020, pp. 400, 407, 421), and evoke his admiration when observed with wonder. The "extra" additional aspect incorporated into the ordinary condition relates to the subjective perspective of the individual, rather than the uniqueness of the object or entity beyond the realm of ordinary.

Given this, aesthetic experiences have the potential to manifest in various settings, transcending spatial and temporal constraints, and including a wide range of objects and situations. The actualization of these experiences depends on an individual's adoption of a suitable attitude—marked by qualities like imagination, consciousness, and benevolence—all within an aesthetic framework that aligns with the pursuit of happiness and well-being. It explores how, starting from a sense of wonder, adopting an aesthetic perspective, or reflecting on everyday life as an attitude can lead to an impressive, fascinating, or interesting connection with the world. This connection, moreover, evolves into an ethical posture that seeks to cultivate happiness in specific moments of daily life. Therefore, everyday aesthetics assumes a profound ethical significance, as the aesthetic dimension of a human life is intimately tied to the presence or absence of happiness (Leddy, 2014, p. 30). Happiness, thus, emerges as a shared foundation for both ethics and aesthetics. The former finds support in the Aristotelian idea, where "the pursuit of virtuous actions contributes to personal happiness" (Aristóteles, 2003, p. 41).

The latter draws inspiration from Baumgarten's aesthetic theory, specifically the notion of the *felix aestheticus,* which establishes a connection between aesthetics and the individual's pursuit of increased happiness through the cultivation and application of aesthetic knowledge (as cited in Kuisma et al., p. 13).

In our subsequent analysis, we build, in addition, upon Seligman's (2011) framework, which establishes a clear connection between happiness and well-being. In this context, happiness extends beyond a single positive emotion; it includes a spectrum of positive emotional experiences, such as joy, contentment, amusement, a sense of delight, and hope, among others. Based on Seligman's (2011) theory, happiness is recognized as a constituent component of the factors contributing to well-being, which also comprise engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (p. 16).

3. ETHICS AND LITERATURE IN *MOMENTS OF UNNOTICED HAPPINESS*

When reading, interpreting, and comprehending literary texts, our inquiry revolves, in this specific analysis, around whether the particularities of a fragment or the entirety of a narrative align with a framework that prioritizes everyday aesthetics as a central concern within the characters or narrative voice. This pertinence should be demonstrated through its contribution to the overall or partial meaning of the text, as well as the ethical stances of the characters and the narrator's perspective. These elements indicate the quests and discoveries of vital significance that, from an ethical-aesthetic standpoint, appear to enhance the characters' lives by experiencing happiness within the confines of the author's imagined world.

Taking these factors into consideration, we conduct an analysis of *Moments of Unnoticed Happiness*, a narrative literary work by Italian author Francesco Piccolo (2012). This text defies categorization within traditional literary genres due to its content, which is interwoven with a serendipitous combination of phrases, thoughts, and micro-stories. The narrative unfolds through a narrator-protagonist character, whose primary aim is to articulate the supposedly unexpected joy derived from the pleasurable moments encountered during his daily life in the summer setting of Rome, Italy.

Piccolo's (2012) work facilitates a profound comprehension of some of the aesthetic idiosyncrasies of everyday existence. It establishes a harmonious relationship between its narrative and the philosophical theory that elucidates everyday aesthetic as a field of inquiry. It is significant to note that the mere inclusion of aspects of daily life as subject matter in a novel, short story, poem, painting, or film does not automatically classify them as exemplars of everyday aesthetics. The crux of the latter, within the sphere of an aesthetic text, lies not solely in the artistic portrayal of the realm of the *world of life*

(poiesis) but rather in the contemplation of how someone engages with daily life in an aesthetic manner. This engagement is often underpinned by ethical motivations. Piccolo's (2012) work achieves this by portraying a narrator-protagonist character[5] in a specific setting. Through this character's perceptive lens, an astonishing connection with his daily circumstances is established. Because of this unique perspective, things acquire a heightened vitality, reality, presence, and interconnectedness, ultimately evoking a sense of happiness. In other words, they attain a greater significance and possess an aura (Leddy, 2020). Consequently, everyday aesthetics places emphasis on the experiential aspect of events, objects, relationships, spaces, or situations, rather than exclusively focusing on their inherent qualities. They need not be obligated to possess beauty, but rather, individuals tend to positively appraise them due to their aesthetic and ethical values, endowing their existence (Haapala, 1999).

This way of astonishingly approaching daily phenomena is, in some cases, accompanied by imagination. This is inferred when, during the summer, the character of *Moments of Unnoticed Happiness* (Piccolo, 2012) -hereafter *Moments*- observes the city from his apartment window and, in his imagination, conceives the day in what he calls "three movements" (p. 91). The first of them takes place in the morning. He sees two elderly women leaving a house every day who walk very slowly, but one of them always passes the other by ten meters. They walk, and when they return, the protagonist is amazed to see them keeping the same distance. The second movement takes place in the afternoon. This happens when he sees Angela, a neighbor for whom he has always felt attracted. The woman usually carries a large bag hanging from her shoulder, and the character is intrigued to know what kinds of things she carries in it. The third movement occurs at night when the streets surrounding his residence become empty and silent. Suddenly, these streets are filled with men on motorcycles and parked cars. Within minutes, dozens of female employees leave the huge stores around to board the vehicles waiting for them.

The protagonist harbors the belief that his daily observations bestow a sense of meticulous order upon these occurrences. He claims that: “If my gaze suddenly disappears from them, I could be responsible for everything on this street changing, getting confused, getting lost" (Piccolo, 2012, p. 96). In this context, imagination assumes the role of orchestrator, manipulating the unfolding of the day as if it were a theatrical production divided into three acts. This creative reimagining is not contingent upon a linear progression of events; instead, the character underscores the *precision* (first movement), the *intrigue* (second movement), and the *choreographed motions* (third

[5] Due to the dual role of the main character as both protagonist and narrator, we will use the terms protagonist, character, and narrator interchangeably to refer to this figure throughout the text.

movement) inherent in these happenings. These aesthetic qualities are products of his imaginative engagement with the world, shaped by his experiences.

In a similar vein, the character meticulously scrutinizes the supermarket carts of individuals, vividly envisioning their breakfasts, dinners, and discernible parallels to his own way of life (Piccolo, 2012, p. 28). He confidently affirms his inclination to make purchases strikingly similar to those of specific individuals. Thus, in this quotidian pursuit, the character effortlessly transcends physical confines, immersing himself in imagined realms where fellow human beings partake in comparable daily routines akin to those of the narrator. This imaginative endeavor evolves into an abundant wellspring, allowing for the profound experience of a distinct sense of delight.

The essence of this matter lies in imagination, as explained by Sartre (1964). It entails shifting one's focus away from events and redirecting it towards the inherent mode of existence within those events (p. 13). However, the protagonist engages in a playful realm of introspection, contemplating the possibility that these events, rather than being predetermined, are fashioned by his very own agency: "And what if it is **I**, with my longing to observe and uphold the coherence of the entire street, and what if it is **I**, with my yearning for seamless occurrences, who orchestrates their seamless unfolding?" (Piccolo, 2012, p. 96). These questions ultimately seek to justify the character's sense of contentment, as he sees himself as the creator of something that, again, would lose all significance if his vigilant gaze were to cease.

As inferred, aesthetic particularities emerge through the process of reception, implicating the acts of perceiving and imagining. While explanatory perspectives in everyday aesthetics focus on the impact of the intentional aesthetic objects and spaces (Fetell, 2019), *Moments* diverges from this approach. The environment's characteristics, including colors, shapes, design, harmony, unexpected elements, or situations do not serve the purpose of deliberate aesthetic communication. Consequently, the aesthetic experience is not predetermined by an external enunciator, detached from the receiver. In *Moments*, the character assumes the role of a creative framer who defines the boundaries of his aesthetic encounters with the world, thereby deriving moments of happiness and infusing greater meaning into his existence.

This aspect becomes additionally apparent as the protagonist manipulates the narrative plot concerning his plan to visit the cinema. Initially, he expresses his intention to watch a recently released film in the city, but subsequently decides to delay and meticulously strategize his visit to heighten the sense of anticipation. As time passes, the character continuously postpones his cinema outing and introduces a plot twist by opting to watch the movie solely during its final week of exhibition, when locating a suitable venue becomes increasingly challenging. Ultimately, he resolves to attend on the last day, taking the risk of not reaching a distant cinema where the film is still being

showcased. However, faced with the fear of potentially missing the screening, he decides against going. As a result of this narrative development, the film ceases to be available in the city, leading to a fascinated protagonist that expresses a peculiar sense of joy: "And I feel, inexplicably, relieved" (Piccolo, 2012, p. 13).

The concept of place proposed by Haapala (1999), then, extends beyond a mere reference to physical space. It encompasses, as previously mentioned, interconnectedness with other individuals, objects, events, routines, and circumstances. Hence, the acts of gazing out the window and attending the cinema, for instance, are inherently tied to the notion of place. As Haapala (1999) states: "I create a place for myself within the structures of a cultural world by connecting different sorts of ties to different sorts of entities" (p. 258). In this context, these connections possess both an aesthetic component, rooted in the wonder and fascination that arise from engaging with things, and an ethical dimension, as conscious associations aim to infuse vital significance through moments of happiness.

It is paradoxical, then, that the title of the analyzed text suggests the presence of *unnoticed happiness* while we witness moments in which the protagonist becomes aware of specific circumstances that bring him happiness[6]. To achieve this, as noted before, the character adopts a particular perspective that delineates the aesthetic qualities of the everyday, seeking satisfaction, enjoyment and, a broader sense of well-being within them. In this regard, our interpretation suggests that the primary intention of the narrator is to prompt readers to introspect and consider whether they, like him, have encountered similar circumstances that were never perceived as potential sources of happiness. The character emphasizes this narrative purpose by listing situations, aiming to evoke readers' memories and encourage reflection on whether these experiences have brought about a sense of well-being or could serve as reasons for happiness. For instance, he presents examples such as: "The smell of bread in the morning, coffee makers when they are turned off. Walks. Snacks with peanut-buttered hands. The first receipt printed in a store. . . . The long-awaited encore at a concert" (Piccolo, 2012, p. 145). If readers' recollections evoke happy memories associated with these circumstances, we would indeed be discussing unnoticed moments of happiness -past instances of unconscious happiness that become conscious through the faculty of memory-. This rationale substantiates the text's title. It is worth noting, however, that the narrator's repetitive depiction of situations in which moments of happiness are

[6] In the original Italian title, 'negligible' replaces 'unnoticed,' hinting at a form of happiness seen as minor and trivial. This highlights the everyday nature of this seemingly insignificant source of joy. However, the protagonist assigns importance to such situations, revealing a contrast with theoretical assumptions that deem everyday aesthetic experiences inconsequential compared to those of art (see Dowling, 2010).

consciously noticed or intentionally created leads us to conclude that the character is driven by a deliberate pursuit of these kind of occasions.

Similarly, this occurs when the character creates a sequence of actions that he observes in people, as is typical in a plot. On Sundays, for instance, he frequents the deserted streets of Rome to see a woman, or sometimes multiple women, wearing high heels, searching for a place to buy a cappuccino after a wild Saturday night. Despite the smudged makeup and exhausted appearance, the protagonist notices "that subtle happiness that hides under that confused appearance, like under a carpet" (Piccolo, 2012, p. 13) in the woman he observes. Once the woman finishes her drink and leaves the cafe, the protagonist considers "that the moment yesterday's night has really ended" (Piccolo, 2012, p. 14). Thus, the woman becomes an imagined character of an imagined story within the narrative. The setting of the scene is in the early hours of a Sunday when the silence of the city creates a sense of beauty for the protagonist. The protagonist is not seeking any woman but a particular type of woman who wears heels, which are associated with elegance and connect to another time and space: that of a party. The woman's disheveled appearance and ruined makeup indicate that something happened to her the night before, something happy, involving friendship, romance, or celebration. This implies a visual ellipsis and builds a narrative plot around the woman. The character derives pleasure from selecting a Sunday moment as the concluding episode of the imagined previous day of a "real person" (the woman).

Therefore, we assert that the character consciously makes a deliberate choice to imbue his everyday life with aesthetic qualities. It is important to note that aesthetics extend beyond their own sake, but rather, serve a greater purpose: happiness. Moreover, happiness is seen as a gateway to a higher objective, namely, well-being. In *Moments*, the protagonist finds life worthwhile through the experience of well-being: “I envision a world where doors never shut, where no human cough interrupts the tranquility, and where every citizen feels a deep sense of belonging” (Piccolo, 2012, p. 148). He envisions that “someone would always utter the words: how beautiful it is to live here, even if it is only whispered to oneself” (Piccolo, 2012, p. 148).

4. WELL-BEING IN A FICTIONAL CHARACTER

According to the theory of everyday aesthetics, happiness is intricately connected to the sense of well-being derived from engaging in activities made proficiently and accompanied by pleasure (Leddy, 2014, p. 39). Within this framework, well-being refers to individuals' capacity to regulate their hedonic state by embracing practices that enhance their satisfaction in everyday life. One such practice is the cultivation of an aesthetic gaze supported by the power of imagination. This gaze represents a consistent

and conscious habit in the protagonist of *Moments*, allowing him to experience fleeting instances of happiness that often might go unnoticed for other people. It is an intrinsic part of a deliberate routine, seamlessly integrated into the rhythm of his everyday activities without compromising their fundamental aspects.

The regulation of well-being relies on individuals' exercise of self-control and self-concordance in response to their daily life circumstances (Melchionne, 2014). It is the individual who assumes the agency to determine whether and how to engage in this regulation, aligning it with their daily activities. Within the narrative of *Moments,* the protagonist, as noted earlier, adeptly harnesses any given event as an opportunity to unleash his sense of wonder and imagination. This becomes evident when, during the summer season, the character observes a girl from their neighborhood embarking on an early morning journey to the beach. This circumstance becomes a catalyst for the narrator's imaginative exploration, envisioning the girl unfurling her beach blanket and gradually shedding her attire until "she is clad only in a minuscule thong. Throughout the day, she reclines and basks in the sun, alternating between leisurely reading books and magazines, as well as enjoying snacks like yogurt and fruits" (Piccolo, 2012, p. 76). To add an intriguing or even conflicting dimension, the protagonist envisions how some men approach her, engaging in dialogues that suggest lascivious advances, to which she responds with a dismissive 'hum'. Eventually, as the day draws to a close, "she rises, leisurely packs her belongings, dresses herself, and returns to the city" (Piccolo, 2012, p. 76). The character finds solace in imagining that the woman frequents the beach to amuse herself with the nonsensical pursuits of unsuspecting men who, in her eyes, display naivety in their attempts to engage with her.

We argue, then, that everyday aesthetics offers a valuable perspective for comprehending happiness. It is seen as a holistically pursuit of human well-being, extending beyond mere sensory gratification such as pleasure. Drawing on Leddy's (2014) work, we perceive happiness as an activity that is performed skillfully, accompanied by pleasurable experiences. This viewpoint aligns with Haapala's (1999) ethical approach and enhances the sense of existence through well-being. While this paper does not extensively delve into the topic, it is noteworthy that Positive Psychology has shifted its focus from investigating happiness as the only emotion to measure life satisfaction to embracing the broader concept of well-being in recent years. In this framework, well-being is intertwined with the PERMA factors, including positive emotions (such as happiness), engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011, p. 16).

In this context, it is crucial to establish a connection between previous perspectives on well-being, such as everyday aesthetics and Positive Psychology. Additionally, we should relate these perspectives to Aristotelian thought. In Aristotelian ethics, happiness is not presented as an end in itself but rather as a means to achieve the *good*. This

notion is evident in *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle (2003) asserts that everything "tends towards a good" (p. 28). Regarding our analysis, well-being is not only the ultimate good but also a vital component that imbues existence with meaning. In this way, the aesthetic activities conducted by the character in *Moments*, as we emphasized earlier, are oriented towards a greater good. Initially, the character adopts an aesthetic gaze and attitude, which bring him happiness. It is precisely this happiness that seems, in part, to ensure the attainment of that good: well-being. To illustrate this point further, we can draw a parallel to Aristotle's (1995) example of the connection between walking and health, which aids in clarifying our interpretation. Aristotle states: "For why do we walk? We reply: to be healthy, and in saying this we believe we have indicated the cause" (p. 142). The philosopher further elucidates his point by highlighting that: "And anything else that, being moved by something else, becomes a means to an end, such as losing weight, purging, medication, and surgical instruments become means with respect to health" (Aristóteles, 1995, p. 142).

Within the scope of this analysis, the character in *Moments* adeptly capitalizes on inconspicuous occurrences to evoke his profound sense of joy in the pursuit of well-being. These instances include situations like: "When they leave the keys under the mats" (Piccolo, 2012, p. 87); "the exact moment at night when the traffic lights start flashing, which means that there are already few cars left and almost everyone is going home" (Piccolo, 2012, p. 144); and "those who raise the metal blinds, those who fix the streets" (Piccolo, 2012, p. 145). It is significant, as highlighted throughout this paper, that the experienced joy emanates from his gaze of astonishment, complemented by a vivid imagination. The flashing traffic lights symbolize a cheerful indication of the day's end in the bustling city, as the commotion gradually dissipates, giving way to the serenity of the nocturnal hours. Conversely, the ascending metal blinds accompany his elation at the dawn of a new day, while the presence of individuals engaged in street maintenance appears to beckon him to anticipate the forthcoming renovation of the city. Moreover, the keys discreetly placed beneath the doormat are regarded as an innocent stratagem, intended to confound potential intruders.

In this way, *Moments* meticulously shapes its entire narrative trajectory towards its ultimate objective: the pursuit of well-being through the experience of happiness derived from the intrinsic aspects of everyday existence. Nonetheless, it is decisive to admit that, as put forward, the mere existence of these aspects does not inherently guarantee the pathway to well-being. Instead, it is the adoption of an aesthetic perspective by the literary character, fueled by an underlying ethical stance, which empowers him to find moments of happiness and well-being, and perceive life as meaningful and worth living.

5. CONCLUSION

The relationship between the fields of ethics and literature has been exemplified through the portrayal of the main fictional character of *Moments*. Our analysis suggests that this relationship is mediated by an aesthetic perspective and reflective contemplation of certain everyday life circumstances. It represents a convergence of the of ethics, literature, and everyday aesthetics, demonstrating that everyday life is embraced within the narrative structure as a source that provides moments of happiness to the protagonist and contributes to his overall well-being. This underscores the possible practical implications of the philosophical discipline of everyday aesthetics, extending beyond theoretical exposition. Within this field, the ethical dimension indicates that everyday aesthetics, as illustrated by the fictional character, could play a role in enhancing individual's well-being.

Instead of only evaluating the ethical or aesthetic aspects of *Moments*, our analysis shows how these domains are interconnected within the author's narrative. However, it is important to note that this study does not delve into discussions of ethics, literature, and social issues. The absence of such discussions could lead to concerns about the perception of these domains as self-indulgent, potentially overlooking considerations related to other individuals and social commitments, including the critique or resistance of unjust power relations. Therefore, further interdisciplinary research including literature, ethics, and everyday aesthetics is essential to deepen our understanding of their interconnected role in promoting happiness and well-being.

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