Regret

Regret is a complex emotion. It is closely connected with loss, which frequently means the loss of something regretted, something he or she wishes he still had. The sense of loss, which ensues on this regret brings with it the special cachet of 'it's being too late,' the stage of loss already having occurred. 'Too late to lock the barn door after the cow's got out.'

An emotion as tinted as regret is sure to have found its way into the world's great literature. Dante gives regret this twist, in Canto V of the *Divine Comedy*:

Nessun maggior dolore che,
Nella miseria, ricordarsi del tempo felice…

(There is no greater sadness than, in the midst of misery, to remember times of joy…)

Having known great joy in the past, the awareness of one's present misery brings to a peak the sense of conflict and loss. To the awareness of loss Dante brings the additional sense of the present joy which embitters the awareness of loss. May we say that Shakespeare depicts a similar cross patterned sense of emotions, when he says that 'parting is such sweet sorrow,' forcing us to recognize once more that joy and sadness—ingredients of regret—can coexist.

The Christian texts of Creation, which put the wretched plight of man squarely on his own shoulders, accuse us of careless abandonment to desire, and subsequent regret at our folly. 'Man's first disobedience,' eating the forbidden fruit, becomes an act that we cannot fail to regret. Wishing that one had not done something is a milder substitute for having done what one regrets but cannot withdraw.