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Kierkegaard

It was on one of the last days in July, at ten o'clock in the evening, when the participants in that banquet assembled together. Date and year I have forgotten; indeed this would be interesting only to one's memory of details: and not to one's recollection of the contents of what experience. The "spirit of the occasion" and whatever impressions are recorded in one's mind under that heading, concerns only one's recollections; and just as generous wine gains in flavor by passing the Equator, because of the evaporation of its watery particles, likewise does recollection gain by getting rid of the watery particles of memory; and yet recollection becomes as little a mere figment of the imagination by this process as does the generous wine.

The participants were five in number: John, with the epithet of the Seducer, Victor Eremita, Constantin Constantius, and yet two others whose names I have not exactly forgotten--which would be a matter of small importance but whose names I did not learn. It was as if these two had no proper names, for they were constantly addressed by some epithet. The one was called the Young Person. Nor was he more than twenty and some years, of slender and delicate build, and of a very dark complexion. His face was thoughtful; but more pleasing even was its lovable and engaging expression which betokened a purity of soul harmonizing perfectly with the soft charm, almost feminine, and the transparency of his whole presence.

This external beauty of appearance was lost sight of, however, in one's next impression of him; or, one kept it only in mind whilst regarding a youth nurtured or to use a still tenderer expression - petted into being, by thought, and nourished by the contents of his own soul a youth who as yet had had nothing to do with the world, had been neither aroused and fired, nor disquieted and disturbed. Like a sleep-walker he bore the law of his actions within himself, and the amiable, kindly expression of his countenance concerned no one, but only mirrored the disposition of his soul.

The other person they called the Dressmaker, and that was his occupation. Of him it was impossible to get a consistent impression. He was dressed according to the very latest fashion, with his hair curled and perfumed, fragrant with eau-de-cologne. One moment his carriage did not lack self-possession, whereas in the next it assumed a certain festive air, a certain hovering motion which, however was kept in rather definite bounds by the robustness of his figure. Even when he was most malicious in his speech his voice ever had a touch of the smooth-tonguedness of the shop, the suaveness of the dealer in fancy-goods, which evidently was utterly disgusting to himself and only satisfied his spirit of defiance. As I think of him now I understand him better, to be sure, than when I first saw him step out of his carriage and I involuntarily laughed. At the same time there is some contradiction left still. He had transformed or bewitched himself, had by the magic of his own will assumed the appearance of one almost halfwitted, but had not thereby entirely satisfied himself; and this is why his reflectiveness now and then peered forth from beneath his disguise.

As I think of it now it seems rather absurd that five such persons should get a banquet arranged. Nor would anything have come of it, I suppose, if Constantin had not been one of us. In a retired room of a confectioner's shop where they met at times, the matter had been broached once before, but had been dropped immediately when the question arose as to who was to head the undertaking. The Young Person was declared unfit for that task, the Dressmaker affirmed himself to be too busy. Victor Eremita did not beg to be excused because "he had married a wife or bought yoke of oxen which he needed to prove",¹ but, he said, even if he should make an exception, for once, and come to the banquet, yet he would decline the courtesy offered him to preside at it, and he therewith "entered protest at the proper time."² This, John considered a work spoken in due season; because, as he saw it, there was but one person able to prepare a banquet, and that was the possessor of the wishing-table which set itself with delectable things whenever he said to it "Cover thyself!" He averred that to enjoy the charms of a young girl in haste was not always the wisest course; but as to a banquet, he would not wait for it, and generally was tired of it a long while before it came off. However, if the plan was to be carried into effect he would make one condition, which was, that the banquet should be so arranged as to be served in one course. And that all were agreed on. Also, that the settings for it were to be made altogether new, and that afterwards they were to be destroyed entirely; ay, before rising from table one was to hear the preparation for their destruction. Nothing was to remain; "not even so much," said the

¹ Cf. Luke XIV, 19-20.

² Words used in the banns.

Dressmaker, "as there is left of a dress after it has been made over into a hat." "Nothing," said John, "because nothing is more unpleasant than a sentimental scene, and nothing more disgusting than the knowledge that somewhere or other there is an external setting which in a direct and impertinent fashion pretends to be a reality."

When the conversation had thus become animated, Victor Eremita suddenly arose, struck an attitude on the floor, beckoned with his hand in the fashion of one commanding and, holding his arm extended as one lifting a goblet, he said, with the gesture of one waving a welcome: "With this cup whose fragrance already intoxicates my senses, whose cool fire already inflames my blood, I greet you, beloved fellow-banqueters, and bid you welcome; being entirely assured that each one of you is sufficiently satisfied by our merely speaking about the banquet; for our Lord satisfied the stomach before satisfying the eye, but the imagination acts in the reverse fashion." Thereupon he inserted his hand in his pocket, took from it a cigar-case, struck a match, and began to smoke. When Constantin Constantius protested against this sovereign free way of transforming the banquet planned into an illusory fragment of life, Victor declared that he did not believe for one moment that such a banquet could be got up and that, in any case, it had been a mistake to let it become the subject of discussion in advance. "Whatever is to be good must come at once; for 'at once' is the divinest of all categories and deserves to be honored as in the language of the Romans: *ex templo*,³ because it is the starting point for all that is divine in life, and so much so that what is not done at once is of

³ Which in Latin means both "from the temple" and "at once."

evil." However, he remarked, he did not care to argue this point. In case the others wished to speak and act differently he would not say a word, but if they wished him to explain the sense of his remarks more fully he must have leave to make a speech, because he did not consider it all desirable to provoke a discussion on the subject.

Permission was given him; and as the others called on him to do so at once, he spoke as follows: "A banquet is in itself a difficult matter, because even if it be arranged with ever so much taste and talent there is something else essential to its success, to-wit, good luck. And by this I mean not such matters as most likely would give concern to an anxious hostess, but something different, a something which no one can make absolutely sure of: a fortunate harmonizing of the spirit and the minutiae of the banquet, that fine ethereal vibration of chords, that soul-stirring music which cannot be ordered in advance from the town-musicians. Look you, therefore is it a hazardous thing to undertake, because if things do go wrong, perhaps from the very start, one may suffer such a depression and loss of spirits that recovery from it might involve a very long time.

"Sheer habit and thoughtlessness are father and godfather to most banquets, and it is only due to the lack of critical sense among people that one fails to notice the utter absence of any idea in them. In the first place, women ought never to be present at a banquet. Women may be used to advantage only in the Greek style, as a chorus of dancers. As it is the main thing at a banquet that there be eating and drinking, woman ought not to be present; she cannot do justice to what is offered; or, if she can, it is most unbeautiful. Whenever a woman is present the matter of eating and drinking ought to be reduced to the very slightest proportions. At most, it

ought to be no more than some trifling feminine occupation, to have something to busy one's hands with. Especially in the country a little repast of this kind which, by the way, should be put at other times than the principal meals--may be extremely delightful; and if so, always owing to the presence of the other sex. To do like the English, who let the fair sex retire as soon as the real drinking is to start, is to fall between two stools, for every plan ought to be a whole, and the very manner with which I take a seat at the table and seize hold of knife and fork bears a definite relation to this whole. In the same sense a political banquet presents an unbeautiful ambiguity inasmuch as one does not⁴ want to cut down to a very minimum the essentials of a banquet, and yet does not wish to have the speeches thought of as having been made over the cups.

"So far, we are agreed, I suppose; and our number in case anything should come of the banquet--is correctly chosen, according to that beautiful rule: neither more than the Muses nor fewer than the Graces. Now I demand the greatest superabundance of everything thinkable. That is, even though everything be not actually there, yet the possibility of having it must be at one's immediate beck and call, aye, hover temptingly over the table, more seductive even than the actual sight of it. I beg to be excused, however, from banqueting on sulphur-matches or on a piece of sugar which all are to suck in turn. My demands for such a banquet will, on the contrary, be difficult to satisfy; for the feast itself must be calculated to arouse and incite that unmentionable longing which each worthy participant is to bring with him. I require that the earth's fertility be at our service, as though everything sprouted forth at the very

⁴ The omission of the negative particle in the original is no doubt unintentional.

moment the desire for it was born. I desire a more luxurious abundance of wine than when Mephistopheles needed but to drill holes into the table to obtain it. I demand an illumination more splendid than have the gnomes when they lift up the mountain on pillars and dance in a sea of blazing light. I demand what most excites the senses, I demand their gratification by deliciously sweet perfumes, more superb than any in the Arabian Nights. I demand a coolness which voluptuously provokes desire and breathes relaxation on desire satisfied. I demand a fountain's unceasing enlivenment. If Maecenas could not sleep without hearing the splashing of a fountain, I cannot eat without it. Do not misunderstand me, I can eat stockfish without it; but I cannot eat at a banquet without it; I can drink water without it, but I cannot drink wine at a banquet without it. I demand a host of servants, chosen and comely, as if I sate at table with the gods; I demand that there shall be music at the feast, both strong and subdued; and I demand that it shall be an accompaniment to my thoughts; and what concerns you, my friends, my demands regarding you are altogether incredible. Do you see, by reason of all these demands--which are as many reasons against it I hold a banquet to be a *pium desideratum*,⁵ and am so far from desiring a repetition of it that I presume it is not feasible even a first time."

The only one who had not actually participated in this conversation, nor in the frustration of the banquet, was Constantin. Without him, nothing would have been done save the talking. He had come to a different conclusion and was of the opinion that the

⁵ Pious wish.

idea might well be realized, if one but carried the matter with a high hand.

Then some time passed, and both the banquet and the discussion about it were forgotten, when suddenly, one day, the participants received a card of invitation from Constantius for a banquet the very same evening. The motto of the Party had been given by him as: *In Vino Veritas*, because there was to be speaking, to be sure, and not only conversation; but the speeches were not to be made except *in vino*, and no truth was to be uttered there excepting that which is *in vino*--when the wine is a defense of the truth and the truth a defense of the wine.

The place had been chosen in the woods, some ten miles distant from Copenhagen. The hall in which they were to feast had been newly decorated and in every way made unrecognizable; a smaller room, separated from the hall by a corridor, was arranged for an orchestra. Shutters and curtains were let down before all windows, which were left open. The arrangement that the participants were to drive to the banquet in the evening hour was to intimate to them and that was Constantin's idea what was to follow. Even if one knows that one is driving to a banquet, and the imagination therefore indulges for a moment in thoughts of luxury, yet the impression of the natural surroundings is too powerful to be resisted. That this might possibly not be the case was the only contingency he apprehended; for just as there is no power like the imagination to render beautiful all it touches, neither is there any power which can to such a degree disturb all misfortune conspiring if confronted with reality. But driving on a summer evening does not lure the imagination to luxurious thoughts, but rather to the

opposite. Even if one does not see it or hear it, the imagination will unconsciously create a picture of the longing for home which one is apt to feel in the evening hours one sees the reapers, man and maid, returning from their work in the fields, one hears the hurried rattling of the hay wagon, one interprets even the far-away lowing from the meadows as a longing. Thus does a summer evening suggest idyllic thoughts, soothing even a restless mind with its assuagement, inducing even the soaring imagination to abide on earth with an indwelling yearning for home as the place from whence it came, and thus teaching the insatiable mind to be satisfied with little, by rendering one content; for in the evening hour time stands still and eternity lingers.

Thus they arrived in the evening hour: those invited; for Constantin had come out somewhat earlier. Victor Eremita who resided in the country not far away came on horseback, the others in a carriage. And just as they had discharged it, a light open vehicle rolled in through the gate carrying a merry company of four journeymen who were entertained to be ready at the decisive moment to function as a corps of destruction: just as firemen are stationed in a theatre, for the opposite reason at once to extinguish a fire.

So long as one is a child one possesses sufficient imagination to maintain one's soul at the very top-notch of expectation--for a whole hour in the dark room, if need be; but when one has grown older one's imagination may easily cause one to tire of the Christmas tree before seeing it.

The folding doors were opened. The effect of the radiant illumination, the coolness wafting toward them, the beguiling

fragrance of sweet perfumes, the excellent taste of the arrangements, for a moment overwhelmed the feelings of those entering; and when, at the same time, strains from the ballet of "Don Juan" sounded from the orchestra, their persons seemed transfigured and, as if out of reverence for an unseen spirit about them, they stopped short for a moment like men who have been roused by admiration and who have risen to admire.

Whoever knows that happy moment, whoever has appreciated its delight, and has not also felt the apprehension lest suddenly something might happen, some trifle perhaps, which yet might be sufficient to disturb all! Whoever has held the lamp of Aladdin in his hand and has not also felt the swooning of pleasure, because one needs but to wish? Whoever has held what is inviting in his hand and has not also learned to keep his wrist limber to let go at once, if need be?

Thus they stood side by side. Only Victor stood alone, absorbed in thought; a shudder seemed to pass through his soul, he almost trembled; he collected himself and saluted the omen with these words: "Ye mysterious, festive, and seductive strains which drew me out of the cloistered seclusion of a quiet youth and beguiled me with a longing as mighty as a recollection, and terrible, as though Elvira had not even been seduced but had only desired to be! Immortal Mozart, thou to whom I owe all; but no! as yet I do not owe thee all. But when I shall have become an old man if ever I do become an old man; or when I shall have become ten years older if ever I do; or when I am become old if ever I shall become old; or when I shall die for that, indeed, I know I shall: then shall I say: immortal Mozart, thou to whom I owe all and then I shall let my admiration,

which is my soul's first and only admiration, burst forth in all its might and let it make away with me, as it often has been on the point of doing. Then have I set my house in order,⁶ then have I remembered my beloved one, then have I confessed my love, then have I fully established that I owe thee all, then am I occupied no longer with thee, with the world, but only with the grave thought of death."

Now there came from the orchestra that invitation in which joy triumphs most exultantly, and heaven-storming soars aloft above Elvira's sorrowful thanks; and gracefully apostrophizing, John repeated: "*Viva la liberta*" "*et veritas*," said the Young Person; "but above all, *in vino*," Constantin interrupted them, seating himself at the table and inviting the others to do likewise.

How easy to prepare a banquet; yet Constantin declared that he never would risk preparing another. How easy to admire; yet Victor declared that he never again would lend words to his admiration; for to suffer a discomfiture is more dreadful than to become an invalid in war! How easy to express a desire, if one has the magic lamp; yet that is at times more terrible than to perish of want!

They were seated. In the same moment the little company were launched into the very middle of the infinite sea of enjoyments as if with one single bound. Each one had addressed all his thoughts and all his desires to the banquet, had prepared his soul for the enjoyment which was offered to overflowing and in which their souls overflowed. The experienced driver is known by his ability to start the snorting team with a single bound and to hold them well

⁶ 2 Kings 20,1; Isaiah 38,1.

abreast; the well-trained steed is known by his lifting himself in one absolutely decisive leap: even if one or the other of the guests perhaps fell short in some particular, certainly Constantin was a good host.

Thus they banqueted. Soon, conversation had woven its beautiful wreaths about the banqueters, so that they sat garlanded. Now, it was enamored of the food, now of the wine, and now again of itself; now, it seemed to develop into significance, and then again it was altogether slight. Soon, fancy unfolded itself the splendid one which blows but once, the tender one which straightway closes its petals; now, there came an exclamation from one of the banqueters: "These truffles are superb," and now, an order of the host: "This Chateau Margaux!" Now, the music was drowned in the noise, now it was heard again. Sometimes the servants stood still as if *in pausa*, in that decisive moment when a new dish was being brought out, or a new wine was ordered and mentioned by name, sometimes they were all a-bustle. Sometimes there was a silence for a moment, and then the re-animating spirit of the music went forth over the guests. Now, one with some bold thought would take the lead in the conversation and the others followed after, almost forgetting to eat, and the music would sound after them as it sounds after the jubilant shouts of a host storming on; now, only the clinking of glasses and the clattering of plates was heard and the feasting proceeded in silence, accompanied only by the music that joyously advanced and again stimulated conversation. Thus they banqueted.

How poor is language in comparison with that symphony of sounds unmeaning, yet how significant, whether of a battle or of a banquet, which even scenic representation cannot imitate and for which language has but a few words! How rich is language in the expression of the world of ideas, and how poor, when it is to describe reality!

Only once did Constantin abandon his omnipresence ill which one actually lost sight of his presence. At the very beginning he got them to sing one of the old drinking songs, "by way of calling to mind that jolly time when men and women feasted together," as he said a proposal which had the positively burlesque effect he had perhaps calculated it should have. It almost gained the upper hand when the Dressmaker wanted them to sing the ditty: "When I shall mount the bridal bed, hoiho!" After a couple of courses had been served Constantin proposed that the banquet should conclude with each one's making a speech, but that precautions should be taken against the speakers' divagating too much. He was for making two conditions, viz., there were to be no speeches until after the meal; and no one was to speak before having drunk sufficiently to feel the power of the wine else he was to be in that condition in which one says much which under other circumstances one would leave unsaid without necessarily having the connection of speech and thought constantly interrupted by hiccoughs.⁷ Before speaking, then, each one was to declare solemnly that he was in that condition. No definite quantity of wine was to be required, capacities differed so widely. Against this proposal, John entered protest. He could never become intoxicated, he averred, and when

⁷ An allusion to the plight of Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*.

he had come to a certain point he grew the soberer the more he drank. Victor Eremita was, of the opinion that any such preparatory premeditations to insure one's becoming drunk would precisely militate against one's becoming so. If one desired to become intoxicated the deliberate wish was only a hindrance. Then there ensued some discussion about the divers influences of wine on consciousness, and especially about the fact that, in the case of a reflective temperament, an excess of wine may manifest itself, not in any particular *impetus* but, on the contrary, in a noticeably cool self-possession. As to the contents of the speeches, Constantin proposed that they should deal with love, that is, the relation between man and woman. No love stories were to be told though they might furnish the text of one's remarks.

The conditions were accepted. All reasonable and just demands a host may make on his guests were fulfilled: they ate and drank, and "drank and were filled with drink," as the Bible has it;⁸ that is, they drank stoutly.

The desert was served. Even if Victor had not, as yet, had his desire gratified to hear the splashing of a fountain, which, for that matter, he had luckily forgotten since that former conversation now champagne flowed profusely. The clock struck twelve. Thereupon Constantin commanded silence, saluted the Young Person with a goblet and the words *quod felix sit faustumque*⁹ and bade him to speak first.

⁸ Haggai 1, 6 (inexact).

⁹ May it be fortunate and favorable.

(The Young Person's Speech)

The Young Person arose and declared that he felt the power of the wine, which was indeed apparent to some degree; for the blood pulsed strongly in his temples, and his appearance was not as beautiful as before the meal. He spoke as follows:

If there be truth in the words of the poets, dear fellow banqueters, then unrequited love is, indeed, the greatest of sorrows. Should you require any proof of this you need but listen to the speech of lovers. They say that it is death, certain death; and the first time they believe it for the space of two weeks. The next time they say that it is death; and finally they will die sometime as the result of unrequited love. For that love has killed them, about that there can obtain no doubt. And as to love's having to take hold three times to make away with them, that is not different from the dentist's having to pull three times before he is able to budge that firmly rooted molar. But, if unrequited love thus means certain death, how happy am I who have never loved and, I hope, will only achieve dying some time, and not from unrequited love! But just this may be the greatest misfortune, for all I know, and how unfortunate must I then be!

The essence of love probably (for I speak as does a blind man about colors), probably lies in its bliss; which is, in other words, that the cessation of love brings death to the lover. This I comprehend very well as in the nature of a hypothesis correlating life and death. But, if love is to be merely by way of hypothesis, why, then lovers lay themselves open to ridicule through their actually falling in love. If, however, love is something real, why, then reality must bear out what lovers say about it. But did one in real life ever hear of, or observe, such things having taken place, even if there is hearsay to that effect? Here I perceive already one of the contradictions in which love involves a person; for whether this is different for those initiated, that I have no means of knowing; but love certainly does seem to involve people in the most curious contradictions.

There is no other relation between human beings which makes such demands on one's ideality as does love, and yet love is never seen to have it. For this reason alone I would be afraid of love; for I fear that it might have the power to make me too talk vaguely about a bliss which I did not feel and a sorrow I did not have. I say this here since I am bidden to speak on love, though unacquainted with it. I say this in surroundings which appeal to me like a Greek symposium; for I should otherwise not care to speak on this subject as I do not wish to disturb any one's happiness but, rather, am content with my own thoughts. Who knows but these thoughts are sheer imbecilities and vain imaginings perhaps my ignorance is explicable from the fact that I never have learned, nor have wished to learn, from any one, how one comes to love; or from the fact that I have never yet challenged a woman with a glance which is supposed to be smart but have always lowered my eyes, unwilling to

yield to an impression before having fully made sure about the nature of the power into whose sphere I am venturing.

At this point he was interrupted by Constantin who expostulated with him because, by his very confession of never having been in love, he had debarred himself from speaking. The Young Person declared that at any other time he would gladly obey an injunction to that effect as he had often enough experienced how tiresome it was to have to make a speech; but that in this case he would insist upon his right. Precisely the fact that one had had no love affair, he said, also constituted an affair of love; and he who could assert this of himself was entitled to speak about Eros just because his thoughts were bound to take issue with the whole sex and not with individuals. He was granted permission to speak and continued.

Inasmuch as my right to speak has been challenged, this may serve to exempt me from your laughter; for I know well that, just as among rustics he is not considered a man who does not call a tobacco pipe his own, likewise among men-folks he is not considered a real man who is not experienced in love. If any one feels like laughing, let him laugh; my thought is, and remains, the essential consideration for me. Or is love, perchance, privileged to be the only event which is to be considered after, rather than before, it happens? If that be the case, what then if I, having fallen in love, should later on think that it was too late to think about it? Look you, this is the reason why I choose to think about love before it happens. To be sure, lovers also maintain that they gave the matter thought, but such is not the case. They assume it to be essential in man to fall in love; but this surely does not mean thinking about

love but, rather, assuming it, in order to make sure of getting one's self a sweetheart.

In fact, whenever my reflection endeavors to pin down love, naught but contradiction seems to remain. At times, it is true, I feel as if something had escaped me, but I cannot tell what it is, whereas my reflection is able at once to point out the contradictions in what does occur. Very well, then, in my opinion love is the greatest self-contradiction imaginable, and comical at the same time. Indeed, the one corresponds to the other. The comical is always seen to occur in the category of contradictions which truth I cannot take the time to demonstrate now; but what I shall demonstrate now is that love is comical. By love I mean the relation between man and woman. I am not thinking of Eros in the Greek sense which has been extolled so beautifully by Plato who, by the way, is so far from considering the love of woman that he mentions it only in passing, holding it to be inferior to the love of youths.¹⁰ I say, love is comical to a third person more I say not. Whether it is for this reason that lovers always hate a third person I do not know; but I do know that reflection is always in such a relation the third person, and for this reason I cannot love without at the same time having a third person present in the shape of my reflection.

This surely cannot seem strange to any one, every one having doubted everything, whereas I am uttering my doubts only with reference to love. And yet I do think it strange that people have doubted everything and have again reached certainty, without as much as dropping a word concerning the difficulties which have

¹⁰ Symposion, ch.9.

held my thought captiveso much so that I have, now and then, longed to be freed of themfreed by the aid of one, note well, who was aware of these difficulties, and not of one who in his sleep had a notion to doubt, and to have doubted, everything, and again in his sleep had the notion that he is explaining, and has explained, all.¹¹

Let me then have your attention, dear fellow banqueters, and if you yourselves be lovers do not therefore interrupt me, nor try to silence me because you do not wish to hear the explanation. Rather turn away and listen with averted faces to what I have to say, and what I insist upon saying, having once begun.

In the first place I consider it comical that every one loves, and every one wishes to love, without any one ever being able to tell one what is the nature of the lovable or that which is the real object of love. As to the word "to love" I shall not discuss it since it means nothing definite; but as soon as the matter is broached at all we are met by the question as to what it is one loves. No other answer is ever vouchsafed us on that point other than that one loves what is lovable. For if one should make answer, with Plato,¹² that one is to love what is good, one has in taking this single step exceeded the bounds of the erotic.

The answer may be offered, perhaps, that one is to love what is beautiful. But if I then should ask whether to love means to love a

¹¹ This ironic sally refers, not to Descartes' principle of *skepsis*, but to the numerous Danish followers of Hegel and his "method"; cf. Fear and Trembling, p. 119.

¹² Symposium, ch. 24.

beautiful landscape or a beautiful painting it would be immediately perceived that the erotic is not, as it were, comprised in the more general term of the love of things beautiful, but is something entirely of its own kind. Were a lover just to give an example to speak as follows, in order to express adequately how much love there dwelled in him: "I love beautiful landscapes, and my Lalage, and the beautiful dancer, and a beautiful horse--in short, love all that is beautiful," his Lalage would not be satisfied with his encomium, however well satisfied she might be with him in all other respects, and even if she be beautiful; and now suppose Lalage is not beautiful and he yet loved her!

Again, if I should refer the erotic element to the bisection of which Aristophanes tells us¹³ when he says that the gods severed man into two parts as one cuts flounders, and that these parts thus separated sought one another, then I again encounter a difficulty I cannot get over, which is, in how far I may base my reasoning on Aristophanes who in his speech just because there is no reason for the thought to stop at this point--goes further in his thought and thinks that the gods might take it into their heads to divide man

into three parts, for the sake of still better fun. For the sake of still better fun; for is it not true, as I said, that love renders a person ridiculous, if not in the eyes of others others certainly in the eyes of the gods?

Now, let me assume that the erotic element resides essentially in the relation between man and woman what is to be inferred from that? If the lover should say to his Lalage: I love you because you

¹³ Ibid., ch. 15-16.

are a woman; I might as well love any other woman, as for instance, ugly Zoe: then beautiful Lalage would feel insulted.

In what, then, consists the lovable? This is my question; but unfortunately, no one has been able to tell me, The individual lover always believes that, as far as he is concerned, he knows. Still he cannot make himself understood by any other lover; and he who listens to the speech of a number of lovers will learn that no two of them ever agree, even though they all talk about the same thing. Disregarding those altogether silly explanations which leave one as wise as before, that is, end by asserting that it is really the pretty feet of the beloved damsel, or the admired mustachios of the swain, which are the objects of love, disregarding these, one will find mentioned, even in the declamations of lovers in the higher style, first a number of details and, finally, the declaration: all her lovable ways; and when they have reached the climax: that inexplicable something I do not know how to explain. And this speech is meant to please especially beautiful Lalage. Me it does not please, for I don't understand a word of it and find, rather, that it contains a double contradiction first, that it ends with the inexplicable, second, that it ends with the inexplicable; for he who intends to end with the inexplicable had best begin with the inexplicable and then say no more, lest he lay himself open to suspicion. If he begin with the inexplicable, saying no more, then this does not prove his helplessness, for it is, anyway, an explanation in a negative sense; but if he does begin with something else and lands in the inexplicable, then this does certainly prove his helplessness.

So then we see: to love corresponds to the lovable; and the lovable is the inexplicable. Well, that is at least something; but comprehensible it is not, as little as the inexplicable way in which love seizes on its prey. Who, indeed, would not be alarmed if people about one, time and again, dropped down dead, all of a sudden, or had convulsions, without anyone being able to account for it? But precisely in this fashion does love invade life, only with the difference that one is not alarmed thereby, since the lovers themselves regard it as their greatest happiness, but that one, on the contrary, is tempted to laugh; for the comical and the tragical elements ever correspond to one another. Today, one may converse with a person and can fairly well make him out tomorrow, he speaks in tongues and with strange gestures: he is in love.

Now, if to love meant to fall in love with the first person that came along, it would be easy to understand that one could give no special reasons for it; but since to love means to fall in love with one, one single person in all the world, it would seem as if such an extraordinary process of singling out ought to be due to such an extensive chain of reasoning that one might have to beg to be excused from hearing it--not so much because it did not explain anything as because it might be too lengthy to listen to. But no, the lovers are not able to explain anything at all. He has seen hundreds upon hundreds of women; he is, perhaps, advanced in years and has all along felt nothing--and all at once he sees her, her the Only one, Catherine. Is this not comical? Is it not comical that the relation which is to explain and beautify all life, love, is not like the mustard seed from which there grows a great tree,¹⁴ but being still smaller

¹⁴ Cf. Matthew 13, 31, etc.

is, at bottom, nothing at all; for not a single antecedent criterion can be mentioned, as e.g., that the

phenomenon occurred at a certain age, nor a single reason as to why he should select her, her alone in all the world and that by no means in the same sense as when "Adam chose Eve, because there was none other."¹⁵

Or is not the explanation which the lovers vouchsafe just as comical; or, does it not, rather, emphasize the comical aspect of love? They say that love renders one blind, and by this fact they undertake to explain the phenomenon. Now, if a Person who was going into a dark room to fetch something should answer, on my advising him to take a light along, that it was only a trifling matter he wanted and so he would not bother to take a light alongah! then I would understand him excellently well. If, on the other hand, this same person should take me aside and, with an air of mystery, confide to me that the thing he was about to fetch was of the very greatest importance and that it was for this reason that he was able to do it in the darkah! then I wonder if my weak mortal brain could follow the soaring flight of his speech. Even if I should refrain from laughing, in order not to offend him, I should hardly be able to restrain my mirth as soon as he had turned his back. But at love nobody laughs; for I am quite prepared to be embarrassed like the Jew who, after ending his story, asks: Is there no one who will laugh?¹⁶ And yet I did not miss the point, as did the Jew, and as to

¹⁵ A quotation from Musaeus, *Volksmarchen der Deutschen*, III, 219.

¹⁶ The reference is to a situation in Richard Cumberland's (1732-1811) play of "The Jew," known to Copenhagen playgoers in an adaptation.

my laughter I am far from wanting to insult any one. Quite on the contrary, I scorn those fools who imagine that their love has such good reasons that they can afford to laugh at other lovers; for since love is altogether inexplicable, one lover is as ridiculous as the other. Quite as foolish and haughty I consider it also when a man proudly looks about him in the circle of girls to find who may be worthy of him, or when a girl proudly tosses her head to select or reject; because such persons are simply basing their thoughts on an unexplained assumption. No. What busies my thought is love as such, and it is love which seems ridiculous to me; and therefore I fear it, lest I become ridiculous in my own eyes, or ridiculous in the eyes of the gods who have fashioned man thus. In other words, if love is ridiculous it is equally ridiculous, whether now my sweetheart be a princess or a servant girl; for the lovable, as we have seen, is the inexplicable.

Look you, therefore do I fear love, and find precisely in this a new proof of love's being comical; for my fear is so seriously tragic that it throws light on the comical nature love. When people wreck a building a sign is hung up to warn people, and I shall take care to stand from under; when a bar has been freshly painted a stone is laid in the road to apprise people of the fact; when a driver is in danger of running a man over he will shout "look out"; when there have been cases of cholera in a house a soldier is set as guard; and so forth. What I mean is that if there is some danger, one may be warned and will successfully escape it by heeding the warning. Now, fearing to be rendered ridiculous by love, I certainly regard it as dangerous; so what shall I do to escape it? In other words, what shall I do to escape the danger of some woman falling in love with me? I am far from entertaining the thought of being an Adonis

every girl is bound to fall in love with (*relata refero*,¹⁷ for what this means I do not understand) -goodness no! But since I do not know what the lovable is I cannot, by anymanner of means, know how to escape this danger. Since, for that matter, the very opposite of beauty may constitute the lovable; and, finally, since the inexplicable also is the lovable, I am forsooth in the same situation as the man Jean Paul speaks of somewhere who, standing on one foot, reads a sign saying, "fox-traps here," and now does not dare, either to lift his foot or to set it down. No, love any one I will not, before I have fathomed what love is; but this I cannot, but have, rather, come to the conclusion that it is comical. Hence I will not love-but alas! I have not thereby avoided the danger, for, since I do not know what the lovable is and how it seizes me, or how it seizes a woman with reference to me, I cannot make sure Whether I have avoided the danger. This is tragical and, in a certain sense, even profoundly tragical, even if no one is concerned about it, or if no one is concerned about the bitter contradiction for one who thinks-that a something exists which everywhere exercises its power and yet is not to be definitely conceived by thought and which, perhaps, may attack from the rear him who in vain seeks to conceive it. But as to the tragic side of the matter it has its deep reason in the comic aspects just pointed out. Possibly, every other person will turn all this upside down and not find that to be comical which I do, but rather that which I conceive to be tragical; but this too proves that I am right to a certain extent. And that for which, if so happens, I become either a tragic or comic victim is plain enough, viz., my desire to reflect about all I do, and not imagine I am reflecting

¹⁷ I relate what I have been told.

about life by dismissing its every important circumstance with an "I don't care, either way."

Man has both a soul and a body. About this the wisest and best of the race are agreed. Now, in case one assumes the essence of love to lie in the relation between man and woman, the comic aspect will show again in the face-about which is seen when the highest spiritual values express themselves in the most sensual terms. I am now referring to all those extraordinary and mystic signals of love in short, to all the free-masonry which forms a continuation of the above-mentioned inexplicable something. The contradiction in which love here involves a person lies in the fact that the symbolic signs mean nothing at all or which amounts to the same that no one is able to explain what they do signify. Two loving souls vow that they will love each the other in all eternity; thereupon they embrace, and with a kiss they seal this eternal pact. Now I ask any thinking person whether he would have hit upon that! And thus there is constant shifting from the one to the other extreme in love. The most spiritual is expressed by its very opposite, and the sensual is to signify the most spiritual. Let me assume I am in love. In that case I would conceive it to be of the utmost importance to me that the one I love belonged to me for all time. This I comprehend; for I am now, really, speaking only of Greek eroticism which has to do with loving beautiful souls. Now when the person I love had vowed to return my love I would believe her or, in as far as there remained any doubt in me, try to combat my doubt. But what happens actually? For if I were in love I would, probably, behave like all the others, that is, seek to obtain still some other assurance than merely to believe her I love; which, though, is plainly the only assurance to
*had.

When Cockatoo¹⁸ all at once begins to plume himself like a duck which is gorged with food, and then emits the word "Marian," everybody will laugh, and so will I.. I suppose the spectator finds it comical that Cockatoo, who doesn't love Marian at all, should be on such intimate terms with her. But suppose, now, that Cockatoo does love Marian. Would that be comical still? To me it would; and the comical would seem to me to lie in love's having become capable of being expressed in such fashion. Whether now this has been the custom since the beginning of the world makes no difference whatsoever, for the comical has the prescriptive right from all eternity to be present in contradictions and here is a contradiction. There is really nothing comical in the antics of a manikin since we see some one pulling the strings. But to be a manikin at the beck of something inexplicable is indeed comical, for the contradiction lies in our not seeing any sensible reason why one should have to twitch now this leg and now that. Hence, if I cannot explain what I am doing, I do not care to do it; and if I cannot understand the power into whose sphere I am venturing, I do not care to surrender myself to that power. And if love is so mysterious a law which binds together the extremest contradictions, then who will guarantee that I might not, one day, become altogether confused? Still, that does not concern me so much.

Again, I have heard that some lovers consider the behavior of other lovers ridiculous. I cannot conceive how this ridicule is justified, for if this law of love be a natural law, then all lovers are subject to it; but if it be the law of their own choice, then those laughing lovers ought to be able to explain all about love; which,

¹⁸ A character in the Danish playwright Overskou's vaudeville of "Capriciosa" (Comedies III, 184).

however, they are unable to do. But in this respect I understand this matter better as it seems a convention for one lover to laugh at the other because he always finds the other lover ridiculous, but not himself. If it be ridiculous to kiss an ugly girl, it is also ridiculous to kiss a pretty one; and the notion that doing this in some particular way should entitle one to cast ridicule on another who does it differently, is but presumptuousness and a conspiracy which does not, for all that, exempt such a snob from laying himself open to the ridicule which invariably results from the fact that no one is able to explain what this act of kissing signifies, whereas it is to signify all to signify, indeed, that the lovers desire to belong to each other in all eternity; aye, what is still more amusing, to render them certain that they will. Now, if a man should suddenly lay his head on one side, or shake it, or kick out with his leg and, upon my asking him why he did this, should answer "To be sure I don't know, myself, I just happened to do so, next time I may do something different, for I did it unconsciously" ah, then I would understand him quite well. But if he said, as the lovers say about their antics, that all bliss lay therein, how could I help finding it ridiculous just as I thought that other man's motions ridiculous, to be sure in a different sense until he restrained my laughter by declaring that they did not signify anything. For by doing so he removed the contradiction which is the basic cause of the comical. It is not at all comical that the insignificant is declared to signify nothing, but it is very much so if it be asserted to signify all.

As regards involuntary actions, the contradiction arises at the very outset because involuntary actions are not looked for in a free rational being. Thus if one supposed that the Pope had a coughing spell the very moment he was to place the crown on Napoleon's

head; or that bride and groom, in the most solemn moment of the wedding ceremony should fall to sneezing-these would be examples of the comical, That is, the more a given action accentuates the free rational being, the more comical are involuntary actions. This holds true also in respect of the erotic gesticulations, where the comical element appears a second time, owing to the circumstance that the lovers attempt to explain away the contradiction by attributing to their gesticulations an absolute value. As is well known, children have a keen sense of the ridiculouswitness children's testimony which can always be relied on in this regard. Now as a rule children , will laugh at lovers, and if one makes them tell what they have seen, surely no one can help laughing. This is, perhaps, due to the fact that children omit the point. Very strange! When the Jew omitted the point no one cared to laugh. Here, on the contrary, every one laughs because the point is omitted; since, however, no one can explain what the point iswhy, then there is no point at all.

So the lovers explain nothing; and those who praise love explain nothing but are merely intent onas one is bidden in the Royal Laws of Denmarkon saying anent it all which may be pleasant and of good report. But a man who thinks, desires to have his logical categories in good order; and he who thinks about love wishes to be sure about his categories also in this matter. The fact is, though, that people do not think about love, and a "pastoral science" is still lacking; for even if a poet in a pastoral poem makes an attempt to show how love is born, everything is smuggled in again by help of another person who teaches the lovers how to love!

As we saw, the comical element in love arose from the face-about whereby the highest quality of one sphere does not find expression

in that sphere but in the exactly opposite quality of another sphere. It is comical that the soaring flight of love-the desire to belong to each other for all timelands ever, like Saft,¹⁹ in the pantry; but still more comical is it that this conclusion is said to constitute love's highest expression.

Wherever there is a contradiction, there the comical element is present also. I am ever following that track. If it be disconcerting to you, dear fellow banqueters, to follow me in what I shall have to say now, then follow me with averted countenances. I myself am speaking as if with veiled eyes; for as I see only the mystery in these matters, why, I cannot see, or I see nothing.

What is a consequence? If it cannot, in some way or other, be brought under the same head as its antecedent why, then it would be ridiculous if it posed as a consequence. To illustrate: if a man who wanted to take a bath jumped into the tank and, coming to the surface again somewhat confused, groped for the rope to hold on to, but caught the douche-line by mistake, and a shower now descended on him with sufficient motivation and for excellent good reasonwhy, then the consequence would be entirely in order. The ridiculous here consisted in his seizing the wrong rope; but there is nothing ridiculous in the shower descending when one pulls the proper rope. Rather, it would be ridiculous if it did not come; as for example, just to show the correctness of my contention about contradictions, if a man nerved himself with bold resolution in

¹⁹ The glutton in Oehlenschloeger's vaudeville of "Sovedrikken."

order to withstand the shock and, in the enthusiasm of his decision, with a stout heart pulled the line-and the shower did not come.

Let us see now how it is with regard to love. The lovers wish to belong to each other for all time, and this they express, curiously, by embracing each other with all the intensity of the moment; and all the bliss of love is said to reside therein. But all desire is egotistic. Now, to be sure, the lover's desire is not egotistic in respect of the one he loves, but the desire of both in conjunction is absolutely egotistic in so far as they in their union and love represent a new ego. And yet they are deceived; for in the same moment the race triumphs over the individual, the race is victorious, and the individuals are debased to do its bidding.

Now this I find more ridiculous than what Aristophanes thought so ridiculous. The ridiculous aspect of his theory of bi-section lies in the inherent contradiction (which the ancient author does not sufficiently emphasize, however). In considering a person one naturally supposes him to be an entity, and so one does believe till it becomes apparent that, under the obsession of love, he is but a half which runs about looking for its complement. There is nothing ridiculous in half an apple. The comical would appear if a whole apple turned out to be only half an apple. In the first case there exists no contradiction, but certainly in the latter. If one actually based one's reasoning on the figure of speech that woman is but half a person she would not be ridiculous at all in her love. Man, however, who has been enjoying civic rights as a whole person, will certainly appear ridiculous when he takes to running about (and looking for his other half);²⁰ for he betrays thereby that he is but

²⁰ Supplied by the translator to complete the sense.

half a person. In fact, the more one thinks about the matter the more ridiculous it seems; because if man really be a whole, why, then he will not become a whole in love, but he and woman would make up one and a half. No wonder, then, that the gods laugh, and particularly at man.

But let me return to my consequence. When the lovers have found each other, one should certainly believe that they formed a whole, and in this should lie the proof of their assertion that they wished to live for each other for all time. But lo! instead of living for each other they begin to live for the race, and this they do not even suspect.

What is a consequence? If, as I observed, one cannot detect in it the cause out of which it proceeded, the consequence is merely ridiculous, and he becomes a laughing stock to whom this happens. Now, the fact that the separated halves have found each other ought to be a complete satisfaction and rest for them; and yet the consequence is a new existence. That having found each other should mean a new existence for the lovers, is comprehensible enough; but not, that a new existence for a third being should take its inception from this fact. And yet the resulting consequence is greater than that of which it is the consequence, whereas such an end as the lovers' finding each other ought to be infallible evidence of no other, subsequent, consequence being thinkable.

Does the satisfaction of any other desire show an analogy to this consequence? Quite on the contrary, the satisfaction of desire is in

every other case evinced by a period of rest; and even if a *tristitia*²¹ does supervene indicating by the way, that every satisfaction of an appetite is comical this *tristitia* is a straightforward consequence, though no *tristitia* so eloquently attests a preceding comical element as does that following love. It is quite another matter with an enormous consequence such as we are dealing with, a consequence of which no one knows whence it comes, nor whether it will come; whereas, if it does come, it comes as a consequence.

Who is able to grasp this? And yet that which for the initiates of love constitutes the greatest pleasure is also the most important thing for them so important that they even adopt new names, derived from the consequence thereof which thus, curiously enough, assumes retroactive force. The lover is now called father, his sweetheart, mother; and these names seem to them the most beautiful. And yet there is a being to whom these names are even more beautiful; for what is as beautiful as filial piety? To me it seems the most beautiful of all sentiments; and fortunately I can appreciate the thought underlying it. We are taught that it is seeming in a son to love his father. This I comprehend, I cannot even suspect that there is any contradiction possible here, and I acknowledge infinite satisfaction in being held by the loving bonds of filial piety. I believe it is the greatest debt of all to owe another being one's life. I believe that this debt cannot ever be wiped out, or even fathomed by any calculation, and for this reason I agree with Cicero when he asserts that the son is always in the wrong as against his father; and it is precisely filial piety which teaches me to believe this, teaches me not even to penetrate the hidden, but rather

²¹ Dejection. Cf. the Maxim: *omne animal post coitum* [?] [transcript unreadable] *triste*.

to remain hidden in the father. Quite true, I am glad to be another person's greatest debtor; but as to the opposite, viz., before deciding to make another person my greatest debtor, I want to arrive at greater clarity. For to my conception there is a world of difference between being some person's debtor, and making some person one's debtor to such an extent that he will never be able to clear himself.

What filial piety forbids the son to consider, love bids the father to consider. And here contradiction sets in again. If the son has an immortal soul like his father, what does it mean, then, to be a father? For must I not smile at myself when thinking of myself as a father whereas the son is most deeply moved when he reflects on the relation he bears to his father? Very well do I understand Plato when he says that an animal will give birth to an animal of the same species, a plant, to a plant of the same species, and thus also man to man.²² But this explains nothing, does not satisfy one's thought, and arouses but a dim feeling; for an immortal soul cannot be born. Whenever, then, a father considers his son in the light of his son's immortality which is, indeed, the essential consideration²³ he will probably smile at himself, for he cannot, by any means, grasp in their entirety all the beautiful and noble thoughts which his son with filial piety entertains about him. If, on the other hand, he considers his son from the point of view of his animal nature he must smile again, because the conception of fatherhood is too exalted an expression for it.

²² This statement is to be found, rather, in Aristotle's *Ethics* II, 6.

²³ There is a pun here in the original.

Finally, if it were thinkable that a father influenced his son in such fashion that his own nature was a condition from which the son's nature could not free itself, then the contradiction would arise in another direction; for in this case nothing more terrible is thinkable than being a father. There is no comparison between killing a person and giving him life: the former decides his fate only in time, the other for all eternity. So there is a contradiction again, and one both to laugh and to weep about. Is paternity then an illusion even if not in the same sense as is implied in Magdelone's speech to Jeronymus²⁴ or is it the most terrible thought imaginable? Is it the greatest benefit conferred on one, or is it the sweetest gratification of one's desire? Is it something which just happens, or is it the greatest task of life?

Look you, for this reason have I forsworn all love, for my thought is to me the most essential consideration. So even if love be the most exquisite joy, I renounce it, without wishing either to offend or to envy any one; and even if love be the condition for conferring the greatest benefit imaginable I deny myself the opportunity therefor but my thought I have not prostituted. By no means do I lack an eye for what is beautiful, by no means does my heart remain unmoved when I read the songs of the poets, by no means is my soul without sadness when it yields to the beautiful conception of love; but I do not wish to become unfaithful to my thought. And of what avail were it to be, for there is no happiness possible for me except my thought have free sway. If it had not, I would in desperation yearn for my thought, which I may not desert to cleave to a wife, for it is my immortal part and, hence, of more importance

²⁴ In Holberg's comedy of "Erasmus Montanus," III, 6.

than a wife. Well do I comprehend that if any thing is sacred it is love; that if faithlessness in any relation is base, it is doubly so in love; that if any deceit is detestable, it is tenfold more detestable in love. But my soul is innocent of blame. I have never looked at any woman to desire her, neither have I fluttered about aimlessly before blindly plunging, or lapsing, into the most decisive of all relations. If I knew what the lovable were I would know with certainty whether I had offended by tempting any one; but since I do not know, I am certain only of never having had the conscious desire to do so.

Supposing I should yield to love and be made to laugh; or supposing I should be cast down by terror, since I cannot find the narrow path which lovers travel as easily as if it were the broad highway, undisturbed by any doubts, which they surely have bestowed thought on (seeing our times have, indeed, reflected about all²⁵ and consequently will comprehend me when I assert that to act unreflectingly is nonsense, as one ought to have gone through all possible reflections before acting) supposing, I say, I should yield to love! Would I not insult past redress my beloved one if I laughed; or irrevocably plunge her into despair if I were overwhelmed by terror? For I understand well enough that a woman cannot be expected to have thought as profoundly about these matters; and a woman who found love comical (as but gods and men can, for which reason woman is a temptation luring them to become ridiculous) would both betray a suspicious amount of previous experience and understand me least. But a woman who comprehended the terror of love would have lost her loveliness and still fail to understand

²⁵ Cf. note p. 60.

meshe would be annihilated; which is in nowise my case, so long as my thought saves me.

Is there no one ready to laugh? When I began by wanting to speak about the comical element in love you perhaps, expected to be made to laugh, for it is easy to make you laugh, and I myself am a friend of laughter; and still you did not laugh, I believe. The effect of my speech was a different one, and yet precisely this proves that I have spoken about the comical. If there be no one who laughs at my speechwell, then laugh a little at me, dear fellow-banqueters, and I shall not wonder; for I do not understand what I have occasionally heard you say about love. Very probably, though, you are among the initiated as I am not.

Thereupon the Young Person seated himself. He had become more beautiful, almost, than before the meal. Now he sat quietly, looking down before him, unconcerned about the others. John the Seducer desired at once to urge some objections against the Young Person's speech but was interrupted by Constantin who warned against discussions and ruled that on this occasion only speeches were in order. John said if that was the case, he would stipulate that he should be allowed to be the last speaker. This again gave rise to a discussion as to the order in which they were to speak, which Constantin closed by offering to speak forth with, against their recognizing his authority to appoint the speakers in their turn.

(Constantin's Speech)

Constantin spoke as follows:

There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak,²⁶ and now it seems to be the time to speak briefly, for our young friend has spoken much and very strangely. His *vis comica*²⁷ has made us struggle *incipiti proelio*²⁸ because his speech was full of doubts, as he himself is, sitting there now a perplexed man who knows not whether to laugh, or weep, or fall in love. In fact, had I had foreknowledge of his speech, such as he demands one should have of love, I should have forbidden him to speak; but now it is too late. I shall bid you then, dear fellow-banqueters, "gladsome and merry to be," and even if I cannot enforce this I shall ask you to forget each speech so soon as it is made and to wash it down with a single draught.

And now as to woman, about whom I shall speak. I too have pondered about her, and I have finally discovered the category to which she belongs. I too have sought, but I have found, too, and I have made a matchless discovery which I shall now communicate to

²⁶ Eccles. 3, 7.

²⁷ Comical power.

²⁸ In uncertain battle.

you. Woman is understood correctly only when placed in the category of "the joke."

It is man's function to be absolute, to act in an absolute fashion, or to give expression to the absolute. Woman's sphere lies in her relativity.²⁹ Between beings so radically different, no true reciprocal relation can exist. Precisely in this incommensurability lies the joke. And with woman the joke was born into the world. It is to be understood, however, that man must know how to stick to his role of being absolute; for else nothing is seen that is to say, something exceedingly common is seen, viz., that man and woman fit each other, he as a half man and she as a halfman.

The joke is not an æsthetic, but an abortive ethical, category. Its effect on thought is about the same as the impression we receive if a man were solemnly to begin making a speech, recite a comma or two with his pronouncement, then say "hm!"—dash"—and then stop. Thus with woman. One tries to cover her with the ethical category, one thinks of human nature, one opens one's eyes, one fastens one's glances on the most excellent maiden in question, an effort is made to redeem the claims of the ethical demand; and then one grows ill at ease and says to one's self: ah, this is undoubtedly a joke! The joke lies, indeed, in applying that category to her and measuring her by it, because it would be idle to expect serious results from her; but just that is the joke. Because if one could demand it of her it would not be a joke at all. A mighty poor joke indeed it would be, to place her under the air-pump and draw the air out of her—indeed it were a shame; but to blow her up to supernatural size and let her imagine

²⁹ According to the development of these terms in Kierkegaard's previous works, the "absolute" belongs to the ethic, the "relative" to the æsthetic sphere.

herself to have attained all the ideality which a little maiden of sixteen imagines she has, that is the beginning of the game and, indeed, the beginning of a highly entertaining performance. No youth has half so much imaginary ideality as a young girl, but: "We shall soon be even" as says the tailor in the proverb; for her ideality is but an illusion.

If one fails to consider woman from this point of view she may cause irreparable harm; but through my conception of her she becomes harmless and amusing. For a man there is nothing more shocking than to catch himself twaddling. It destroys all true ideality; for one may repent of having been a rascal, and one may feel sorry for not having meant a word of what one said; but to have talked nonsense, sheer nonsense, to have meant all one said and behold! it was all nonsense—that is too disgusting for repentance incarnate to put up with. But this is not the case with woman. She has a prescriptive right to transfigure herself in less than 24 hours—in the most innocent and pardonable nonsense; for far is it from her ingenuous soul to wish to deceive one! indeed, she meant all she said, and now she says the precise opposite, but with the same amiable frankness, for now she is willing to stake everything on what she said last. Now in case a man in all seriousness surrenders to love he may be called fortunate indeed if he succeeds in obtaining an insurance—if, indeed, he is able to obtain it anywhere; for so inflammable a material as woman is most likely to arouse the suspicions of an insurance agent. Just consider for a moment what he has done in thus identifying himself with her! If, some fine New Year's night she goes off like some fireworks he will promptly follow suit; and even if this should not happen he will have many a close call. And what may he not lose! He may lose his all; for there is but

one absolute antithesis to the absolute, and that is nonsense. Therefore, let him not seek refuge in some society for morally tainted individuals, for he is not morally tainted—far from it; only, he has been reduced in *absurdum* and beatified in nonsense; that is, has been made a fool of.

This will never happen among men. If a man should sputter off in this fashion I would scorn him. If he should fool me by his cleverness I need but apply the ethical category to him, and the danger is trifling. If things go too far I shall put a bullet through his brain; but to challenge a woman—what is that, if you please? Who does not see that it is a joke, just as when Xerxes had the sea whipped? When Othello murders Desdemona, granting she really had been guilty, he has gained nothing, for he has been duped, and a dupe he remains; for even by his murdering her he only makes a concession with regard to a consequence which originally made him ridiculous; whereas Elvira³⁰ may be an altogether pathetic figure when arming herself with a dagger to obtain revenge. The fact that Shakespeare has conceived Othello as a tragic figure (even disregarding the calamity that Desdemona is innocent) is to be explained and, indeed, to perfect satisfaction, by the hero being a colored person. For a colored person, dear fellow-banqueters, who cannot be assumed to represent spiritual qualities—a colored person, I say, who therefore becomes green in his face when his ire is aroused (which is a physiological fact), a colored man may, indeed, become tragic if he is deceived by a woman; just as a woman has all the pathos of tragedy on her side when she is betrayed by a man. A man who flies into a rage may perhaps become tragic; but a man of

³⁰ Heroine of Mozart's "Don Juan."

whom one may expect a developed mentality, he either not become jealous, or he will become ridiculous if does; and most of all when he comes running with a dagger in his hand.

A Pity that Shakespeare has not presented us with a comedy of this description in which the claim raised by a woman's infidelity is turned down by irony; for not every one who is able to see the comical element in this situation is able also to develop the thought and give it dramatic embodiment. Let one but imagine Socrates surprising Xanthippe in the act—for it would be un-Socratic even to think of Socrates being particularly concerned about his wife's infidelity, or still worse, spying on her—imagine it, and I believe that the fine smile which transformed the ugliest man in Athens into the handsomest, would for the first time have turned into a roar of laughter. It is incomprehensible why Aristophanes, who so frequently made Socrates the butt of his ridicule, neglected to have him run on the stage shouting: "Where is she, where is she, so that I may kill her, i.e., my unfaithful Xanthippe." For really it does not matter greatly whether or no Socrates was made a cuckold, and all that Xanthippe may do in this regard is wasted labor, like snapping one's fingers in one's pocket; for Socrates remains the same intellectual hero, even with a horn on his forehead. But if he had in fact become jealous and had wanted to kill Xanthippe—alas! then would Xanthippe have exerted a power over him such as the entire Greek nation and his sentence of death could not—to make him ridiculous.

A cuckold is comical, then, with respect to his wife; but he may be regarded as becoming tragical with respect to other men. In this fact we may find an explanation of the Spanish conception of honor. But

the tragic element resides chiefly in his not being able to obtain redress, and the anguish of his suffering consists really in its being devoid of meaning—which is terrible enough. To shoot the woman, to challenge her, to despise her, all this would only serve to render the poor man still more ridiculous; for woman is the weaker sex. This consideration enters in everywhere and confuses all. If she performs a great deed she is admired more than man, because it is more than was expected of her. If she is betrayed, all the pathos is on her side; but if a man is deceived one has scant sympathy and little patience while he is present—and laughs at him when his back is turned.

Look you, therefore is it advisable betimes to consider woman as a joke. The entertainment she affords is simply incomparable. Let one consider her a fixed quantity, and one's self a relative one; let one by no means contradict her, for that would simply be helping her; let one never doubt what she says but, rather, believe her every word; let one gallivant about her, with eyes rendered unsteady unspeakable admiration and blissful intoxication, and with the mincing steps of a worshipper; let one languishingly fall on one's knees, then lift up one's eyes up to her languishingly and heave a breath again; let one do all she bids one, like an obedient slave. And now comes the cream of the joke. We need no proof that woman can speak, i.e., use words. Unfortunately, however, she does not possess sufficient reflection for making sure against her in the long run—which is, at most, eight days—contradicting herself; unless indeed man, by contradicting her, exerts a regulative influence. So the consequence is that within a short time confusion will reign supreme. If one had not done what she told one to, the confusion would pass unnoticed; for she forgets again as quickly as she talks.

But since her admirer has done all, and has been at her beck and call in every instance, the confusion is only too glaring.

The more gifted the woman, the more amusing the situation. For the more gifted she is, the more imagination she will possess. Now, the more imagination she possesses, the greater airs she will give herself and the greater the confusion which is bound to become evident in the next instant. In life, such entertainment is rarely had, because this blind obedience to a woman's whims occurs but seldom. And if it does, in some languishing swain, most likely he is not qualified to see the fun. The fact is, the ideality a little maiden assumes in moments when her imagination is at work is encountered nowhere else, whether in gods or man; but it is all the more entertaining to believe her and to add fuel to the fire.

As I remarked, the fun is simply incomparable—indeed, I know it for a fact, because I have at times not been able to sleep at night with the mere thought of what new confusions I should live to see, through the agency of my sweetheart and my humble zeal to please her. Indeed, no one who gambles in a lottery will meet with more remarkable combinations than he who has a passion for this game. For this is sure, that every woman without exception possesses the same qualifications for being resolved and transfigured in nonsense with a gracefulness, a nonchalance, an assurance such as befits the weaker sex.

Being a right-minded lover one naturally discovers every possible charm in one's beloved. Now, when discovering genius in the above sense, one ought not to let it remain a mere possibility but ought, rather, to develop it into virtuosity. I do not need to be more specific, and more cannot be said in a general way, yet every one

will understand me. Just as one may find entertainment in balancing a cane on one's nose, in swinging a tumbler in a circle without spilling a drop, in dancing between eggs, and in other games as amusing and profitable, likewise, and not otherwise, in living with his beloved the lover will have a source of incomparable entertainment and food for most interesting study. In matters pertaining to love let one have absolute belief, not only in her protestations of fidelity—one soon tires of that game—but in all those explosions of inviolable Romanticism by which she would probably perish if one did not contrive a safety-valve through which the sighs and the smoke, and "the aria of Romanticism³¹" may escape and make her worshipper happy. Let one compare her admiringly to Juliet, the difference being only that no person ever as much as thought of touching a hair on her Romeo's head. With regard to intellectual matters, let one hold her capable of all and, if one has been lucky enough to find the right woman, in a trice one will have a cantankerous authoress, whilst wonderingly shading one's eyes with one's hand and duly admiring what the little black hen may yield besides.³² It is altogether incomprehensible why Socrates did not choose this course of action instead of bickering with Xanthippe—oh, well! to be sure he wished to acquire practice, like the riding master who, even though he has the best trained horse, yet knows how to tease him in such fashion that there is good reason for breaking him in again."³³

³¹ Quotations from Wessel's famous comedy of "Love without Stockings," III, 3.

³² Viz. besides the eggs she duly furnishes; Holberg, "The Busybody," II, 1.

³³ This figure is said by Diogenes Laertios II,37 to have been used by Socrates himself about his relation to Xanthippe.

Let me be a little more concrete, in order to illustrate a particular and highly interesting phenomenon. A great deal has been said about feminine fidelity, but rarely with any discretion.³⁴ From a purely æsthetic point of view this fidelity is to be regarded as a piece of poetic fiction which steps on the stage to find her lover—a fiction which sits by the spinning wheel and waits for her lover to come; but when she has found him, or he has come, why, then æsthetics is at a loss. Her infidelity, on the other hand, as contrasted with her previous fidelity, is to be judged chiefly with regard to its ethical import, when jealousy will appear as a tragic passion. There are three possibilities, so the case is favorable for woman; for there are two cases of fidelity, as against one of infidelity. Inconceivably great is her fidelity when she is not altogether sure of her cavalier; and ever so inconceivably great is it when he repels her fidelity. The third case would be her infidelity. Now granted one has sufficient intellect and objectivity to make reflections, one will find sufficient justification, in what has been said, for my category of "the joke." Our young friend whose beginning in a manner deceived me seemed to be on the point of entering into this matter, but backed out again, dismayed at the difficulty. And yet the explanation is not difficult, providing one really sets about it seriously, to make unrequited love and death correspond to one another, and providing one is serious enough to stick to his thought—and so much seriousness one ought to have—for sake of the joke.

Of course this phrase of unrequited love being death originated either with a woman or a womanish male. Its origin is easily made out, seeing that it is one of those categorical outbursts which,

³⁴ The following sentences are not as clear in meaning as is otherwise the case in Kierkegaard.

spoken with great bravado, on the spur of the moment, may count on a great and immediate applause; for although this business is said to be a matter of life and death, yet the phrase is meant for immediate consumption—like cream-puffs. Although referring to daily experience it by no means binding on him who is to die, but only obliges the listener to rush post-haste to the assistance of the dying lover. If a man should take to using such phrases it would not be amusing at all, for he would be too despicable to laugh at. Woman, however, possesses genius, is lovable in the measure she possesses it, and is amusing at all times. Well, then, the languishing lady dies of love—why certainly, for did she not say so herself? In this matter she is pathetic, for woman has enough courage to say what no man would have the courage to do—so then she dies! In saying so I have measured her by ethical standards. Do ye likewise, dear fellow-banqueters, and understand your Aristotle aright, now! He observes very correctly that woman cannot be used in tragedy.³⁵ And very certainly, her proper sphere is the pathetic and serious *divertissement*, the half-hour face, not the five-act drama. So then she dies. But should she for that reason not be able to love again? Why not?—that is, if it be possible to restore her to life. Now, having been restored to life, she is of course a new being—another person, that is, and begins afresh and falls in love for the first time: nothing remarkable in that! Ah, death, great is thy power; not the most violent emetic and not the most powerful laxative could ever have the same purging effect!

The resulting confusion is capital, if one but is attentive and does not forget. A dead man is one of the most amusing characters to be

³⁵ Poetics, chap.15.

met with in life. Strange that more use is not made of him on the stage, for in life he is seen, now and then. When you come to think of it, even one who has only been seemingly dead is a comical figure; but one who was really dead certainly contributes to our entertainment all one can reasonably expect of a man. All depends on whether one is attentive. I myself had my attention called to it, one day, as I was walking with one of my acquaintances. A couple passed us. I judged from the expression on his face that he knew them and asked whether that was the case. "Why, yes," he answered, "I know them very well, and especially the lady, for she is my departed one."—"What departed one?" I asked.—"Why, my departed first love," he answered. "Indeed, this is a strange affair. She said: I shall die. And that very same moment she departed, naturally enough, by death—else one might have insured her beforehand in the widow's insurance. Too late! Dead she was and dead she remained; and now I wander about, as says the poet, vainly seeking the grave of my lady-love that I may shed my tears thereon." Thus this broken-hearted man who remained alone in the world, though it consoled him to find her pretty far along with some other man.

It is a good thing for the girls, thought I, that they don't have to be buried, every time they die; for if parents have hitherto considered a boy-child to be the more expensive, the girls might become even more so!

A simple ease of infidelity is not as amusing, by far. I mean, if a girl should fall in love with some one else and should say to her lover: "I cannot help it, save me from myself!" But to die from sorrow because she cannot endure being separated from her lover

by his journey to the West Indies, to have put up with his departure, however, and then, at his return, be not only not dead, but attached to some one else for all time—that certainly is a strange fate for a lover to undergo. No wonder, then, that the heart-broken man at times consoled himself with the burthen of an old song which runs: "Hurrah for you and me, I say, we never shall forget that day!"

Now forgive me, dear fellow-banqueters, if I have spoken at too great length; and empty a glass to love and to woman. Beautiful she is and lovely, if she be considered æsthetically. That is undeniable. But, as has often been said, and as I shall say also: one ought not to remain standing here, but should go on.³⁶ Consider her, then, ethically and you will hardly have begun to do so before the humor of it will become apparent. Even Plato and Aristotle assume that woman is an imperfect form, an irrational quantity, that is, one which might some time, in a better world, be transformed into a man. In this life one must take her as she is. And what this is becomes apparent very soon; for she will not be content with the æsthetic sphere, but goes on, she wants to become emancipated, and she has the courage to say so. Let her wish be fulfilled and the amusement will be simply incomparable.

When Constantin had finished speaking he forthwith ruled Victor Eremita to begin. He spoke as follows:

³⁶ Cf. note p. 60. [re: footnote 11 of this document.]

(Victor Eremita's Speech)

As will be remembered, Plato offers thanks to the gods for four things. In the fourth place he is grateful for having been permitted to be a contemporary of Socrates. For the three other boons mentioned by him,³⁷ an earlier Greek philosopher³⁸ had already thanked the gods, and so I conclude that they are worthy our gratitude. But alas!—even if I wanted to express my gratitude like these Greeks I would not be able to do so for what was denied me. Let me then collect my soul in gratitude for the one good which was conferred on me also—that I was made a man and not a woman.

To be a woman is something so curious, so heterogeneous and composite that no predicate will fully express these qualities; and if I should use many predicates they would contradict one another in such fashion that only a woman would be able to tolerate the result and, what is worse, feel happy about it. The fact that she really signifies less than man—that is not her misfortune, and still less so if she got to know it, for it might be borne with fortitude. No, her misfortune consists in her life's having become devoid of fixed

³⁷ They are, that he had been created a man and not an animal, a man and not a woman, a Greek and not a Barbarian (Lactantius, *Instit.* III, 19,17).

³⁸ Thales of Miletos (Diogenes Laertios I, 33).

meaning through a romantic conception of things, by virtue of which, now she signifies all, and now, nothing at all; without ever finding out what she really does signify and even that is not her misfortune but, rather, the fact that, being a woman, she never will be able to find out. As for myself, if I were a woman, I should prefer to be one in the Orient and as a slave; for to be a slave, neither more nor less is at any rate something, in comparison with being, now heyday, now nothing.

Even if a woman's life did not contain such contrasts, the distinction she enjoys, and which is rightly assumed to be hers as a woman—a distinction she does not share with man—would by itself point to the meaninglessness of her life. The distinction I refer to is that of gallantry. To be gallant to woman is becoming in men. Now gallantry consists very simply in conceiving in fantastic categories that person to whom one is gallant. To be gallant to a man is, therefore, an insult, for he begs to be excused from the application of fantastic categories to him. For the fair sex, however, gallantry signifies a tribute, a distinction, which is essentially its privilege. Ah me, if only a single cavalier were gallant to them the case would not be so serious. But far from it! At bottom every man is gallant, he is unconsciously so. This signifies, therefore, that it is life itself which has bestowed this perquisite on the fair sex. Woman on her part unconsciously accepts it. Here we have the same trouble again; for if only a single woman did so, another explanation would be necessary. This is life's characteristic irony.

Now if gallantry contained the truth it ought to be reciprocal, i.e., gallantry would be the accepted quotation for the stated difference between beauty on the one hand, and power, astuteness, and

strength, on the other. But this is not the case, gallantry is essentially woman's due; and the fact that she unconsciously accepts it may be explained through the solicitude of nature for the weak and those created in a stepmotherly fashion by her, who feel more than recompensed by an illusion. But precisely this illusion is misfortune. It is not seldom the case that nature comes to the assistance of an afflicted creature by consoling him with the notion that he is the most beautiful. If that is so, why, then we may say that nature made good the deficiency since now the creature is endowed with even more than could be reasonably demanded. But to be beautiful -only in one's imagination, and not to be overcome, indeed, by sadness, but to be fooled into an illusion—why, that is still worse mockery. Now, as to being afflicted, woman certainly is far from having been treated in a stepmotherly fashion by nature; still she is so in another sense inasmuch as she never can free herself from the illusion with which life has consoled her.

Gathering together one's impressions of a woman's existence, in order to point out its essential features, one is struck by the fact that every woman's life gives one an entirely phantastic impression. In a far more decisive sense than man she may be said to have turning points in her career; for her turning points turn everything upside down. In one of Tieck's³⁹ Romantic dramas there occurs a person who, having once been king of Mesopotamia, now is a green-grocer in Copenhagen. Exactly as fantastic is every feminine existence. If the girl's name is Juliana, her life is as follows: erstwhile empress in the wide domains of love, and titular queen of all the exaggerations of tomfoolery; now, Mrs. Peterson, corner Bath Street.

³⁹ German poet of the Romantic School (1773-1853).

When a child, a girl is less highly esteemed than a boy. When a little older, one does not know exactly what to make of her. At last she enters that decisive period in which she holds absolute sway. Worshipfully man approaches her as a suitor. Worshipfully, for so does every suitor, it is not the scheme of a crafty deceiver. Even the executioner, when laying down his *fascēs* to go a-wooing, even he bends his knee, although he is willing to offer himself up, within a short time, to domestic executions which he finds so natural that he is far from seeking any excuse for them in the fact that public executions have grown so few. The cultured person behaves in the very same manner. He kneels, he worships, he conceives his lady-love in the most fantastic categories; and then he very quickly forgets his kneeling position—in fact, he knew full well the while he knelt that it was fantastic to do so.

If I were a woman I would prefer to be sold by my father to the highest bidder, as is the custom in the Orient; for there is at least some sense in such a deal. What misfortune to have been born a woman! Yet her misfortune really consists in her not being able to comprehend it, being a woman. If she does complain, she complains rather about her Oriental, than her Occidental, status. But if I were a woman I would first of all refuse to be wooed, and resign myself to belong to the weaker sex, if such is the case, and be careful—which is most important if one is proud—of not going beyond the truth. However, that is of but little concern to her. Juliana is in the seventh heaven, and Mrs. Peterson submits to her fate.

Let me, then, thank the gods that I was born a man and not a woman. And still, how much do I forego! For is not all poetry, from the drinking song to the tragedy, a deification of woman? All the

worse for her and for him who admires her; for if he does not look out he will, all of a sudden, have to pull a long face. The beautiful, the excellent, all of man's achievement, owes its origin to woman, for she inspires him. Woman is, indeed, the inspiring element in life. How many a love-lorn shepherd has played on this theme, and how many a shepherdess has listened to it! Verily, my soul is without envy and feels only gratitude to the gods; for I would rather be a man, though in humble station, but really so, than be a woman and an indeterminate quantity, rendered happy by a delusion—I would rather be a concrete thing, with a small but definite meaning, than an abstraction which is to mean all.

As I have said, it is through woman that ideality is born into the world and—what were man without her! There is many a man who has become a genius through a woman, many a one a hero, many a one a poet, many a one even a saint; but he did not become a genius through the woman he married, for through her he only became a privy councillor; he did not become a hero through the woman he married, for through her he only became a general; he did not become a poet through the woman he married, for through her he only became a father; he did not become a saint through the woman he married, for he did not marry, and would have married but one—the one whom he did not marry; just as the others became a genius, became a hero, became a poet through the help of the woman they did not marry. If woman's ideality were in itself inspiring, why, then the inspiring woman would be the one to whom a man is united for life. But life tells a different story. It is only by a negative relation to her that man is rendered productive in his ideal endeavors. In this sense she is inspiring; but to say that she is inspiring, without qualifying one's statement, is to be guilty of a

paralogism⁴⁰ which one must be a woman to overlook. Or has any one ever heard of any man having become a poet through his wife? So long as man does not possess her she inspires him. It is this truth which gives rise to the illusions entertained in poetry and by women. The fact that he does not possess her signifies, either, that he is still fighting for her—thus has woman inspired many a one and rendered him a knight; but has any one ever heard of any man having been rendered a knight valiant through his wife? Or, the fact that he does not possess her signifies that he cannot obtain her by any manner of means—thus has woman inspired many a one and roused his ideality; that is, if there is anything in him worth while. But a wife, who has things ever so much worth while for her husband, will hardly arouse any ideal strivings in him. Or, again, the fact that he does not possess her signifies that he is pursuing an ideal. Perchance he loves many, but loving many is also a kind of unrequited love; and yet the ideality of his soul is to be seen in this striving and yearning, and not in the small bits of loveliness which make up the sum total of the contributions of all those he loves.

The highest ideality a woman can arouse in a man consists, in fact, in the awakening within him of the consciousness of immortality. The point of this proof lies in what one might call the necessity of a reply. Just as one may remark about some play that it cannot end without this or that person getting in his say, likewise (says ideality) our existence cannot be all over with death: I demand a reply! This proof is frequently furnished, in a positive fashion, in the public advertiser. I hold that to be entirely proper, for if proof is to be made in the public advertiser it must be made in a positive

⁴⁰ Reasoning against the rules of logic.

fashion. Thus: Mrs. Petersen, we learn, has lived a number of years, until in the night of the 24th it pleased Providence, etc. This produces in Mr. Petersen an attack of reminiscences from his courting days or, to express it quite plainly, nothing but seeing her again will ever console him. For this blissful meeting he prepare himself, in the meanwhile, by taking unto himself another wife; for, to be sure, this marriage is by no means as poetic as the first—still it is a good imitation. This is the proof positive. Mr. Petersen is not satisfied with demanding a reply, no, he wants a meeting again in the hereafter.

As is well known, a base metal will often show the gleam of precious metal. This is the brief silver-gleam. With respect to the base metal this is a tragic moment, for it must once for all resign itself to being a base metal. Not so with Mr. Petersen. The possession of ideality is by rights inherent in every person—and now, if I laugh at Mr. Petersen it is not because he, being in reality of base metal, had but a single silver-gleam; but, rather, because just this silver-gleam betrays his having become a base metal. Thus does the philistine look most ridiculous when, arrayed in ideality, he affords fitting occasion to say, with Holberg: What! does that cow wear a fine dress, too?⁴¹

The case is this: whenever a woman arouses ideality in man, and thereby the consciousness of immortality, she always does so negatively. He who really became a genius, hero, a poet, a saint through woman, he has by that very fact seized on the essence of immortality. Now if the inspiring element were positively present in

⁴¹ "The Lying-in Room," II, 2.

woman, why, then a man's wife, and only his wife, ought to awaken in the consciousness of immortality. But the reverse holds true. That is, if she is really to awaken ideality in husband she must die. Mr. Petersen, to be sure, is not affected, for all that. But if woman, by her death, does awaken man's ideality, then is she indeed the cause of all the great things poetry attributes to her; but note well: that which she did in a positive fashion for him in no wise roused his ideality. In fact, her significance in this regard becomes the more doubtful the longer she lives, because she will at length really begin to wish to signify something positive. However, the more positive the proof the less it proves; for then Mr. Petersen's longing will be for some past common experiences whose content was, to all intents and purposes, exhausted when they were had. Most positive of all the proof becomes if the object of his longing concerns their marital spooning—that time when they visited the Deer Park together! In the same way one might suddenly feel a longing for the old pair of slippers one used to be so comfortable in; but that proof is not exactly a proof for the immortality of the soul. On the other hand, the more negative the proof, the better it is; for the negative is higher than the positive, inasmuch as it concerns our immortality, and is thus the only positive value.

Woman's main significance lies in her negative contribution, whereas her positive contributions are as nothing in comparison but, on the contrary, pernicious. It is this truth which life keeps from her, consoling her with an illusion which surpasses all that might arise in any man's brain, and with parental care ordering life in such fashion that both language and everything else confirm her in her illusion. For even if she be conceived as the very opposite of inspiring, and rather as the well-spring of all corruption; whether

now we imagine that with her, sin came into the world, or that it is her infidelity which ruined all—our conception of her is always gallant. That is, when hearing such opinions one might readily assume that woman were really able to become infinitely more culpable than man, which would, indeed, amount to an immense acknowledgment of her powers. Alas, alas! the case is entirely different. There is a secret reading of this text which woman cannot comprehend; for, the very next moment, all life owns to the same conception as the state, which makes man responsible for his wife. One condemns her as man never is condemned (for only a real sentence is passed on him, and there the matter ends), not with her receiving a milder sentence; for in that case not all of her life would be an illusion, but with the case against her being dismissed and the public, i.e., life, having to defray the costs. One moment, woman is supposed to be possessed of all possible wiles, the next moment, one laughs at him whom she deceived, which surely is a contradiction. Even such a case as that of Potiphar's wife does not preclude the possibility of her having really been seduced. Thus has woman an enormous possibility, such as no man has—an enormous possibility; but her reality is in proportion. And most terrible of all is the magic of illusion in which she feels herself happy.

Let Plato then thank the gods for having been born a contemporary of Socrates: I envy him; let him offer thanks for being a Greek: I envy him; but when he is grateful for having been born a man and not a woman I join him with all my heart. If I had been born a woman and could understand what now I can understand—it were terrible! But if I had been born a woman and therefore could not understand it—that were still more terrible!

But if the case is as I stated it, then it follows that one had better refrain from any positive relation with woman. Wherever she is concerned one has to reckon with that inevitable hiatus which renders her happy as she does not detect the illusion, but which would be a man's undoing if he detected it.

I thank the gods, then, that I was born a man and not a woman; and I thank them, furthermore, that no woman by some life-long attachment holds me in duty bound to be constantly reflecting that it ought not to have been.

Indeed, what a passing strange device is marriage! And what makes it all the stranger is the suggestion that it is to be a step taken without thought. And yet no step is more decisive, for nothing in life is as inexorable and masterful as the marriage tie. And now so important a step as marriage ought, so we are told, to be taken without reflection! Yet marriage is not something simple but something immensely complex and indeterminate. Just as the meat of the turtle smacks of all kinds of meat, so likewise does marriage have a taste of all manner of things; and just as the turtle is a sluggish animal, likewise is marriage a sluggish thing. Falling in love is, at least, a simple thing, but marriage—! Is it something heathen or something Christian, something spiritual or something profane, or something civil, or something of all things? Is it an expression of an inexplicable love, the elective affinity of souls in delicate accord with one another; or is it a duty, or a partnership, or a mere convenience, or the custom of certain countries or is it a duty, or a partnership, or a mere convenience, or the custom of certain countries—or is it a little of all these? Is one to order the music for it from the town musician or the organist, or is one to have a little

from both? Is it the minister or the police sergeant who is to make the speech and enroll the names in the book of life—or in the town register? Does marriage blow a tune on a comb, or does it listen to the whisperings "like to those of the fairies from the grottoes of a summer night"⁴²

And now every Darby imagines he performed such a Potpourri, such incomparably complex music, in getting married—and imagines that he is still performing it while living a married life! My dear fellow-banqueters, ought we not, in default of a wedding present and congratulations, give each of the conjugal partners a demerit for repeated inattentiveness? It is taxing enough to express a single idea in one's life; but to think something so complicated as marriage and, consequently, bring it under one head; to think something so complicated and yet to do justice to each and every element in it, and have everything present at the same time—verily, he is a great man who can accomplish all this! And still every Benedict accomplishes it—so he does, no doubt; for does he not say that he does it unconsciously? But if this is to be done unconsciously it must be through some higher form of unconsciousness permeating all one's reflective powers. But not a word is said about this! And to ask any married man about it means just wasting one's time.

He who has once committed a piece of folly will constantly be pursued by its consequences. In the case of marriage the folly consists in one's having gotten into a mess, and the punishment, in recognizing, when it is too late, what one has done. So you will find

⁴² A quotation from Oehlenschläger's "Aladdin."

that the married man, now, becomes chesty, with a bit of pathos, thinking he has done something remarkable in having entered wedlock; now, puts his tail between his legs in dejection; then again, praises marriage in sheer self-defense. But as to a thought-unit which might serve to hold together the *disjecta membra*⁴³ of the most heterogeneous conceptions of life contained in marriage—for that we shall wait in vain.

Therefore, to be a mere Benedict is humbug, and to be a seducer is humbug, and to wish to experiment with woman for the sake of "the joke" is also humbug. In fact, the two last mentioned methods will be seen to involve concessions to woman on the part of man quite as large as those found in marriage. The seducer wishes to rise in his own estimation by deceiving her; but this very fact that he deceives and wishes to deceive—that he cares to deceive, is also a demonstration of his dependence on woman. And the same is true of him who wishes to experiment with her.

If I were to imagine any possible relation with woman it would be one so saturated with reflecton that it would, for that very reason, no longer be any relation with her at all. To be an excellent husband and yet on the sly seduce every girl; to seem a seducer and yet harbor within one all the ardor of romanticism—there would be something to that, or the concession in the first instance were then annihilated in the second. Certain it is that man finds his true ideality only in such a reduplication. All merely unconscious existence must be obliterated, and its obliteration ever cunningly guarded by some sham expression. Such a reduplication is

⁴³ Scattered members.

incomprehensible to woman, for it removes from her the possibility of expressing man's true nature in one form. If it were possible for woman to exist in such a reduplication, no erotic relation with her were thinkable. But, her nature being such as we all know it to be, any disturbance of the erotic relation is brought about by man's true nature which ever consists precisely in the annihilation of that in which she has her being.

Am I then preaching the monastic life and rightly called Eremita? By no means. You may as well eliminate the cloister, for after all it is only a direct expression of spirituality and as such but a vain endeavor to express it in direct terms. It makes small difference whether you use gold, or silver, or paper money; but he who does not spend a farthing but is counterfeit, he will comprehend me. He to whom every direct expression is but a fraud, he and he only, is safeguarded better than if he lived in a cloister-cell—he will be a hermit even if he travelled in an omnibus and night.

Scarcely had Victor finished when the Dressmaker jumped to his feet and threw over a bottle of wine standing before him; then he spoke as follows:

(The Dressmaker's Speech)

Well spoken, dear fellow-banqueters, well spoken! The longer I hear you speak the more I grow convinced that you are fellow-conspirators—I greet you as such, I understand you as such; for fellow-conspirators one can make out from afar. And yet, what know you? What does your bit of theory to which you wish to give the appearance of experience, your bit of experience which you make over into a theory—what does it amount to? For every now and then you believe her a moment and—are caught in a moment! No, I know woman—from her weak side, that is to say, I know her. I shrink from no means to make sure about what I have learned; for I am a madman, and a madman one must be to understand her, and if one has not been one before, one will become a madman, once one understands her. The robber has his hiding place by the noisy high-road, and the ant-lion his funnel in the loose sand, and the pirate his haunts by the roaring sea: likewise have I my fashion-shop in the very midst of the teeming streets, seductive, irresistible to woman as is the Venusberg to men. There, in a fashion-shop, one learns to know woman, in a practical way and without any theoretical ado.

Now, if fashion meant nothing than that woman in the heat of her desire threw off all her clothing—why, then it would stand for something. But this is not the case, fashion is not plain sensuality, not tolerated debauchery, but an illicit trade in indecency authorized as proper. And, just as in heathen Prussia the

marriageable girl wore a bell whose ringing served as a signal to the men, likewise is a woman's existence in fashion a continual bell-ringing, not for debauchees but for lickerish voluptuaries. People hold Fortune to be a woman—ah, yes it is, to be sure, fickle; still, it is fickle in something, as it may also give much; and insofar it is not a woman. No; but fashion is a woman, for fashion is fickleness in nonsense, and is consistent only in its becoming ever more crazy.

One hour in my shop is worth more than days and years without, if it really be one's desire to learn to know woman; in my shop, for it is the only one in the capital, there is no thought of competition. Who, forsooth, would dare to enter into competition with one who has entirely devoted himself, and is still devoting himself, as high-priest in this idol worship? No, there is not a distinguished assemblage which does not mention my name first and last; and there is not a Middle-class gathering where my name, whenever mentioned, does not inspire sacred awe, like that of the king; and there is no dress so idiotic but is accompanied by whisters of admiration when its owner proceeds down the hall—provided it bears my name; and there is not the lady of gentle birth who dares pass my shop by, nor the girl of humble origin but passes it sighing and thinking: if only I could afford it! Well, neither was she deceived. I deceive no one; I furnish the finest goods and the most costly, and at the lowest price, indeed, I sell below cost. The fact is, I do not wish to make a profit. On the contrary, every year I sacrifice large sums. And yet do I mean to win, I mean to, I shall spend my last farthing in order to corrupt, in order to bribe, the tools of fashion so that I may win the game. To me it is a delight beyond compare to unroll the most precious stuffs, to cut them out, to clip

pieces from genuine Brussels-lace, in order to make a fool's costume I sell to the lowest prices, genuine goods and in style.

You believe, perhaps, that woman wants to be dressed fashionably only at certain times? No such thing, she wants to be so all the time and that is her only thought. For a woman does have a mind, only it is employed about as well as is the Prodigal Son's substance; and woman does possess the power of reflection in an incredibly high degree, for there is nothing so holy but she will in no time discover it to be reconcilable with her finery—and the chiefest expression of finery is fashion. What wonder if she does discover it to be reconcilable; for is not fashion holy to her? And there is nothing so insignificant but she certainly will know how to make it count in her finery—and the most fatuous expression of finery is fashion. And there is nothing, nothing in all her attire, not the least ribbon, of whose relation to fashion she has not a definite conception and concerning which she is not immediately aware whether the lady who just passed by noticed it; because, for whose benefit does she dress, if not for other ladies!

Even in my shop where she comes to be fitted out *à la mode*, even there she is in fashion. Just as there is a special bathing costume and a special riding habit, likewise there is a particular kind of dress which it is the fashion to wear to the dressmaker's shop. That costume is not *insouciant* in the same sense as is the negligée a lady is pleased to be surprised in, earlier in the forenoon, where the point is her belonging to the fair sex and the coquetry lies in her letting herself be surprised. The dressmaker costume, on the other hand, is calculated to be nonchalant and a bit careless without her being embarrassed thereby; because a dressmaker stands in a different

relation to her from a cavalier. The coquetry here consists in thus showing herself to a man who, by reason of his station, does not presume to ask for the lady's womanly recognition, but must be content with the perquisites which fall abundantly to his share, without her ever thinking of it; or without it even so much as entering her mind to play the lady before a dressmaker. The point is, therefore, that her being of the opposite sex is, in a certain sense, left out of consideration, and her coquetry invalidated, by the superciliousness of the noble lady who would smile if any one alluded to any relation existing between her and her dressmaker. When visited in her negligée she conceals herself, thus displaying her charms by this very concealment. In my shop she exposes her charms with the utmost nonchalance, for he is only a dressmaker—and she is a woman. Now, her shawl slips down and bares some part of her body, and if I did not know what that means, and what she expects, my reputation would be gone to the winds. Now, she draws herself up, *a priori* fashion, now she gesticulates *a posteriori*; now, she sways to and fro in her hips; now, she looks at herself in the mirror and sees my admiring phiz behind her in the glass; now, she minces her words; now, she trips along with short steps; now, she hovers; now, she draws her foot after her in a slovenly fashion; now, she lets herself sink softly into an arm-chair, whilst I with humble demeanor offer her a flask of smelling salts and with my adoration assuage her agitation; now, she strikes after me playfully; now, she drops her handkerchief and, without as much as a single motion, lets her relaxed arm remain in its pendent position, whilst I bend down low to pick it up and return it to her, receiving a little patronizing nod as a reward. These are the ways of a lady of fashion

when in my shop. Whether Diogenes⁴⁴ made any impression on the Woman who was praying in a somewhat unbecoming posture, when he asked her whether she did not believe the gods could see her from behind—that I do not know; but this I do know, that if I should say to her ladyship kneeling down in church: "The folds of your gown do not fall according to fashion," she would be more alarmed than if she had given offense to the gods. Woe to the outcast, the male Cinderella, who has not comprehended this! *Pro dii immortales*⁴⁵ what, pray, is a woman who is not in fashion; *per deos obsecro*,⁴⁶ and what when she is in fashion!

Whether all this is true? Well, make trial of it: let the swain, when his beloved one sinks rapturously on his breast, whispering unintelligibly: "thine forever," and hides her head on his bosom—let him but say to her: "My sweet Kitty, your coiffure is not at all in fashion."—Possibly, men don't give thought to this; but he who knows it, and has the reputation of knowing it, he is the most dangerous man in the kingdom. What blissful hours the lover passes with his sweetheart before marriage I do not know; but of the blissful hours she spends in my shop he hasn't the slightest inkling, either. Without my special license and sanction a marriage is null and void, anyway—or else an entirely plebeian affair. Let it be the very moment when they are to meet before the altar, let her step forward with the very best conscience in the world that everything was bought in my shop and tried on there—and now, if I were to

⁴⁴ See Diogenes Laërtius, VI, 37.

⁴⁵ By the immortal gods.

⁴⁶ I adjure you by the gods.

rush up And exclaim: "But mercy! gracious lady, your myrtle wreath is all awry"—why, the whole ceremony might be postponed, for aught I know. But men do not suspect these things, one must be a dressmaker to know. So immense is the power of reflection needed to fathom a woman's thought that only a man who dedicates himself wholly to the task will succeed, and even then only if gifted to start with. Happy therefore the man who does not associate with any woman, for she is not his, anyway, even if, she be no other man's; for she is possessed by that phantorn born of the unnatural intercourse of woman's reflection with itself, fashion. Do you see, for this reason should woman always swear by fashion—then were there some force in her oath; for after all, fashion is the thing she is always thinking of, the only thing she can think together with, and into, everything. For instance, the glad message has gone forth from my shop to all fashionable ladies that fashion decrees the use of a particular kind of head-dress to be worn in church, and that this head-dress, again, must be somewhat different for High Mass and for the afternoon service. Now when the bells are ringing the carriage stops in front of my door. Her ladyship descends (for also this has been decreed, that no one can adjust that head-dress save I, the fashion-dealer), I rush out, making low bows, and lead her into my cabinet. And whilst she languishingly reposes I put everything in order. Now she is ready and has looked at herself in the mirror; quick as any messenger of the gods I hasten in advance, open the door of my cabinet with a bow, then hasten to the door of my shop and lay my arm on my breast, like some oriental slave; but encouraged by a gracious courtesy, I even dare to throw her an adoring and admiring kiss—now she is seated in her carriage—oh dear! she left her hymn book behind. I hasten out again and hand it

to her through the carriage window, I permit myself once more to remind her to hold her head a trifle more to the right, and herself to arrange things, should her head-dress become a bit disordered when descending. She drives away and is edified.

You believe, perhaps, that it is only great ladies who worship fashion, but far from it! Look at my sempstresses for whose dress I spare no expense, so that the dogmas of fashion may be proclaimed most emphatically from my shop. They form a chorus of half-witted creatures, and I myself lead them on as high-priest, as a shining example, squandering all, solely in order to make all womankind ridiculous. For when a seducer makes the boast that every woman's virtue has its price, I do not believe him; but I do believe that every woman at an early time will be crazed by the maddening and defiling introspection taught her by fashion, which will corrupt her more thoroughly than being seduced. I have made trial more than once. If not able to corrupt her myself I set on her a few of fashion's slaves of her own nation; for just as one may train rats to bite rats, likewise is the crazed woman's sting like that of the tarantula. And most especially dangerous is it when some man lends his help.

Whether I serve the Devil or God I do not know; but I am right, I shall be right, I will be, so long as I possess a single farthing, I will be until the blood spurts out of my fingers. The physiologist pictures the shape of woman to show the dreadful effects of wearing a corset, and beside it he draws a picture of her normal figure. That is all entirely correct, but only one of the drawings has the validity of truth: they all wear corsets. Describe, therefore, the miserable, stunted perversity of the fashion-mad woman, Describe the insidious introspection devouring her, and then describe the womanly

modesty which least of all knows about itself—do so and you have judged woman, have in very truth passed terrible sentence on her. If ever I discover such a girl who is contented and demure and not yet corrupted by indecent intercourse with women—she shall fall nevertheless. I shall catch her in my toils, already she stands at the sacrificial altar, that is to say, in my shop. With the most scornful glance a haughty monchalance can assume I measure her appearance, she perishes with fright; a peal of laughter from the adjoining room where sit my trained accomplices annihilates her. And afterwards, when I have gotten her rigged up *à la mode* and she looks crazier than a lunatic, as crazy as one who would not be accepted even in a lunatic asylum, then she leaves me in a state of bliss—no man, not even a god, were able to inspire fear in her; for is she not dressed in fashion?

Do you comprehend me now, do you comprehend why I call you fellow-conspirators, even though in a distant way? Do you now comprehend my conception of woman? Everything in life is a matter of fashion, the fear of God is a matter of fashion, and so are love, and crinolines, and a ring through the nose. To the utmost of my ability will I therefore come to the support of the exalted genius who wishes to laugh at the most ridiculous of all animals. If woman has reduced everything to a matter of fashion, then will I, with the help of fashion, prostitute her, as she deserves to be; I have no peace, I the dressmaker, my soul rages when I think of my task—she will yet be made to wear a ring through her nose. Seek therefore no sweetheart, abandon love as you would the most dangerous neighborhood; for the one whom you love would also be made to go with a ring through her nose.

Thereupon John, called the Seducer, spoke as follows:

(The Speech of John the Seducer)

My dear boon companions, is Satan plaguing you? For, indeed, you speak like so many hired mourners, your eyes are red with tears and not with wine. You almost move me to tears also, for an unhappy lover does have a miserable time of it in life. *Hinc illae lacrimae*.⁴⁷ I, however, am a happy lover, and my only wish is to remain so. Very possibly, that is one of the concessions to woman which Victor is so afraid of. Why not? Let it be a concession! Loosening the lead foil of this bottle of champagne also is a concession; letting its foaming contents flow into my glass also is a concession; and so is raising it to my lips—now I drain it—*concedo*.⁴⁸ Now, however, it is empty, hence I need no more concessions. Just the same with girls. If some unhappy lover has bought his kiss too dearly, this proves to me only that he does not know, either how to take what is coming to him or how to do it. I never pay too much for this sort of thing—that is a matter for the girls to decide. What this signifies? To me it signifies the most beautiful, the most delicious, and well-nigh the most persuasive, *argumentum ad hominem*; but since every woman, at

⁴⁷ Therefore those tears.

⁴⁸ I concede.

least once in her life, possesses this argumentative freshness I do not see any reason why I should not let myself be persuaded. Our young friend wishes to make this experience in his thought. Why not buy a cream puff and be content with looking at it? I mean to enjoy. No mere talk for me! Just as an old song has it about a kiss: *es ist kaum zu sehn, es ist nur filr Lippen, die genau sich verstehn*⁴⁹—understand each other so exactly that any reflection about the matter is but an impertinence and a folly. He who is twenty and does not grasp the existence of the categorical imperative "enjoy thyself"—he is a fool; and he who does not seize the opportunity is and remains a Christianfelder.⁵⁰

However, you all are unhappy lovers, and that is why you are not satisfied with woman as she is. The gods forbid! As she is she pleases me, just as she is. Even Constantin's category of "the joke" seems to contain a secret desire. I, on the other hand, I am gallant. And why not? Gallantry costs nothing and gives one all and is the condition for all, erotic pleasure. Gallantry is the Masonic language of the senses and of voluptuousness, between man and woman. It is a natural language, as love's language in general is. It consists not of sounds but of desires disguised and of ever changing wishes. That an unhappy lover may be ungallant enough to wish to convert his deficit into a draught payable in immortality—that I understand well enough. That is to say, I for my part do not understand it; for to me a woman has sufficient intrinsic value. I assure every woman of this, it is the truth; and at the same time it is certain that I am the only one who is not deceived by this truth. As to whether a

⁴⁹ It can hardly be seen, it is but for lips which understand each other exactly.

⁵⁰ Christiansfeld, a town in South Jutland, was the seat of a colony of Herrhuthian Pietists.

despoiled woman is worth less than man—about that I find no information in my price list. I do not pick flowers already broken, I leave them to the married men to use for Shrove-tide decoration. Whether e. g. Edward, wishes to consider the matter again, and again fall in love with Cordelia,⁵¹ or simply repeat the affair in his reflection —that is his own business. Why should I concern myself with other peoples' affairs! I explained to her at an earlier time what I thought of her; and, in truth, she convinced me, convinced me to my absolute satisfaction, that my gallantry was well applied.

*Concedo. Concessi.*⁵² If I should meet with another Cordelia, why then I shall enact a comedy "Ring number 2."⁵³ But you are unhappy lovers and have conspired together, and are worse deceived than the girls, notwithstanding that you are richly endowed by nature. But decision—the decision of desire, is the most essential thing in life. Our young friend will always remain an onlooker. Victor is an unpractical enthusiast. Constantin has acquired his good sense at too great a cost; and the fashion dealer is a madman. Stuff and nonsense! With all four of you busy about one girl, nothing would come of it.

Let one have enthusiasm enough to idealize, taste enough to join in the clinking of glasses at the festive board of enjoyment, sense enough to break off—to break off absolutely, as does Death,

⁵¹ The reference is to the "Diary of the Seducer" (in "Either—Or," part I). Edward is the scorned lover of Cordelia who is seduced by John.

⁵² I concede. I have conceded.

⁵³ Reference to a comedy by Farquhar, which enjoyed a moderate popularity in Copenhagen.

madness enough to wish to enjoy all over again—if you have all that you will be the favorite of gods and girls.

But of what avail to speak here? I do not intend to make proselytes. Neither is this the place for that. To be sure I love wine, to be sure I love the abundance of a banquet—all that is good; but let a girl be my company, and then I shall be eloquent. Let then Constantin have my thanks for the banquet, and the wine, and the excellent appointments—the speeches, however, were but indifferent. But in order that things shall have a better ending I shall pronounce a eulogy on woman.

Just as he who is to speak in praise of the divinity must be inspired by the divinity to speak worthily, and must therefore be taught by the divinity as to what he shall say, Likewise he who would speak of women. For woman, even less than the divinity, is a mere figment of man's brain, a day-dream, or a notion that occurs to one and which one may argue about *pro et contra*. Nay, one learns from woman alone what to say of her. And the more teachers one has had, the better. The first time one is a disciple, the next time one is already over the chief difficulties, just as one learns in formal and learned disputations how to use the last opponent's compliments against a new opponent. Nevertheless nothing is lost. For as little as a kiss is a mere sample of good things, and as little as an embrace is an exertion, just as little is this experience exhaustive. In fact it is essentially different from the mathematical proof of a theorem, which remains ever the same, even though other letters be substituted. This method is one befitting mathematics and ghosts, but not love and women, because each is a new proof, corroborating the truth of the theorem in a different manner. It is my joy that, far

from being less perfect than man, the female sex is, on the contrary, the more perfect. I shall, however, clothe my speech in a myth; and I shall exult, on woman's account whom you have so unjustly maligned, if my speech pronounce judgment on your souls, if the enjoyment of her beckon you only to flee you, as did the fruits from Tantalus; because you have fled, and thereby insulted, woman. Only thus, forsooth, may she be insulted, even though she scorn it, and though punishment instantly falls on him who had the audacity. I, however, insult no one. That is but the notion of married men, and a slander; whereas, in reality, I respect her more highly than does the man she is married to.

Originally there was but one sex, so the Greeks relate, and that was man's. Splendidly endowed he was, so he did honor to the gods—so splendidly endowed that the same happened to them as sometimes happens to a poet who has expended all his energy on a poetic invention: they grew jealous of man. Ay, what is worse, they feared that he would not willingly bow under their yoke; they feared, though with small reason, that he might cause their very heaven to totter. Thus they had raised up a power they scarcely held themselves able to curb. Then there was anxiety and alarm in the council of the gods. Much had they lavished in their generosity on the creation of man; but all must be risked now, for reason of bitter necessity; for all was at stake—so the gods believed—and recalled he could not be, as a poet may recall his invention. And by force he could not be subdued, or else the gods themselves could have done so; but precisely of that they despaired. He would have to be caught and subdued, then, by a power weaker than his own and yet stronger—one strong enough to compel him. What a marvellous power this would have to be! However, necessity teaches even the

gods to surpass themselves in inventiveness. They sought and they found. That power was woman, the marvel of creation, even in the eyes of the gods a greater marvel than man—a discovery which the gods in their naïveté could not help but applaud themselves for. What more can be said in her praise than that she was able to accomplish what even the gods did not believe themselves able to do; and what more can be said in her praise than that she did accomplish it! But how marvellous a creation must be hers to have accomplished it.

It was a ruse of the gods. Cunningly the enchantress was fashioned, for no sooner had she bewitched man than she changed and caught him in all the circumstantialities of existence. It was that the gods had desired. But what, pray, can be more delicious, or more entrancing and bewitching, than what the gods themselves contrived, when battling for their supremacy, as the only means of luring man? And most assuredly it is so, for woman is the only, and the most seductive, power in heaven and on earth. When compared with her in this sense man will indeed be found to be exceedingly imperfect.

And the stratagem of the gods was crowned with success; but not always. There have existed at all times some men—a few—who have detected the deception. They perceive well enough woman's loveliness—more keenly, indeed than the others—but they also suspect the real state of affairs. I call them erotic natures and count myself among them. Men call them seducers, woman has no name for them—such persons are to her unnameable. These erotic natures are the truly fortunate ones. They live more luxuriously than do the very gods, for they regale themselves with food more delectable than

ambrosia, and they drink what is more delicious than nectar; they eat the most seductive invention of the gods' most ingenious thought, they are ever eating dainties set for a bait—ah, incomparable delight, ah, blissful fare—they are ever eating but the dainties set for a bait; and they are never caught. All other men greedily seize and devour it, like bumpkins eating their cabbage, and are caught. Only the erotic nature fully appreciates the dainties set out for bait—he prizes them infinitely. Woman divines this, and for that reason there is a secret understanding between him and her. But he knows also that she is a bait, and that secret he keeps to himself.

That nothing more marvellous, nothing more delicious, nothing more seductive, than woman can be devised, for that vouch the gods and their pressing need which heightened their powers of invention; for that vouches also the fact that they risked all, and in shaping her moved heaven and earth.

I now forsake the myth. The conception "man" corresponds to his "idea." I can therefore, if necessary, think of an individual man as existing. The idea of woman, on the other hand, is so general that no one single woman is able to express it completely. She is not contemporaneous with man (and hence of less noble origin), but a later creation, though more perfect than he. Whether now the gods took some part from him whilst he slept, from fear of waking him by taking too much; or whether they bisected him and made woman out of the one half—at any rate it was man who was partitioned. Hence she is the equal of man only after this partition. She is a delusion and a snare, but is so only afterwards, and for him who is deluded. She is finiteness incarnate; but in her first stage she is

finiteness raised to the highest degree in the deceptive infinitude of all divine and human illusions. Now, the deception does not exist—one instant longer, and one is deceived.

She is finiteness, and as such she is a collective: one woman represents all women. Only the erotic nature comprehends this and therefore knows how to love many without ever being deceived, sipping the while all the delights the cunning gods were able to prepare. For this reason, as I said, woman cannot be fully expressed by one formula, but is, rather, an infinitude of finalities. He who wishes to think her "idea" will have the same experience as he who gazes on a sea of nebulous shapes which ever form anew, or as he who is dazed by looking over the waves whose foamy crests ever mock one's vision; for her "idea" is but the workshop of possibilities. And to the erotic nature these possibilities are the everlasting reason for his worship.

So the gods created her delicate and ethereal as if out of the mists of the summer night, yet goodly like ripe fruit; light like a bird, though the repository of what attracts all the world—light because the play of the forces is harmoniously balanced in the invisible center of a negative relation;⁵⁴ slender in growth, with definite lines, yet her body sinuous with beautiful curves; perfect, yet ever appearing as if completed but now; cool, delicious, and refreshing like new-fallen snow, yet blushing in coy transparency; happy like some pleasantry which makes one forget all one's sorrow; soothing as being the end of desire, and satisfying in herself being the stimulus of desire. And the gods had calculated that man, when first

⁵⁴ I.e., evidently, she does not exist because of herself; hence she is in a "negative" relation to herself. The center of this relation is "what attracts all the world."

beholding her, would be amazed, as one who sees himself, though familiar with that sight—would stand in amaze as one who sees himself in the splendor of perfection—would stand in amaze as one who beholds what he did never dream he would, yet beholds what, it would seem, ought to have occurred to him before—sees what is essential to life and yet gazes on it as being the very mystery of existence. It is precisely this contradiction in his admiration which nurses desire to life, while this same admiration urges him ever nearer, so that he cannot desist from gazing, cannot desist from believing himself familiar with the sight, without really daring to approach, even though he cannot desist from desiring.

When the gods had thus planned her form they were seized with fear lest they might not have the wherewithal to give it existence; but what they feared even more was herself. For they dared not let her know how beautiful she was, apprehensive of having some one in the secret who might spoil their ruse. Then was the crowning touch given to their wondrous creation: they made her faultless; but they concealed all this from her in the nescience of her innocence, and concealed it doubly from her in the impenetrable mystery of her modesty. Now she was perfect, and victory certain. Inviting she had been before, but now doubly so through her shyness, and beseeching through her shrinking, and irresistible through herself offering resistance. The gods were jubilant. And no allurements has ever been devised in the world so great as is woman, and no allurements is as compelling as is innocence, and no temptation is as ensnaring as is modesty, and no deception is as matchless as is woman. She knows of nothing, still her modesty is instinctive divination. She is distinct from man, and the separating wall of modesty parting them is more decisive than Aladdin's sword

separating him from Gulnare;⁵⁵ and yet, when like Pyramis he puts his head to this dividing wall of modesty, the erotic nature will perceive all pleasures of desire divined within as from afar.

Thus does woman tempt. Men are wont to set forth the most precious things they possess as a delectation for the gods, nothing less will do. Thus is woman a show-bread. the gods knew of naught comparable to her. She exists, she is present, she is with us, close by; and yet she is removed from us to an infinite distance when concealed in her modesty-until she herself betrays her hiding place, she knows not how: it is not she herself, it is life which informs on her. Roguish she is like a child who in playing peeps forth from his hiding place, yet her roguishness is inexplicable, for she does not know of it herself, she is ever mysterious-mysterious when she casts down her eyes, mysterious when she sends forth the messengers of her glance which no thought, let alone any word, is able to follow. And yet is the eye the "interpreter" of the soul! What, then, is the explanation of this mystery if the interpreter too is unintelligible? Calm she is like the hushed stillness of eventide, when not a leaf stirs; calm like a consciousness as yet unaware of aught. Her heart-beats are as regular as if life were not present; and yet the erotic nature, listening with his stethoscopically practiced ear, detects the dithyrambic pulsing of desire sounding along unbeknown. Careless she is like the blowing of the wind, content like the profound ocean, and yet full of longing like a thing biding its explanation. My friends! My mind is softened, indescribably softened. I comprehend that also my life expresses an idea, even if you do not comprehend me. I too have discovered the secret of

⁵⁵ In Oehlenschläger's "Aladdin."

existence; I too serve a divine idea—and, assuredly, I do not serve it for nothing. If woman is a ruse of the gods, this means that she is to be seduced; and if woman is not an "idea," the true inference is that the erotic nature wishes to love as many of them as possible.

What luxury it is to relish the ruse without being duped, only the erotic nature comprehends. And how blissful it is to be seduced, woman alone knows. I know that from woman, even though I never yet allowed any one of them time to explain it to me, but re-asserted my independence, serving the idea by a break as sudden as that caused by death; for a bride and a break are to one another like female and male.⁵⁶ Only woman is aware of this, and she is aware of it together with her seducer. No married man will ever grasp this. Nor does she ever speak with him about it. She resigns herself to her fate, she knows that it must be so and that she can be seduced only once. For this reason she never really bears malice against the man who seduced her. That is to say, if he really did seduce her and thus expressed the idea. Broken marriage vows and that kind of thing is, of course, nonsense and no seduction. Indeed, it is by no means so great a misfortune for a woman to be seduced. In fact, it is a piece of good fortune for her. An excellently seduced girl may make an excellent wife. If I myself were not fit to be a seducer—however deeply I feel my inferior qualifications in this respect—if I chose to be a married man, I should always choose a girl already seduced, so that I would not have to begin my marriage by seducing my wife. Marriage, to be sure, also expresses an idea; but in relation to the idea of marriage that quality is altogether immaterial which is the absolutely essential condition for my idea. Therefore, a

⁵⁶ In the Danish, a pun on the homonyms *en brud* and *et brud*.

marriage ought never to be planned to begin as though it were the beginning of a story of seduction. So much is sure: there is a seducer for every woman. Happy is she whose good fortune it is to meet just him.

Through marriage, on the other hand, the gods win their victory. In it the once seduced maiden walks through life by the side of her husband, looking back at times, full of longing, resigned to her fate, until she reaches the goal of life. She dies; but not in the same sense as man dies. She is volatilized and resolved into that mysterious primal element of which the gods formed her—she disappears like a dream, like an impermanent shape whose hour is past. For what is woman but a dream, and the highest reality withal! Thus does the erotic nature comprehend her, leading her, and being led by her in the moment of seduction, beyond time—where she has her true existence, being an illusion. Through her husband, on the other hand, she becomes a creature of this world, and he through her.

Marvellous nature! If I did not admire thee, a woman would teach me; for truly she is the *venerabile* of life. Splendidly didst thou fashion her, but more splendidly still in that thou never didst fashion one woman like another. In man, the essential is the essential, and insofar always alike; but in woman the adventitious is the essential, and is thus an inexhaustible source of differences. Brief is her splendor; but quickly the pain is forgotten, too, when the same splendor is proffered me anew. It is true, I too am aware of the unbeautiful which may appear in her thereafter; but she is not thus with her seducer.

They rose from the table. It needed but a hint from Constantin, for the participants understood each other with military precision whenever there was a question of face or turn about. With his invisible baton of command, elastic like a divining rod in his hand, Constantin once more touched them in order to call forth in them a fleeting reminiscence of the banquet and the spirit of enjoyment which had prevailed before but was now, in some measure, submerged through the intellectual effort of the speeches—in order that the note of glad festivity which had disappeared might, by way of resonance, return once more among the guests in a brief moment of recollection. He saluted with his full glass as a signal of parting, emptying it, and then flinging it against the door in the rear wall. The others followed his example, consummating this symbolic action with all the solemnity of adepts. Justice was thus done the pleasure of stopping short—that royal pleasure which, though briefer, yet is more liberating than any other pleasure. With a libation this pleasure ought to be entered upon, with the libation of flinging one's glass into destruction and oblivion, and tearing one's self passionately away from every memory, as if it were a danger to one's life: this libation is to the gods of the nether world. One breaks off, and strength is needed to do that, greater strength than to sever a knot by a sword-blow; for the difficulty of the knot tends to arouse one's passion, but the passion required for breaking off must be of one's own making. In a superficial sense the result is, of course, the same; but from an artistic int of view there is a world of difference between something ceasing or simply coming to an end, and it being broken off by one's own free will—whether it is a mere occurrence or a passionate decision; whether it is all over, like a

school song, because there is no more to it, or whether it is terminated by the Cæsarian operation of one's own Pleasure; whether it is a triviality every one has experienced, or the secret which escapes most.

Constantin's flinging his beaker against the door was intended merely as a symbolic rite; nevertheless, his so doing was, in a way, a decisive act; for when the last glass was shattered the door opened, and just as he who presumptuously knocked at Death's door and, on its opening, beheld the powers of annihilation, so the banqueters beheld the corps of destruction ready to demolish everything—a memento which in an instant put them to flight from that place, while at the very same moment the entire surroundings had been reduced to the semblance of ruin.

A carriage stood ready at the door. At Constantin's invitation they seated themselves in it and drove away in good spirits; for that tableau of destruction which they left behind had given their souls fresh elasticity. After having covered a distance of several miles a halt was made. Here Constantin took his leave as host, informing them that five carriages were at their disposal—each one was free to suit his own pleasure and drive wherever he wanted, whether alone or in company with whomsoever he pleased. Thus a rocket, propelled by the force of the powder, ascends at a single shot, remains collected for an instant, in order then to spread out to all the winds.

While the horses were being hitched to the carriages the nocturnal banqueters strolled a little way down the road. The fresh air of the morning purified their hot blood with its coolness, and they gave themselves up to it entirely. Their forms, and the groups in which

they ranged themselves, made a phantastic impression on me. For when the morning sun shines on field and meadow, and on every creature which in the night found rest and strength to rise up jubilating with the sun—in this there is only a pleasing, mutual understanding; but a nightly company, viewed by the morning light and in smiling surroundings, makes a downright uncanny impression. It makes one think of spooks which have been surprised by daylight, of subterranean spirits which are unable to regain the crevice through which they may vanish, because it is visible only in the dark; of unhappy creatures in whom the difference between day and night has become obliterated through the monotony of their sufferings.

A foot path led them through a small patch of field toward a garden surrounded by a hedge, from behind whose concealment a modest summer-cottage peeped forth. At the end of the garden, toward the field, there was an arbor formed by trees. Becoming aware of people being in the arbor, they all grew curious, and with the spying glances of men bent on observation, the besiegers closed in about that pleasant place of concealment, hiding themselves, and as eager as emissaries of the police about to take some one by surprise. Like emissaries of the police—well, to be sure, their appearance made the misunderstanding possible that it was they whom the minions of the law might be looking for. Each one had occupied a point of vantage for peeping in, when Victor drew back a step and said to his neighbor, "Why, dear me, if that is not Judge William and his wife!"

They were surprised—not the two whom the foliage concealed and who were all too deeply concerned with their domestic enjoyment to

be observers. They felt themselves too secure to believe themselves an object of any one's observation excepting the morning sun's which took pleasure in looking in to them, whilst a gentle zephyr moved the boughs above them, and the reposefulness of the countryside, as well as all things around them girded the little arbor about with peace. The happy married couple was not surprised and noticed nothing. That they were a married couple was clear enough; one could perceive that at a glance—alas! if one is something of an observer one's self. Even if nothing in the wide world, nothing, whether overtly or covertly, if nothing, I say, threatens to interfere with the happiness of lovers, yet they are not thus secure when sitting together. They are in a state of bliss; and yet it is as if there were some power bent on separating them, so firmly they clasp one another; and yet it is as if there were some enemy present against whom they must defend themselves; ,and yet it is as if they could never become, sufficiently reassured. Not thus married people, and not thus that married couple in the arbor. How long they had been married, however, that was not to be determined with certainty. To be sure, the wife's activity at the tea-table revealed a sureness of hand born of practice, but at the same time such almost childlike interest in her occupation as if she were a newly married woman and in that middle condition when she is not, as yet, sure whether marriage is fun or earnest, whether being a housewife is a calling, or a game, or a pastime. Perhaps she had been married for some longer time but did not generally preside at the tea-table, or perhaps did so only out here in the country, or did it perhaps only that morning which, possibly, had a special significance for them. Who could tell? All calculation is frustrated to a certain degree by the fact that every personality exhibits some originality which keeps

time from leaving its marks. When the sun shines in all his summer glory one thinks straightway that there must be some festal occasion at hand—that it cannot be so for every-day use, or that it is the first time, or at least one of the first times; for surely, one thinks, it cannot be repeated for any length of time. Thus would think he who saw it but once, or saw it for the first time; and I saw the wife of the justice for the first time. He who sees the object in question every day may think differently; provided he sees the same thing. But let the judge decide about that!

As I remarked, our amiable housewife was occupied. She poured boiling water into the cups, probably to warm them, emptied them again, set a cup on a platter, poured the tea and served it with sugar and cream—now all was ready; was it fun or earnest? In case a person did not relish tea at other times—he should have sat in the judge's place; for just then that drink seemed most inviting to me. only the inviting air of the lovely woman herself seemed to me more inviting.

It appeared that she had not had time to speak until then. Now she broke the silence and said, while serving him his tea: "Quick, now, dear, and drink while it is hot, the morning air is quite cool, anyway; and surely the least I can do for you is to be a little careful of you." "The least?" the judge answered laconically. "Yes, or the most, or the only thing." The judge looked at her inquiringly, and whilst he was helping himself she continued: "You interrupted me yesterday when I wished to broach the subject, but I have thought about it again; many times I have thought about it, and now particularly, you know yourself in reference to whom: it is certainly true that if you hadn't married, you would have been far more

successful in your career." With his cup still on the platter the judge sipped a first mouthful with visible enjoyment, thoroughly refreshed; or was it perchance the joy over his lovely wife; I for my part believe it was the latter. She, however, seemed only to be glad that it tasted so good to him. Then he put down his cup on the table at his side, took out a cigar, and said: "May I light it at your chafing-dish"? "Certainly," she said, and handed him a live coal on a tea-spoon. He lit his cigar and put his arm about her waist whilst she leaned against his shoulder. He turned his head the other way to blow out the smoke and then he let his eyes rest on her with a devotion such as only a glance can reveal; yet he smiled, but this glad smile had in it a dash of sad irony. Finally he said: "Do you really believe so, my girl?" "What do you mean?" she answered. He was silent again, his smile gained the upper hand, but his voice remained quite serious, nevertheless. "Then I pardon you your previous folly, seeing that you yourself have forgotten it so quickly; thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh⁵⁷—what great career should I have had?" His wife seemed embarrassed for a moment by this return, but collected her wits quickly and, now explained her meaning with womanly eloquence. The judge looked down before him, without interrupting her; but as she continued he began to drum on the table with the fingers of his right hand, at the same time humming a tune. The words of the song were audible for a moment, just as the pattern of a texture now becomes visible, now disappears again; and then again they were heard no longer as he hummed the tune of the song: "The goodman he went to the forest, to cut the wands so white." After this melodramatic performance,

⁵⁷ Job 2,10.

consisting in the justice's wife explaining herself whilst he hummed his tune, the dialogue set in again. "I am thinking," he remarked, "I am thinking you are ignorant of the fact that the Danish Law permits a man to castigate his wife⁵⁸ —a pity only that the law does not indicate on which occasions it is permitted." His wife smiled at his threat and continued: "Now why can I never get you to be serious when I touch on this matter? You do not understand me: believe me, I mean it sincerely, it seems to me a very beautiful thought. Of course, if you weren't my husband I would not dare to entertain it; but now I have done so, for your sake and for my sake; and now be nice and serious, for my sake, and answer me frankly." "No, you can't get me to be serious, and a serious answer you won't get; I must either laugh at you, or make you forget it, as before, or beat you; or else you must stop talking, about it, or I shall have to make you keep silent about it some other way. You see, it is a joke, and that is why there are so many ways out." He arose, pressed a kiss on her brow, laid her arm in his, and then disappeared in a leafy walk which led from the arbor.

The arbor was empty; there was nothing else to do, so the hostile corps of occupation withdrew without making any gains. Still, the others were content with uttering some malicious remarks. The company returned but missed Victor. He had rounded the corner and, in walking along the garden, had come up to the country

⁵⁸ According to the Jutland Laws (A. D. 1241) a man is permitted to punish his wife, when she has misbehaved, with stick and with rod, but not with weapon. In the Danish Law (1683) this right is restricted to children and servants. S.V.

home. The doors of a garden-room facing the lawn were open, and likewise a window. Very probably he had seen something which attracted his attention. He leapt into the window, and leapt out again just as the party were approaching, for they had been looking for him. Triumphantly he held up some papers in his hand and exclaimed: "One of the judge's manuscripts!"⁵⁹ Seeing that I edited his other works it is no more than my duty that I should edit this one too." He put it into his pocket; or, rather, he was about to do so; for as he was bending his arm and already had his hand with the manuscript half-way down in his pocket I managed to steal it from him.

But who, then, am I? Let no one ask! If it hasn't occurred to you before to ask about it I am over the difficulty—for now the worst is behind me. For that matter, I am not worth asking about, for I am the least of all things, people would put me in utter confusion by asking about me. I am pure existence, and therefore smaller, almost, than nothing. I am "pure existence" which is present everywhere but still is never noticed; for I am ever vanishing. I am like the line above which stands the *summa summarum*—who cares about the line? By my own strength I can accomplish nothing, for even the idea to steal the manuscript from Victor was not my own idea; for this very idea which, as a thief would say, induced me to "borrow" the manuscript, was borrowed from him. And now, when editing, this manuscript, I am, again, nothing at all; for it rightly belongs to the judge. And as editor, I am in my nothingness only a kind of nemesis on Victor, who imagined that he had the prescriptive right to do so.

⁵⁹ Containing the second part of "Stages on Life's Road." entitled "Reflections on Marriage in Refutation of Objections."