

storm, has to step forward again and again. At last silence falls, and the piece can be brought to an end.

(1912) Trans. M.H.

Oskar

He began this strange behavior at a very early age by going his own way and finding such evident pleasure in being alone. In later years he recalled very clearly that nobody had made him aware of such things. All by itself the strange need to be alone and apart had appeared, and was there. All alone he drew from within himself the thought that it is beautiful to shut oneself off so as to gain fresh desire and feel renewed longing for being open and for going out harmlessly among men. It was a kind of calculation that he made, a kind of task that he set himself. He had moved into a wretched, half-destroyed house on the Bergstrasse; he lived there in a shabby little room, which was equipped and decorated with a remarkable lack of furnishings. Even though it was winter, he would have no heating. He did not want any comforts. Everything around him had to be rough, inhospitable, and miserable. He wanted to bear and endure some thing, and ordered himself to do so. And that, nobody had told him either. All alone he had the idea that it would be good for him to order himself to bear hardship and malice in a friendly and good-hearted manner. He considered himself to be at a kind of upper-level school. He went to university there, as a weird and wild student. For him it was a question of observing how far he ought risk pushing himself, how daring he might be. Every once in a while, fear entered his room and grazed him with the cold crêpe of despair. But he had taken up the dare to become peculiar, and he had to keep it up, almost against his will. The oddities take whoever has set foot among them, lead him further, pull him away, never again let him go. His days and his nights he spent alone. Two small children lay in

the next room, right against the wall. He would often hear them crying pitifully. He lay sleeplessly during entire long dark nights, as if sleep were an enemy, frightened and fleeing from him, and as if wakefulness were a good friend, unable to tear himself away from him. Every day he went on the same walk through the frozen winter meadows and felt as though he were on a day-long hike through unknown and unfamiliar regions. Each day resembled the next. No young person would have been able to find this way of life beautiful. He, however, wanted it thus; he ordered himself to consider this way of life beautiful. Since he wanted to see attractions, he saw them; since he was searching for depth, he found it; since he wanted to get to know misery, it revealed itself to him. He endured all so-called boredom with joy and pride. To him the sameness and the one and only color seemed beautiful, and that single tone was his life. He wanted to have nothing to do with boredom. So for him it did not exist. He governed himself thus. Thus did he live. He kept company with those calm women, the hours, as though with sensuous and physical beings. They came and went, and Oskar, that was his name, never lost patience. To him impatience meant death. Perseverance, into which he freely and voluptuously sank, was his life as a man. Swathing and surrounding him with the sweet fragrance of roses was the thought that he was poor. He belonged to the poor with body and soul, with all his thoughts and feelings and with his whole heart. He loved the hidden paths between the high hedges, and the evenings were his friends. He knew no higher joy than the joy of day and of night.

(1914) Trans. M.H.

An Address to a Button

One day, as I was busy mending the buttonhole of a shirt, which a loud sneeze of mine had ripped apart, it sud-

denly occurred to me, as I kept on sewing as diligently as an experienced seamstress, that I might address to the honest shirt button, that faithful and modest little fellow, the following words of appreciation, which, though mumbled quietly to myself, were probably all the more sincerely intended:

"Dear little button," I said, "how many thanks, what a good testimonial he owes you, he whom you have served so faithfully, diligently and unswervingly, by now, I believe, for several years. Notwithstanding all the forgetfulness and lack of consideration he has shown at your expense, you have never even suggested that once in a while he might offer you a bit of praise.

"This is the time for it, now that I have a clear idea of what you stand for, of what you are worth. You, who, throughout your long and patient service, have never pushed your way forward into an advantageous and pretty spotlight, or into some beautiful, harsh, and extremely eye-catching lighting effects. You, who chose rather to dwell always in the most discrete of discretions, where you could exercise your dear, beautiful virtue to your utmost satisfaction, with a modesty that is moving, enchanting, and utterly beyond praise.

"You delight me with your proven strength, which stems from honesty and fervor and from your ability to dispense with the praise or recognition coveted by anybody who ever accomplishes anything.

"You are smiling, my dear fellow, and, as I unfortunately can't help noticing, you already look somewhat used and worn.

"My dear admirable fellow! You ought to be a model to those whose utter craving for ever more applause has made them ill, who, unless constantly pampered, fanned, and petted by the goodwill and high regard of all, fall prey to a grief, a listlessness, and a peevishness that make them wish to collapse immediately and die.

"You, why you are capable of living in such a way that nobody has the slightest recollection you exist.

"You are happy; for modesty is its own reward, and fidelity feels comfortable within itself.

"Your refusing to make anything of yourself, your being

nothing more than your lifelong occupation or, at least, your seeming that way, your feeling entirely devoted to the peaceful fulfillment of duty, which one can call a splendidly fragrant rose, its beauty probably almost a mystery to itself, its fragrance wafting without the least intention, since that is its fate—

"Your being, as was said, what you are and your being as you are enchants, touches, captivates, and moves me, and makes me think that in this world, which is rich enough in disagreeable apparitions, there are things here and there that make the person who sees them happy, joyous, and serene."

(1915) Trans. M.H.

Jesus

Although all these may be only woolly and unkempt figments, wildly entangled fantasies, configurations of the night, and although I have perhaps, or rather probably, never seen this man, this Jesus, with these eyes of mine, have never even caught a glimpse of him, I would nonetheless almost like to believe that I did see him once, and I would prefer not to doubt that he appeared to me in the snow one day, late of a winter evening, after darkness had begun falling. Right there, in a neighborhood on the outskirts, where wide ghostly pale fields reach up to the last few isolated houses, where wilderness grazes habitation, stroking it gently as it were, it was there he encountered me, there that he came towards me, slowly, with long and hushed steps, ever monstrous and incomprehensible. He resembled one from the dead, one who had just climbed out of the tomb, one who had arisen awesomely all of a sudden, and that he must have done, since Jesus, the noble and great friend of mankind, ought after all be long dead, long buried, long since alive no more. But there he was, alive in the ghostly radiance of the extremely cold evening, wondrously large and beautiful. Oh, it would be

a shame if these were only imaginings, nothing but raptures! One so wants, so truly wants to believe in certain things; one forces oneself to, and cannot help but do so. The large and piercingly brilliant stars of the winter skies and the chill cutting through my thin clothes, as I stood there, were truly wonderful. I was shivering in my thin suit, that I still remember very clearly, but a good unending hot joy trembled through me, making me live as I had never lived before, nor ever again would. It is spirit that gives us life, and he, whom I saw striding to and fro in the twilight, was a spirit, surely he was, after all, mainly or merely a spirit, nothing but feeling and spirit. A spirit was shuddering and glowing through me, and everything around me began to sing, talk, and resound. It was the stillness and love that were resounding; and, being most acutely conscious of this, I was pleased. There was an inexpressible joyousness, hope, belief, and love within me, and the mysterious one, standing there, hair falling in delightful golden snakes and waves from head to shoulders, was a sight that made me stare. The beautiful blond hair was like a consuming fire inflaming him, and what's more his expression, no, I must confess, that nowhere else in life have I again seen anything so frightfully beautiful. Such things one sees but once in life and then, never again, even if one were to live to be a thousand years.

It is remarkable, by the way, that it occurred to me the very instant I spotted the strange figure that it was Jesus I am seeing right there in front of me. Since then, I have often thought a lot, especially about this, but have never gotten any wiser. To understand something fully can, at times, mean to lose everything again. Uncertainty is often most beautiful, and majestic configurations do not want to nor ought they be entirely seen through and recognized. It is possible to destroy rather than assimilate one's object of enquiry through penetrating research, immersing it, or so I imagine, in night and invisibility, in sum, I wish to call myself happy whenever I store up an intuition for myself, and have no wish to desire to know any more. So Jesus was not dead: That was the splendid thought, and I clung to it. Love stood there right before me in

the snow, beckoning with wondrous tenderness, the heavenly shy eyes glowing with a terrible brilliance. I threw my whole being into the apparition. Wild noises of drinking drifted across from an inn nearby; this has remained as unforgettable to me as the grace and supernatural gentleness of the divine appearance. I asked myself what Jesus was up to, out here at the farthest reaches of the city, whether there was really anything for him to do in the world, and which way he would most likely think of making his presence felt. Strange thoughts ran through my head. Then I went into the house, up into my room, lit the lamp, sat down at the table, took the pen, and carefully noted on a piece of paper the face and all thoughts related to it. When I was finished, I went to the window, opened it, it was late already, and looked out into the night, onto which a half-moon was looking down from its heights, and then I saw the stranger still standing in the road. I would have liked to call out something, but I couldn't find an appropriate word, and my voice seemed cut off from me. I closed the window and got into bed. The following morning, when I went downstairs, it seemed to me that I could see traces of the stranger's feet in the snow. He himself was gone.

(1916) Trans. M.H.

The Angel

An angel such as this does well to wait until informed he is needed. Sometimes that takes longer than he expects. He simply has to restrain himself, ought not think he is irreplaceable. I would not like to be the one whom I made an angel. I deified him so that he would never again encounter me, would be unalterable as a picture, at which I could look forever according to my needs and desires, drawing courage from the sight. I almost pity him—he, who thought I was curious and would run after him, whereas I have him, so to speak, in my pocket or like a band across my forehead. I go

to him no longer, but his worth surrounds me, and I see myself illumined by his light. Whoever has known how to give, has also known how to take. Both need to be practiced. He came about through compassion, yet it can happen that I, the beseecher, play games with him. He has doubts, is afraid. At times I have faith, at times not, and this he must endure, poor dear.

(1925) Trans. T.W. and S.B.

A Cigarette

What a strange sketch this is presenting me with. I shall enclose it forever even if that makes it go moldy. Today somebody dropped a cigarette on the ground. I saw it fall. Not that it aroused any sympathy in me. "She-gan-resc" is what the she-char-ette made me think. I went on thinking: "What sort might she be?" "Go rescue her," was what then shot through my mind. Another case, then. There is a lady in distress somewhere, and the cigarette that somebody dropped in front of me has reminded me of her. Cigarettes are our lifelong companions, or those of most of us, at least. They are manufactured mainly in Turkey. I am thus either in distress, jammed in, or there exists somewhere a severely criticized beauty towards whom I might have to play the chivalrous and determined little rescuer and savior. Would I be the right person for this? A mission such as that would naturally be very honorable. I do, indeed, feel at times I have been somewhat crowded in, driven into a tight spot, but refuse to take this tragically. One ought to be careful not to take oneself too seriously. In any case, I enjoy being at a loss, and if a censured lady exists somewhere, I shall advise her to consider her condition the prettiest imaginable so that nobody need order himself to mount a chivalrous rescue. It does take a little suffering to make beauties truly beautiful. To me this insight is irrefutable, and, armed with it, I am continually walking courageously

up to the lady seemingly in need of rescue, who would, I believe, be unhappy, were she to allow herself to be saved. If I am the one in a jam, then I somehow treasure everything unfathomable, irretrievable, and lost since in all tragedy there lies to my mind something joyous, or beautiful in other words, something reconciliatory. To be jammed in, smashed to bits, etc., is certainly tragic, I concede, but I have acquired the rather strange notion that the good can be bad, the free unfree, the loveable blameworthy, the just unjust, and the joyous melancholic. In all constraint there is far more salvation than in all salvation mongering, and I should, therefore, like to do without the latter. It is, of course, splendid to come so nobly to the assistance of a beauty. If I were to doubt that, I would be a scoundrel, spending all my free time smoking cigars et cetera. Yet, have not good deeds often turned into bad ones? I believe in my own supposed distress as well as in hers, but, politely, would like to entreat both of us to be patient and well behaved amidst the sea of vexations. To me rescues seem intolerant by nature; I would, by your leave, therefore, like to refrain from them tenderly, and most humbly ask that in future no cigarettes be let drop in front of me. I met her lately, the lady who wants to be lifted up on high by me or, as far as I'm concerned, dragged down to the depths. For I am capable of either. That I admit. She looked more beautiful than ever. Her distress suited her admirably. The little bit of suffering made her face picture perfect. And there was I, supposed to provide her with so-called happy times? I shall never again do so. I feel responsible both for her and for me, and for the time being will leave it at that. I wrote many years ago that life is long for those who have trust, and still stand behind what I said then. Both the lady in dismay and the crestfallen gentleman ought to believe in possibilities and transformations. One night I saw a gentleman throwing away his half-smoked cigarette with a negligence that was frighteningly beautiful. That made a lasting impression on me. Standing there, illuminated by a streetlight, gazing out into the night life, he threw the cigarette away, as if it were an infertile form of belief, as if getting rid of it had brought him some relief. We can

travel, and yet remain the same, can dwell in one and the same place, contemplating the same features year after year, and yet, no matter how extreme the uniformity, go through a wealth of experiences. The way he threw it aside as soon as he decided he no longer liked it! The contemptuous gesture invigorated him. New forms of respect do of course germinate from contempt. How that fellow gazing indifferently into the night life interested me! The cigarette of today brought the earlier one to mind. Past and future circle around us, and signs make existence beautiful. Now we know more, now less. There is always someone thinking of me. I shall never let myself be rescued, nor shall I ever rescue anybody.

(1925) Trans. M.H.

A Slap in the Face et cetera

I tied ice skates onto a woman teacher, jumped to attention in front of the sergeant reprimanding me. A thriller lay among my service records. A girl to whom I mentioned this thought that was the right place for it. Once again I tasted the new Twann wine, and saw an ingenious play at the municipal theater. It was awfully nice, the tiny auditorium. Looked at a new railway station, stroked the chin of a lady bartender. When feeling cheerful, one likes to act like a man of the world. In the play I was speaking of there was an actress who had nothing to say the whole evening except "Yes, Mamma"; she did so in every conceivable key. That was frightfully amusing. I was in the standing room, right behind a young woman. Since I had a suspicion her husband was in the immediate vicinity, I feigned indifference, remaining stoical and at ease. When the husband approached, he probably thought I was being quite proper. The smoothly delivered work comes from the pen of a person whom society let drop because of some faux pas. A peculiar pleasure, to delight in scenes

whose inventor came to such grief! The entertainment that his talent affords you makes you drop into the most profound astonishment at the possibility of human metamorphosis. I'm speaking of Oscar Wilde. I bought myself biscuits, enjoying some myself and handing others out to a group of boys and girls. Even those I had already bitten into found charmingly ready takers. Oh! Carefree youth! Looking at nice faces makes you nice and observing good manners, well-mannered. In refined surroundings, given just a little recognition, you likewise become refined. I rode in floating seats on a merry-go-round. Wonderful, to glide over people way down there! Do not good spirits often well up from bad? I prefer to be neither always in a good nor always in a bad humor. One mood relieves the other. No person on good terms with himself would care to enjoy his existence undeservedly; if things didn't go badly for him now and then, he would feel he were insulting his fellow men. I asked a woman at an advanced hour: "Mind if I take you along?" By way of answer she said: "A slap in the face, that's what you can take!" A car drove up, and she stepped in. When accosted, women have, I think, the right to respond with whatever crosses their minds. Plucky words from pretty lips can only sound delightful.

On another visit to the theater, I was treated so intimately by the lady taking the coats that I felt as though I were her husband. Had I been honest, I would have had to take care of that woman from then on, and I didn't know her at all. Her being put me under an obligation to her. Blazing like a log, I walked down to the stage and examined the feet of the lady beside me. We let slip countless opportunities to set up a liaison and join ourselves with another in a common destiny, sharing merriment and reflection. But I don't wish to reflect, and would rather say I let my eyes glide down into the orchestra, into the boxes. Eyes are unbelievable gymnasts! While I was looking with great interest at the ladies and gentlemen, their hands and feet began to move. Opera glasses, handkerchiefs, programs came into view; fingertips touched hair-

that are being written and whose contents deal predominantly with matters of a weighty and summary nature, whereas the novella in my experience tends to occupy itself with what is remarkable about some detail. Where these days do you come across something remarkable, something that stands out in a tangible, visible way from the mass of remaining, not very *telling* visibilities? My colleague Rheutabaguer, with whom I would take pleasure, in principle, to be instrumental in placing you into relations of fruitful augury, is enabled by his ebulliently developed gift of observation to write with uncommon finesse. What is more, he experiences every day some lacy-pantsy adventurette, whereupon he repairs to his studio and, having fastidiously seated himself at his line-turning lathe, produces graceful essays rather than exploiting his experience for a long short story. Just as life, as I have seen it and expect to be able to see it in the future, has as it were turned into something tentative, cautiously groping, so the same thing has happened in recent years to the writing of fiction—which has been and will remain an analogue to life. As life turns finer or subtler, art too becomes more thoughtful and responsible; and a calm reply to your query whether I was capable of being gripping takes on the hue of what was conveyed in it—as I would ask you kindly to take the trouble to note. The novella writer who goes too briskly at the story that is taking shape under his pen, and which is meant to turn out gripping, is apt to make the unedifying discovery that it up and runs away from him, so to speak, i.e., that all grippingness has evaporated. Although I do not set much store by intentions, I intend to hope that I might be prompted to think it would be nice if at some point I were to bring off a novella that would be to your liking; to which I might add that I strive daily to be active, a thing that many a person may claim.

(Late 1920s) Trans. W.A.

For Zilch

The piece of prose that apparently wants to come into being here is being written in the dead of night, and I am writing it for Zilch, the Cat, that is to say for everyday use.

Zilch is a kind of factory or industrial enterprise, for which writers produce and deliver daily, perhaps even hourly, with steadfast zeal. It is better to deliver than merely to enter upon pointless discussions about delivery or in chatterboxious prattle about service. Here and there even poets will create for Zilch the Cat, telling themselves that they find it more sensible to do something than to refrain. Whoever does something for her, for that quintessence of commercialization, does it for her enigmatic eyes. You know the Cat and you don't; she will slumber and purr with pleasure in her sleep, and looking for an explanation, one is faced with an impenetrable riddle. Although it is recognized that the Cat jeopardizes something like personal development, one seems unable to get on without her, for Zilch is the very time in which we live, that for which we labor, which gives us work to do, the banks, the restaurants, the publishing houses, the schools, the Leviathan of business, the phenomenal range of manufacturing activity, all this (and more if I were to list in numerical order—a thing that just might happen—all I consider redundant) is Zilch, Zilch, Zilch to me is not merely anything that is good for the running of things, that is of any kind of value to the machinery of civilization, but she is rather, as I have said, the whole works themselves. And only such items could possibly aspire to be exempt from Zilchery as can demonstrate so-called eternal values, as for example the masterpieces of art or the deeds that tower high over the hum and drum, the rush and roar of the day. Whatever is not eroded and consumed by favor and distaste—by the Cat in other words, who assuredly is an august entity—may be taken to be lasting and to gain the port of a remote posterity, much like some vessel of freight or state. My colleague Binggeli in my opinion writes for Zilch in every respect, even though his prose and

verse are extremely demanding. Regarding the Zilchitude of his otherwise doubtless excellent literary output, Dinggelari (who calls a ravishingly beautiful woman his conjugal own, who dines and sups famously, takes splendid promenades every day, inhabits a flat in a romantic setting) is a prey to egregious error in that he persists in thinking that the Cat will have nothing to do with him. While she considers him her own, he strains to think that he is unsuitable in her eyes; which by no means squares with the facts.

The Cat Zilch is my name for the contemporary world; for the afterworld I do not presume to have a colloquial term.

The Cat is frequently misunderstood, people turn their noses up at her, and when they give her something, they do so with a quite inappropriate attitude—remarking arrogantly “it’s for Zilch,” as if all human beings had not busied themselves for her from time immemorial.

All that is achieved goes to her first; she eats with relish, and only what lives on and works despite her is immortal.

(1928–29) Trans. W.A.

A Sketch

I tremble less at the whims and oddities of others than at my own which lead me to a house, whose appearance I know not whether to describe or leave undepicted.

Just as much as at the house, I tremble at the garden, in which lies undiscussed the house which I am leaving formless, since this may perhaps even be beautiful.

Light trembles in the garden, restfulness rests, and it is no doubt conceivable that a simpleton of a page is simple inasmuch as he leans dreamily against the house and is a small woman in disguise.

The interior chambers of the house are animated by a woman who is real. The people of the house, in which nobody has ever done any cooking, live from love.

It occurs to me to say a happy man arrived just then from afar. He seems to have been a person who believed he had occasion to take constant delight in his delightedness, which he much loved. Fortune was playing with him, and he felt fortunate mainly for that reason.

When the extremely dashing chap looked up at the house before which he chose to stand, he beheld a figure gaping contentedly down at his arriviste manners.

The movingly beautiful and deft one said in a pleasant enough manner: “I was young, and did not know it, considered myself old, and was never convinced of this, and the gratefulness within me proved utterly ungrateful.”

“That’s the way you look,” replied the other.

“Who are you who look at me with almost eerie ease?”

The one looking out the window possessed sufficient high spirits to respond: “I am life. I look down at you from above. You are the lovable conception of life, which by now allows you to live almost too gracefully. Your gazing interestedly up past me is a pleasure that, I believe, I may be able to grant you.”

The page’s costume makes the page seem like any young person; the woman in the house, inasmuch as she knows she has admirers, lacks something.

The garden somewhat resembled a thought fortunately not thought to a conclusion, and, without having any idea where I get the effrontery to do so, I compare my sketch with a swan singing with unheard of ardor and screechingly giving voice to unmediated things.

(1928–29) Trans. M.H.

able art-of-living glow came into his eyes, which, gazing into the ugliest thing there is, that is, boozing, grew enchantingly beautiful. It now and then happened that women gave the drunken genius flowers, which he accepted with the most charming gratitude; they did this primarily because he wore a splendid hat on his head, which was framed by a torrent of curls. One night he sank to his knees at the gates of the Church of Our Redeemer, for, on account of the ampleness of the long-windedly and joyfully described consumption above, he felt something akin to remorse, which only goes to show how sensitive he was.

(1926-27)

All those who like to laugh while crying . . .

All those who like to laugh while crying, who might, I mean, prefer the latter to the former, are hereby cordially invited, that is, with courteous cheerfulness and the humblest sincerity, to taste, sample, and read a story telling of the most charming of widows, who ran, perhaps, a grocer's shop, which, in the course of the days, weeks, and years, I've forgotten to put in the months, was entered by many a dear, welcome, and thus splendidly served customer with the query on his lips whether this or that fine, useful product could be had or obtained there in exchange for the requisite cash. This widow had, I'll swear with my hand on my heart, which warmly pulsates and beats for the fatherland, the looks of a rocco Neapolitan countess. Her hair seemed to be powdered snowy white, or rather silvery gray, and her lips were the most suitable specimens of female lips ever seen in the world. As for her eyes, well, here we must grant truth precedence and confess these widowy eyes scintillated, as it were, most cautiously, letting a gleam of the finest distinction shine forth. Well then, so there lived, but wait, first, with the utmost haste, to something else—namely, the chambermaid or scullery wench or hired help or girl Friday or cook or servant of this countess or grocer woman, whose little feet, we'll wager or venture or make so bold as to assert, were the most charming pair in the whole city. This servant girl seemed dearly devoted to her mistress, and was, as these dustrag-shakers generally are, rather coarse. There was no apparent cause to suggest she didn't rightly know how to put or bring or set a bed to rights. All told, the lodgings of the petit-bourgeois mistress contained between three and seventeen, oh, my, what falsehoods I'm spouting, no, just approximately four proper, clean, wainscotted rooms with checked floors, one of which served a so-called thoroughly reliable, boorish tenant

as his domicile. So this gallant and well-behaved lad was a boor? How to explain the profusion of such oppositionalities? Sometimes the bumpkin liked to visit the theater, not the court theater, just the democratic, utterly unroyal and un-grand-ducal, municipal one, that, let us emphasize, managed to hold its own reasonably well by means of subscriptions, and not only must have been wonderfully decorated, but seems still to be so today. Here the counter-jumper thought himself in the midst of a *Midsummer Night's* or *Magic Flute* dream, which brings us to the great lights in the realm of art who, out of insufficient namelessness or dearth of renown, need not be named or mentioned, for they do, after all, shimmer starlike in the sky of cultural and educational interest. Now the widow had her eye, quietly, of course, that is, secretly, so with a secret gentility, on the property of this tenant, for he seemed to her matrimonially advantageous and suitable, if only he hadn't had the distressing bad habit of dropping daily into the café, which struck her, as her thoughts and feelings were quite practical, as a frightful waste of time. There in the café, a fabulously painted and wallpapered room, the vagabond listened to the notes that, like a rain made of the blossoms of gentleness and tenderness, streamed and rained and misted out and down from the cornucopia of musical performances. A vagrant he was called by the widow, who must have sensed the dangers his scurrying about into various entertainment spots entailed for her. Residence story, behave, I beg you. Like a lapdog it obeys me, and while I flatter it a bit, injecting it with the proper courage, it continues: The maid, too, believed this concertgoer and fan of bowling alleys and the like might perhaps represent a secure livelihood for her, and our two women now grew jealous thanks to the behavior of this intellectual, whose intellectualism struck them as the most superfluous thing they could think of. Now let me cease to skirt the issue of plot-thickening, but rather ardently pursue it. All stories bear resemblance to an elegant skirt that wants to cling tightly and becomingly to a shape, that is, to something concrete: in other words they have to be told in such a way that the sum total of words forms a skirt that fits the body loosely but with a certain conciseness—fits, that is, the how and what, the this and that to be reported. Widow, I'm almost afraid for you, and actually no less for you, O jewel of a servant girl. Sometimes, on a whim, he introduced himself to café acquaintances as Baron Bider, finding the chance now and then to take note of

Stendhal's great Italian novel. Now and then he flat-out neglected to greet this greatest of widows in the hallway, fancying himself so baronial and biderial before her, though she was in fact his superior in every respect, for taking her coiffure into consideration, she was exceedingly lofty in appearance. And on top of everything else he wrote poems in whose ingeniousness the lamentable woman was incapable of believing, for she was, it seemed, convinced only of the value of his kisses, which she couldn't capture, garner, or reap enough of, a circumstance you can't help but find perfectly understandable if you have even a grain, flicker, or stitch of sense of freedom and kindness in your head, which otherwise may be just as embarrassingly and dully furnished as you please. So, foolish thoughts of pleasure and diversion abounded in no other head than his own, which the reader will kindly take note of, and romantic desires galore populated the grocery lady's little noggin as well as the soubrette missy's upstairs—namely, a constant fretting and trembling at the thought he might want to stop being a hooligan, though it was nonetheless made clear to him daily they were constantly willing to see him as such. While heaping him with reproaches, they shivered in their shoes with the wish that he might stay eternally reproachable and criticizable. Well, that's how women are. Fortunately there exist highly sensitive persons of noble sensibility who can see through them. But Baron Bider didn't notice, not a thing, not in the slightest, and since he lacked the art of insight—for he was capable of comprehending neither maidservant nor mistress, which the tribunal of humanity would find it his duty to do—I'll let him drop, like a leading liberal politician giving the sack to a secretary or amanuensis, and call this braggart of mine, in the hall where people place cups in contact with their drinking tools, a criminal. Both noble creatures died, these Isolde. They made themselves scarce, a real fare-thee-well-till-we-meet-no-more. The street they inhabited during their lifetimes was hereafter dubbed Rogue's Alley by the citizenry, and meanwhile their Tristan went wandering valiantly on. Won't anyone finally settle his score for him? And why do I keep thinking up stories? Isn't there a Tristan who neglects his Isolde lurking behind every narrator? Life itself, after all, writes such beautiful works. Isn't that enough for us?

A Flaubert Prose Piece

He had come back to live where his life had begun, where once again, as he had before, he felt at home, and this pleased him, reviving his past was like reentering a house, a society he had visited every day until he had been drawn into a long absence from which now he returned. Habits long since forgotten came back, appeared to beam at him with familiar, cheerful, beautiful faces. If life seemed like a dream, many a dream may have seemed to him like life. Walking through the region he knew so well, he recalled this or that small, yet significant, remark made by some acquaintance, some friend. Suddenly, for example, he distinctly heard someone saying again to someone else: "It doesn't matter at all." Did it really not matter? the question arose; he didn't feel at all obliged to answer, for the question itself seemed to possess a grandeur, a beauty of which, as it were, he gazed his fill. Questions are usually more beautiful, more significant than their resolutions, which in fact never resolve them, are never sufficient to satisfy us, whereas from a question streams a wonderful fragrance. What flowerlike eyes all his memories now took on. He found himself transported to a moment long past when he had been more overbearing than was probably wise, and it gave him, so to speak, a multifaceted pleasure now and then to shake his head over himself, as if gently, patiently sitting in judgment on himself, radiant with pleasure at his introspection. Images of his travels, all the strange sights he had seen—how could he help but find them more trivial than the trivialities of the life he lived in memory. "How uninteresting interesting things can become," he thought, and felt younger because he was more attracted by his inner life than his outer one. How vividly, for instance, the landscapes he remembered so well sprang to life in his head, though they consisted perhaps of nothing more remarkable than the splashing of a village fountain with its accom-

panying scenery. How nice it was, it occurred to him, that he still thought of that woman, that so delicate, slender creature who, when he met her, had placed her finger lightly upon her lips. Familiar sights, the people, carriages, shop windows, and so forth, tended for the time being to lead him into a kind of melancholy, but this in turn provided him with the finest amusements. Odd, wasn't it, that he failed to think of this woman who, he believed he could assume, was with him wherever he went, her image foremost in his figure-creating consciousness, whereby the figures meant are by no means strangers and thus are rather strange. "How quickly strange things have become familiar, how the things I know now estrange me" was among the many thoughts that came to him. Having fallen out with friends seemed as natural as repaying a debt or stepping into a shop or smoking a cigar. When he thought about friendship, didn't Shakespeare at once turn up with his unhappy Antonio, who nevertheless was so rich in happiness and true pleasure, this enviable possessor of a friend's loyal devotion? One of his life-long companions, though already advanced in years, had married a charming young girl; another considered himself fortunate his wife couldn't be counted among the circle of true beauties, who, in a certain respect, give rise to misgivings. Beautiful women, it's true, have sometimes been the cause of unpleasant scenes, experiences, and so on. Evening had arrived, and by the glow of a streetlamp the thought suddenly fell from high in the air to his well-traveled shoulder that he was probably one of those people who in their contemporaries' eyes have made nothing of themselves. "It's indecent how much time you've wasted," a seemingly refined, somewhat prim, sensitive voice whispered in his wanderer's ear. As for his travels, he had never roamed about like a journeyman, rather had made use of the railroad or packet steamer, and so he stood or sat still for hours at a time instead of jauntily, as one says, setting out. Now, of course, he was, in many ways, to be rather lonely; to his lot would fall the noble task of resigning himself as best he could to isolation, that is, in the most elegant and unobtrusive manner. Certainly he would want to read books of quality again; he was sure of this. Among other things, he tried to persuade himself that he didn't care whether he succeeded in meeting women. Why doubt that he was more entitled to this than ever, since a quick look in a windowpane was all he needed to assure himself that his appearance was more or less outstanding. He had

come home. To a rather homey, though perhaps not so very cosy, furnished four-room apartment, which he had rented after little or no thought, a perfectly unobjectionable home, though of course his true home had always been his own self, worthy now of trust, which, from time to time he was pleased to tell himself, was in excellent condition. A woman sat on the sofa in his living room or drawing room, and even without looking, he knew, sensed with every fiber of his being who she was. She was the one he felt no need to look for because she had always, always accompanied him, nor had he reason to long for her since he was always at her side, though he hardly ever thought about her. Absolute dependence can only be understood by the one entwined within it, the one who knows everything about this enigma. Absolute faithfulness can look deceptively like absolute unfaithfulness.

"I was yours, always, yours alone"—without the least deliberation, the slightest theatricality, these words crossed his lips, which now bore, he felt, an enchanting smile, as though his smile were a dancer who delighted his audience with a humble, victorious leap from behind beautifully painted scenery that lifted up and fell apart while he sprang across the stage of the priceless opportunity to dance again after long being bound. "I know," she replied, and added: "From the moment you picked up my notebook from the ground, so delighted to perform this service, I've never doubted your affection for me." For minutes the two of them gazed upon one another in the silence of this altogether fortuitous room with nothing whatever noteworthy about it, each filled with the greatest joy at seeing the other once again, whereby it's likely that each fleetingly thought the other had, as was only natural, aged, but certainly this commonplace idea flared up for no more than a brief, minute moment. He began to tell her things, ask questions, then suddenly broke off, began to stutter like someone unfamiliar with speech, and was pleased by his timidity, which seemed to him sweet, whereas elegant speech and behavior would have seemed a sin, a faux pas, in this respect he could only be in favor of emotionalism, as though, as it had been in the first days of their so-pleasurable relationship, he were her pupil, come with the shyness of a beginner to take lessons from her lips and gestures in the art of receiving happiness by bestowing it. "Is it really you? I can hardly believe it." Yes, it was, and she answered his curious, yet simple, question: "What great pleasure it gives me to make you forbid your own pleasure

from becoming too great. What could possibly flatter me more than your giving me reason to admonish you?" During intervals perhaps signifying for them a slight weariness or a minor disillusionment, they heard the clatter of wheels below, combined with a slapping sound they surely recognized as the rhythm made by the contact of iron-shod horse hooves with the asphalt pavement. "Oh, how I once wept openly out of longing for you," he cried. She replied: "I can only say I'm envious, hearing you admit such things. While you indulged in this bliss you speak of, it's possible I forgot for a time how you looked, the sound of your voice, all your kindness; I was taken up with my child or my husband or something else practical that didn't amuse me or give me strength, or make me happy. If I made you unhappy, then how happy you've been, how good, how important I've made you!" At these words she pressed the handkerchief she'd quickly drawn from her dress to her eyes, which suddenly, she scarcely knew why, were brimming with tears. With a lover's gestures he exclaimed: "How could I not fall to my knees before such exquisite agitation?" And amidst all the self-pity she so charmingly, wonderfully fought to overcome, she could hardly help smiling. He did in fact carry out what in his excitement he had alluded to, and she tolerated his enthrallment, even though it disregarded contemporary customs and overlooked in part or whole all cultural changes, experiences, and so on, and all the while she trembled with a fear mirrored in her features that he might go too far, but this was not the case, for he was content to give voice to his rapture: "It's right of you to reproach me, and this makes you happy, and it was right of me to weep for you and blame you for this. How our feelings play with us! We can't ever really judge them until later." She rose, saying she had to go now. To his question of whether he might accompany her, she said: "Yes."

"Don't you have anything I can carry for you?"

No, she'd come to him without any baggage.

"How did you find out about my apartment?"

She'd heard about it someplace or other.

He felt obliged to make a few inquiries about her husband.

Her report contained nothing that might have surprised him. They glided and passed among the people gliding and passing by, like a dream vision within the vision of a dream.

S.B./T.W.

(1926-27)

Minotaur

When I'm awake as an author, I pass life by without a glance, sleeping as a man, and perhaps neglect the citizen in me, who would make me give up cigarettes as well as writing if I let him take shape. Yesterday I ate beans and bacon, thinking all the while about the future of nations, a thought I soon found displeasing because it drove away my appetite. I'm glad this won't be any silk-stocking essay, which might, for a change, please a percentage of my readers, since the perpetual dragging-in of girls, the endless refusal to disregard womenfolk, can resemble a person's nodding off, as any nimble thinker will surely agree. If I now take up the question of whether or not the Lombards, and so on, had something along the lines of culture, I'm perhaps straying onto paths not immediately of interest to everyone, since there's hardly a phase of world history so alienating as the age of tribal migration, which brings me to the *Nibelungenlied*, made accessible to us by the art of translation. Running around with the problem of nations in one's head—doesn't this mean falling prey to disproportion? Dragging in millions of people willy-nilly, what a burden on the brain! While I sit here taking all these living people numerically into account, company by company as it were, one of this so-called multitude was perhaps mentally asleep inasmuch as he led a carefree existence without the least inhibition. Perhaps it's possible the wide-awake are seen by sleepers as sleepy.

In the jumble comprised of the sentences above, I think I hear in the distance the Minotaur, who represents, it seems to me, nothing more than the shaggy difficulty of making sense of the problem of nations, which I'll now drop in favor of the *Nibelungenlied*, thereby placing something burdensome, as it were, on ice. It's likewise my intention to leave all Lombards in peace, that is, let them sleep, for it's perfectly clear to me a certain kind of sleep is useful,

if only because it leads a specific life. For the sake of a little happiness, we're here concerned. I believe, with silk-stocking detachment, which I'd like to compare with one's detachment from one's nation, something perhaps displaying in turn a similarity to a sort of Minotaur, whom I am, so to speak, avoiding. The conviction has grown in me that the nation, which is something like a creature that looks to be making all sorts of demands on me, best understands, that is, is most likely to approve of me when I seem to ignore it. Do I need to show understanding for the Minotaur? Don't I know this makes him hopping mad? He flatters himself that I couldn't live without him, the thing is, he can't tolerate devotion, and tends to mistake, say, attachment for this. The nation, too, I might see as a mysterious Lombard, who because of his, how shall I say, unexploredness, certainly makes something of an impression on me, and this, in my opinion, will do quite nicely.

All these nations that have somehow been shaken awake are probably faced with this or that rewarding or thankless task, a circumstance quite beneficial to them. Perhaps one shouldn't, I think, be all too much what one is, too bursting with things one is good at. The good-for-nothing problem, lying nestled on a gently rounded hill, may merit a mention. From the regularly breathing contents of the *Nibelungenlied*, mighty warriors tower up, and I can't help but hold in high esteem this poem that came into being so strangely.

If I can consider what has here come into being from knowledge and unconsciousness to be a labyrinth, then the reader, like a Theseus, so to speak, now steps forth.

Masquerade

The enormous forehead one of them wore made him tower above all the others walking there, and this seemed to give him great pleasure. Through the arcades that grace our city, young men sauntered in the manner of Italian aristocrats. The countryside lay still, like an ineradicable god. For a while I went as an old woman. While giving a masterful imitation of decrepitude, I occasionally drew from my robes a bottle containing a wine you could drink like milk. This juice made me clever, lighthearted, and perspicacious. Out in the country, girls danced to the notes a paterfamilias coaxed from a concertina. The notes confessed this and that and seemed delighted by their confession. I surveyed a seaport that lay resplendent in a travel album. Yesterday masked balls were held, just to get in cost a pretty penny. The better bottles of wine went for a hundred francs each. I met a journalist who resembled a member of an early Gothic knightly order. Part of the time I wore a colossal nose that poked horizontally into the crowd. I walked down a meadow to an inn, the river flowed right past it, as did the stream of strollers, many of whom gazed covetously into the garden, which lay there naked. The sun had something caressing about it. The Alps resembled both tapestry and patisserie, made one think of fabrics and sweets, lace and jewels. I spoke with a woman from Basel about their famous *Fastnacht*, or Shrovetide, parade, successfully skipped stones across the surface of the water, sprang from a small rise to a patch of sand or gravel, and made a girl leaning over a windowsill laugh. The day was as beautiful as a love that is eternal, like a proud northern rage abating, like malice grown kind, like the delicate-hued statue of a saint, like a sin that one blesses, like a mother's face in a palace chamber bent over the little bed in which lies a little child destined to a hard, overly sweet, profoundly distressing fate. All the streets seemed to request courtesy, so bright,

brilliant, smooth, soft, and clean they looked. I made an effort to understand the trees and found the words needed to characterize them; the houses became my friends. A rain of blueness streamed and swirled from the heights into the depths as a silent springtime radiance, and in a bar someone said: "Thank God mind triumphs over matter." Masquerading isn't usually the custom here. For this reason it remained rather inconspicuous. From a sports field cheering could be heard, resembling gentle, distant breakers; at the edge of the forest, people from the higher walks of life reclined upon fir twigs and in the prescient grass, and from all directions longing came to lay itself upon the neck of the world. The sight of a girl with brown braids suddenly made me a painter in thought. How beautifully the young, blue eyes harmonized with the innocent brown. Then the girl laughed at a remark that escaped from me as I spoke with her mother. Promenaders descended the steps, filling the paths that snake through the valleys like veins through a body. Once more the city seemed one you can love without explaining why; I first saw it as a boy and found it magnificently rich and huge. Somewhere in the city sat a girl who thought I wanted to make fun of her, but I behaved in such a manner that she had to form a new opinion of me. Now she knows I'm a "good soul," and she'll think of me because all this time she's had to tell herself she was mistaken, and all this time will have been a time of reform, a Passion-tide with stations of improvement. What a smile of forgiveness life gave me yesterday, one I was hardly concerned with at all, and since this splendid disregard let me posture at my best, women who usually became animated when they saw me coming now grew solemn at the sight of me. You can hurt feelings by showing off the art of living, which has something tightrope-walk-erish about it. Certainly I haven't yet scaled the summit of kindness.

Daily I find new lessons, but using my instinctive sense of balance I have resolved, as it were, not to let them concern me too much. Hills and forests and the swarming streets wish, above all, that I be merry. For the sake of merriment then, I won't take too much to heart.

S.B./T.W.

(1927)

Sampler Plate

When I narrate a story, I think about food. If, for instance, I say that a band marched trumpeting through the streets of an industrial town, during which event the clock tower struck eleven, my thoughts are somewhere else altogether.

If on the other hand I report, with regard to an intellectual woman, that she offered herself, thanks to unluckiness in love, as a nanny in an aristocratic household, causing great astonishment in the latter, my mental vivacities immediately address themselves once more to office-session questions awaiting solutions.

Swallows flew twittering about the head of a washerwoman, which she'd stuck out the window for purposes of air inhalation, whereupon she was overwhelmed by the enchanting view. Taking no, or only superficial, interest in this washerwoman, my agile imagination glides off to join a college girl who one day devoted the sum total of her abilities to clambering with genuine attentiveness into a magnificent tree.

With this I think of something elsewhere—namely, a sack full of sugar in a grocer's shop owned by a woman whom I considered, for a time, my ideal. The art of narration won't let me take the grocer woman seriously. The reader will please refrain from this as well.

Now I shall touch base with the problem of education, insofar as, on the occasion of a cosy chat, a girl who seemed to have a certain dependability about her, for she had all sorts of experiences behind her, pronounced me a boor. Whether it was I or another who was favored with this distinction plays no role before the forum of cultural endeavors. Quiddities never rest, they ramble.

It can happen to anyone that a girl, once made to lose her temper, offers her hand to be kissed in forgiveness.

I've concerned myself with musicians, a coed, three different women, and a graceful girl.

S.B./T.W.

(1927)

Prose Piece

Resemblances exist between snowflakes and leaves. Seeing it snow, we think we can see tiny flowers falling from the sky. Why are the leaves that fade in autumn goldenly beautiful, and why do we think the spring flowers have tongues, comprise a sort of conversation? At the sight of leaves we think of hands fingered as if with buds. The feathers of the birds, the leaves on the trees, the delicate, feathery, fingery snowing in winter are related, we think ourselves entitled to say. The wind seems a thoughtless creature, not to be trusted; the windless calm, sensible of its own beauty, is as sweet as obedience that blissfully flows about within itself. Does the wind sense its own windiness? Does the leaf know how beautiful it is? Do snowflakes smile and flowers bewitch themselves, and do curls have some idea of their curliness? A river resembles a supple, rushing wanderer in its flowing, and water in its tranquillity is like a beautiful woman with white gloves and blue eyes. Thick foliage cloaks the delightful delicacy of the twigs. That lovely things exist is a lovely thought. Waves and branches have snakelike shapes, and there come moments when we know we are no more and no less than waves and snowflakes, or than that which surely feels, now and then, from its so wonderfully charming confinement, the pull of longing: the leaf.

S.B./T.W.

(1927-28)