

murkily enmeshed with every kind of material interest, for marriage as an ignoble compromise, however much Rousseauesque rancour against enjoyment intensified in reflection may also have found its way into his diatribes. The attack on the period of engagement is levelled against the family photograph, with its resemblance to the word 'bridegroom'. 'On top of this there was the repulsive habit of bringing chocolates, the bloating with every kind of sweetmeat, and all the disgusting preparations for the wedding: all around there was talk of nothing but the accommodation, the bedroom, the beds, house-clothes and nightclothes, linen and toilet articles.' In similar vein he ridicules the honeymoon, comparing it to the disappointment after a visit to a much-vaunted, 'highly uninteresting', fair-ground booth. It is not so much the exhausted senses that are to blame for *dégoût*, as the institutional, permitted, assimilated character of pleasure, its false immanence in an order that cuts it to shape and imparts to it in the very moment of ordaining it a deathly melancholy. Such repugnance can so increase that finally ecstasy prefers to withdraw completely into renunciation, rather than sin by realization against its own principle.

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Heliotrope. – When a guest comes to stay with his parents, a child's heart beats with more fervent expectation than it ever did before Christmas. It is not presents that are the cause, but transformed existence. The perfume that the lady visitor puts down on the chest of drawers while he is allowed to watch her unpacking, has a scent that resembles memory even though he breathes it for the first time. The cases with the labels from the Suvretta Hotel and Madonna di Campiglio, are chests in which the jewels of Aladdin and Ali Baba, wrapped in precious tissues – the guest's kimonos – are borne hither from the caravanserais of Switzerland and the South Tyrol in sleeping-car sedan chairs for his gluttoned contemplation. And just as fairies talk to children in fairy-tales, the visitor talks seriously without condescension, to the child of the house. The child asks sensible questions about countries and people and she, in the absence of daily familiarity and seeing nothing but the fascination in his eyes, answers with portentous utterances about a brother-in-law's softening of the brain and a nephew's marital affrays. So,

the child feels himself admitted all at once to the mighty and mysterious league of the grown-ups, the magic circle of the people of sense. With the order of the day – perhaps tomorrow he will be allowed to miss school – the boundaries between the generations too are suspended, and he who at eleven o'clock has still not been sent to bed has an inkling of true promiscuity. The single visit makes Thursday a feast-day and in the hubbub one seems to be sitting at table with all mankind. For the guest comes from afar. Her appearing promises the child a world beyond the family, reminding him that it is not the ultimate. The yearning to plunge into unformed joy, into the pool of salamanders and storks that the child has learned painfully to subdue and block with the frightful image of the black man, the demon who wants to take him away – here he finds it again, without fear. Among those nearest him, as their friend, appears the figure of all that is different. The soothsaying gypsy, let in by the front door, is absolved in the lady visitor and transfigured into a rescuing angel. From the joy of greatest proximity she removes the curse by wedding it to utmost distance. For this the child's whole being is waiting, and so too, later, must he be able to wait who does not forget what is best in childhood. Love counts the hours until the one when the guest steps over the threshold and imperceptibly restores life's washed-out colours: 'Here I am again / returned from the endless world.'¹

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Coming clean. – To find out whether a person means us well there is one almost infallible criterion: how he passes on unkind or hostile remarks about us. Usually such reports are superfluous, nothing but pretexts to help ill-will on its way without taking responsibility, indeed in the name of good. Just as all acquaintances feel an inclination to say something disparaging about everyone from time to time, probably in part because they baulk at the greyness of acquaintanceship, so at the same time each is sensitive to the views of all others, and secretly wishes to be loved even where he does not himself love: no less indiscriminate and general than the alienation between people is the longing to breach it. In this climate the

1. *Da bin ich wieder, / hergekommen aus weiter Welt*: lines from Mörike's *Peregrina* cycle.