



Hide from myself, I cannot; I can hardly control the anxiety that grips me at this moment when I decide in my own interest to make an accurate clean copy of the hurried transcript I was able to obtain at the time only in the greatest haste and with great uneasiness. The episode confronts me just as disquietingly and just as reproachfully as it did then. Contrary to his usual practice, he had not locked his desk; therefore everything in it was at my disposal. But there is no use in wanting to gloss over my conduct by reminding myself that I had not opened any of the drawers. One drawer stood open. In it was a mass of loose papers, and on top of them lay a large quarto volume, exquisitely bound. On the upper side was placed a vignette of white paper on which he had written in his own hand: *Commentarius perpetuus* [Running commentary] *no. 4*. There is no use, however, in trying to delude myself into thinking that if the top of the book had not been turned up, and if the striking title had not tempted me, I would not have fallen into temptation or at least would have offered resistance.

The title itself was curious, yet more because of the items around it than the title itself. From a hasty glance at the loose papers, I learned that they contained impressions of erotic situations, intimations of some relationship or other, drafts of letters of a particular kind, with which I later became familiar in their

artistically completed, calculated nonchalance. Now, having seen through the contriving heart of that corrupt man, when I recall the situation, now, with my eyes opened to all the cunning, so to speak, when I approach that drawer, I feel the same way a policeman must feel when he enters a forger's room, goes through his things, and finds a mass of loose papers in a drawer, specimens of handwriting; on one there is a little decorative design, on another a monogram, on a third a line of reversed writing. It readily shows him that he is on the right track, and his delight over this is mixed with a certain admiration for the effort and diligence obvious here. Since I am less accustomed to detecting crimes and am not armed with a policeman's badge, I would have reacted differently. I would have felt the double weight of the truth that I was on an unlawful path. At that time I lacked ideas as much as I lacked words, which is usually the case. One is awestruck by an impression until reflection once again breaks loose and with multifarious deft movements talks and insinuates its way to terms with the unknown stranger. The more developed reflection is, the more quickly it can collect itself; like a passport officer checking foreign travelers, it comes to be so familiar with the sight of the most fabulous characters that it is not easily taken aback. Although my reflection is indeed very highly developed, I nevertheless was greatly amazed at first. I recall so well that I turned pale, that I was close to fainting, and therefore how anxious I was. Suppose that he had come home, had found me in a swoon with the

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drawer in my hand--a bad conscience can indeed make life interesting.

In itself, the title of the book did not startle me. I took it to be a collection of excerpts, which to me seemed quite natural, since I knew that he had always taken to his studies with zeal. But it contained something altogether different. It was neither more nor less than a diary, painstakingly kept. On the basis of my former acquaintance with him, I did not consider that his life was in great need of a commentary, but according to the insight I now had, I do not deny that the title was chosen with great discernment and much understanding, with truly esthetic, objective mastery of himself and of the situation. The title is in perfect harmony with the entire contents. His life has been an attempt to accomplish the task of living poetically. With a sharply developed organ for discovering the interesting in life, he has known how to find it and after having found it has continually reproduced his experiences half poetically. Therefore, his diary is not historically accurate or strictly narrative; it is not indicative but subjunctive. Although his experiences were of course recorded after they were experienced, sometimes perhaps even a long time afterward, they nevertheless are frequently described as if they were taking place right now and with such dramatic vividness that it sometimes seems as if everything were taking place before one's eyes. It is highly improbable that he did this because he had some other purpose with this diary; it is obvious that in the strictest sense it had only personal importance for him, and to as-

sume that I have before me a poetic work, perhaps even intended for publication, is excluded by the whole as well as by its parts. It is true that he would not need to fear anything personally in publishing it, for most of the names are so odd that it is altogether improbable that they are historical. My only suspicion has been that the first name is historically accurate, and in this way he has always been sure of identifying the actual person, whereas every interloper would be misled by the family name. At least this is the case with the girl I knew, Cordelia, on whom the main interest centers; she was very correctly named Cordelia but not, however, Wahl.

How then can it be explained that the diary nevertheless has taken on such a poetic tinge? The answer to this is not difficult; it is easily explained by his poetic nature, which is not abundant enough or, if you please, not deficient enough to separate poetry and actuality from each other. The poetic was the plus he himself brought along. This plus was the poetic he enjoyed in the poetic situation of actuality; this he recaptured in the form of poetic reflection. This was the second enjoyment, and his whole life was intended for enjoyment. In the first case, he personally enjoyed the esthetic; in the second case, he esthetically enjoyed his personality. The point in the first case was that he egotistically enjoyed personally that which in part actuality has given to him and which in part he himself had used to fertilize actuality; in the second case, his personality was volatilized, and he then enjoyed the situation and himself in the situation. In the first case, he continually needed actuality

as the occasion, as an element; in the second case, actuality was drowned in the poetic. Thus, the fruit of the first stage was the mood from which the diary emerged as the fruit of the second stage, with these words taken in a somewhat different sense in the second case than in the first. In this way he has continually possessed the poetic through the ambiguity in which his life elapsed.

Behind the world in which we live, far in the background, lies another world, and the two have about the same relation to each other as do the stage proper and the stage one sometimes sees behind it in the theater. Through a hanging of fine gauze, one sees, as it were, a world of gauze, lighter, more ethereal, with a quality different from that of the actual world. Many people who appear physically in the actual world are not at home in it but are at home in that other world. But a person's fading away in this manner, indeed, almost vanishing from actuality, can have its basis either in health or in sickness. The latter was the case with this man, whom I had once known without knowing him. He did not belong to the world of actuality, and yet he had very much to do with it. He continually ran lightly over it, but even when he most abandoned himself to it, he was beyond it. But it was not the good that beckoned him away, nor was it actually evil—even now at this moment I dare not say that of him. He has suffered from an *exacerbatio cerebri* [exacerbation of the brain], for which actuality did not have enough stimulation, at most only momentarily. He did not overstrain himself on actuality, he was not too weak to bear it; no, he was too strong,

but this strength was a sickness. As soon as actuality had lost its significance as stimulation, he was disarmed, and the evil in him lay in this. He was conscious of this at the very moment of stimulation, and the evil lay in this consciousness.

I knew the girl whose story constitutes the main content of the diary. Whether he has seduced others, I do not know, but that seems to be borne out by his papers. He appears also to have been practiced in a different kind of procedure, which is altogether typical of him, for he was much too endowed intellectually to be a seducer in the ordinary sense. One sees from the diary that what he at times desired was something totally arbitrary, a greeting, for example, and would accept no more at any price, because that was the most beautiful thing about the other person. With the help of his intellectual gifts, he knew how to tempt a girl, how to attract her without caring to possess her in the stricter sense. I can picture him as knowing how to bring a girl to the high point where he was sure that she would offer everything. When the affair had gone so far, he broke off, without the least overture having been made on his part, without a word about love having been said, to say nothing of a declaration, a promise. And yet it had happened, and for the unhappy one the consciousness of it was doubly bitter because she did not have the least thing to appeal to, because she was continually agitated in a dreadful witches' dance of the most varied moods as she alternately reproached herself, forgave him, and in turn reproached him. And now, since the relationship had possessed actuality only figuratively, she

had to battle continually the doubt whether the whole affair was not a fantasy. She could not confide in anyone, because she did not really have anything to confide. When a person has dreamed, he can tell his dream to others, but what she had to tell was indeed no dream; it was actuality, and yet as soon as she was about to tell it to another to ease her troubled mind, it was nothing. She was fully aware of it herself. No one could grasp this, scarcely she herself, and yet it weighed upon her as a disquieting burden.

Such victims were, therefore, of a very special kind. They were not unfortunate girls who, as outcasts or in the belief that they were cast out by society, grieved wholesomely and intensely and, once in a while at times when the heart was too full, ventilated it in hate or forgiveness. No visible change took place in them; they lived in the accustomed context, were respected as always, and yet they were changed, almost unaccountably to themselves and incomprehensibly to others. Their lives were not cracked or broken, as others' were, but were bent into themselves; lost to others, they futilely sought to find themselves. In the same sense as it could be said that his journey through life was undetectable (for his feet were formed in such a way that he retained the footprint under them--this is how I best picture to myself his infinite reflect- edness into himself), in the same sense no victim fell before him. He lived much too intellectually to be a seducer in the ordinary sense. Sometimes, however, he assumed a parastatic body and then was sheer sensuousness. Even his affair with Cordelia was so intricate that it was possible for him to appear as the

one seduced-indeed, even the unhappy girl can at times be perplexed on this score; and then, too, his footprints here are so indistinct that any proof is impossible. For him, individuals were merely for stimulation; he discarded them as trees shake off their leaves—he was rejuvenated, the foliage withered.

But how may things look in his own head? Just as he has led others astray, so he, I think, will end by going astray himself. He has led the others astray not in the external sense but in the interior sense with respect to themselves. There is something shocking about a person's directing a hiker, uncertain of his way, to the wrong path and then abandoning him in his error; but what is that compared with causing a person to go astray within himself. The lost hiker still has the consolation that the scenery is continually changing around him, and with every change there is fostered a hope of finding a way out. He who goes astray within himself does not have such a large territory in which to move; he soon perceives that it is a circle from which he cannot find an exit. I think that he himself will have the same experience on an even more terrible scale. I can think of nothing more tormenting than a scheming mind that loses the thread and then directs all its keenness against itself as the conscience awakens and it becomes a matter of rescuing himself from this perplexity. The many exits from his foxhole are futile; the instant his troubled soul already thinks it sees daylight filtering in, it turns out to be a new entrance, and thus, like panic-stricken wild game, pursued by despair, he is continually seeking an exit and continually finding an entrance

through which he goes back into himself. Such a person is not always what could be called a criminal; he very often is himself frustrated by his own schemes, and yet he is stricken with a more terrible punishment than is the criminal, for what is even the pain of repentance compared with this conscious madness? His punishment has a purely esthetic character, for even the expression "the conscience awakens" is too ethical to use about him; conscience takes shape in him merely as a higher consciousness that manifests itself as a restlessness that does not indict him even in the profounder sense but keeps him awake, allows him no rest in his sterile restlessness. Nor is he insane, for his multitude of finite thoughts are not fossilized in the eternity of insanity.

Poor Cordelia—for her, too, it will prove difficult to find peace. She forgives him from her heart of hearts, but she finds no rest, for then the doubt awakens: she was the one who broke the engagement; she was the occasion of the calamity; it was her pride that craved the unusual. Then she repents, but she finds no rest, for then the accusing thoughts acquit her of the charges: he was the one who with his cunning instilled this plan into her soul. Then she hates; her heart finds relief in curses, but she finds no repose. Once again she reproaches herself—reproaches herself because she has hated, she who herself is a sinner, reproaches herself because regardless of how cunning he was she nevertheless always remains guilty. It is oppressive for her that he has deceived her, but still more oppressive, one is almost tempted to say, that he has awakened multiple-tongued reflection, that he has so

developed her esthetically that she no longer listens humbly to one voice but is able to hear the many voices at the same time. Then recollection awakens in her soul, and she forgets blame and guilt; she recollects the beautiful moments, and she is dazed in an unnatural exaltation. At such moments, she not only recalls him, she perceives him with a *clairvoyance* that only shows how highly developed she is. Then she does not see the criminal in him, but neither does she see the noble person—she feels him only esthetically. She once wrote me a letter in which she comments on him. "He was sometimes so intellectual that I felt myself annihilated as a woman; at other times he was so wild and passionate, so desiring, that I almost trembled before him. At times I was like a stranger to him; at times he surrendered completely. Then when I threw my arms around him, everything changed, and I embraced a cloud.' I knew this expression before I knew him, but he taught me to understand it; when I use it, I always think of him, just as every thought I think is only through him. I have always loved music; he was a matchless instrument, always sensitive; he had a range such as no other instrument has. He was the quintessence of all feelings and moods, no thought was too sublime for him, none too desperate. He could roar like an autumn storm; he could whisper inaudibly. Not a word of mine was without effect, and nevertheless I cannot say that my words did not fall short in their effect, because it was impossible for me to know what they would do. With an indescribable but cryptic, blissful, unnameable anxiety, I listened to this music I myself had evoked and yet did

not evoke; always there was harmony, always I was enraptured by him."

Terrible it is for her; more terrible it will be for him-this I can conclude from the fact that I myself can scarcely control the anxiety that grips me every time I think about the affair. I, too, am carried along into that kingdom of mist, into that dreamland where one is frightened by one's own shadow at every moment. Often I futilely try to tear myself away from it; I follow along like an ominous shape, like an accuser who cannot speak. How strange! He has spread the deepest secrecy over everything, and yet there is an even deeper secrecy, that I myself am in on the secret and that I came to know it in an unlawful way. To forget the whole thing is not possible. I have sometimes thought of talking to him about it. But what would be the use-he would either disclaim everything and insist that the diary was a literary venture, or he would enjoin me to silence, something I cannot deny him in view of the way in which I came to know about it. There is nothing that involves so much seduction and so much malediction as a secret.

From Cordelia I have received a collection of letters. Whether it is all of them, I do not know, although it seemed to me that she once gave me to understand that she herself had confiscated some. I have copied them and shall interleave them in my fair copy. Admittedly, they are not dated, but even if they were it would not help me much, since the diary becomes more and more sparse as it proceeds. In fact, at last with only a single exception it abandons dates altogether, as if the story in its development became

so qualitatively significant that, although historically actual, it came so close to being idea that specifications of time became unimportant. What did help me, however, was that I found here and there in the diary some words that I did not grasp at first. But by relating them to the letters I perceived that they are the themes in them. Thus it will be easy for me to interleave them in the right places, since I shall always insert the letter where there is an allusion to the theme. If I had not discovered these guiding clues, I would have been guilty of a misunderstanding, for it probably would not have occurred to me-as the diary now seems to indicate-that at times the letters succeeded one another at such short intervals that she seems to have received several in one day. If I had pursued my own thinking, I would probably have dispersed them more evenly and not suspected the effect he achieved through the passionate energy with which he used this and every means to hold Cordelia at the pinnacle of passion.

In addition to the complete information about his relation to Cordelia, the diary has several little word pictures interwoven here and there. Wherever such a piece is found, there is an "NB" in the margin. These word pictures have nothing at all to do with Cordelia's story but have given me a vivid idea of the meaning of an expression he often used, even though I formerly understood it in another way: One should always have a little line out on the side. If an earlier volume of this diary had fallen into my hands, I probably would have encountered several of these, which in the margin he himself calls: *actiones in distans* [ac

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tions at a distance],² for he himself declares that Cordelia occupied him too much for him really to have time to look around.

Shortly after he had left Cordelia, he received from her a couple letters that he sent back unopened. These were among the letters Cordelia turned over to me. She herself had broken the seal, and I take the liberty of making a copy of them. She has never spoken of their contents to me, but whenever she mentioned her relation to Johannes she used to recite a little verse, from Goethe as far as I know--a verse that seemed to mean something different to her according to the difference of her mood and the varied diction conditioned thereby.

<i>Gehe,</i>	[Go,
<i>Verschmiihe</i>	Scorn
<i>Die Treue,</i>	Faithfulness,
<i>Die Reue</i>	Regret
<i>Kommt nach</i>	Will follow] ³

The letters read as follows:

Johannes,

Never will I call you "my Johannes," for I certainly realize you never have been that, and I am punished harshly enough for having once been gladdened in my soul by this thought, and yet I do call you "mine": my seducer, my deceiver, my enemy, my murderer, the source of my unhappiness, the tomb of my joy, the abyss of my unhappiness. I call you "mine" and call myself "yours," and as it once flattered your ear, proudly inclined to my adoration, so shall it now

sound as a curse upon you, a curse for all eternity. Do not look forward to my planning to pursue you or to arm myself with a dagger in order to provoke your ridicule! Flee where you will, I am still yours; go to the ends of the earth,⁴ I am still yours. Love a hundred others, I am still yours-indeed, in the hour of death, I am yours. The very language I use against you must demonstrate to you that I am yours. You have had the audacity to deceive a person in such a way that you have become everything to me, so that I would rejoice solely in being your slave. Yours I am, yours, yours, your curse.

Your Cordelia

Johannes,

There was a rich man; he had great flocks and herds of livestock large and small. There was a poor little maiden; she possessed but a single lamb;⁵ it ate from her hand and drank from her cup. You were the rich man, rich in all the glories of the world; I was the poor one who possessed only my love. You took it, you delighted in it. Then desire beckoned you, and you sacrificed the little that I possessed-you could sacrifice nothing of your own. There was a rich man; he possessed great flocks and herds. There was a poor little maiden, she possessed only her love.

Your Cordelia

Johannes,

Is there no hope at all, then? Might your love never awaken again? That you did love me, I

know, even though I do not know what it is that makes me sure of it. I will wait, however long the time is for me; I will wait, wait until you are tired of loving others. Then your love for me will rise again from its grave; then I will love you as always, thank you as always, as before, O Johannes, as before! Johannes, is your heartless coldness toward me, is it your true nature? Was your love, your rich love, a lie and a falsehood; are you now yourself again! Have patience with my love; forgive me for continuing to love you. I know that my love is a burden to you, but there will still come a time when you will come back to your Cordelia. Your Cordelia! Hear this imploring word! Your
Cordelia. *Your Cordelia*

Even though Cordelia did not possess the admired range of her Johannes, it is clear that she was not without modulation. Her mood is clearly impressed upon every one of the letters, even though she was somewhat lacking in clarity of exposition. This is especially true of the second letter, where one suspects rather than actually understands her meaning, but for me this deficiency makes it very moving.