

# The Man with Many Qualities

Born into the autumn of the Habsburg Empire, Robert Musil served His Imperial and Royal Majesty in one bloody continental convulsion and died halfway through the even worse convulsion that followed. Looking back, he would call the times in which he lived an "accursed era"; his best energies were spent on trying to understand what Europe was doing to itself. His report is contained in a huge unfinished novel, *The Man Without Qualities*; in a series of incisive essays collected in English under the title *Precision and Soul*; and in a set of notebooks newly translated as *Diaries 1899-1941* (1899- 1942 on the jacket, however).

Musil's path to authorship was an unusual one. A scion of the Austrian upper bourgeoisie, he was educated not at a classical Gymnasium but at military boarding schools where he learned, if little else, to dress dapperly and take care of his body. At university he studied first engineering (he designed and patented an optical instrument that was still being manufactured commercially in the 1920s), then psychology and philosophy, taking his doctorate in 1908.

By this time he was already the author of a precocious first novel, *The Confusions of Young Törless* (1906), set in a cadet school. Abandoning the academic career for which he had prepared himself, he devoted himself to writing. *Unions*, a pair of cerebrally erotic novellas, appeared in 1911.

When war came, Musil served on the Italian front with distinction. After the war, troubled by a sense that the best years of his creative life were being stolen from him, he sketched out no fewer than twenty new works, including a series of satirical novels. A play, *The Enthusiasts* (1921), and a set of stories, *Three Women* (1924), won awards. He was elected vice president of the Austrian branch of the Organization of German Writers. Though not widely read, he was on the literary map.

Before long the satirical novels had been abandoned or absorbed into a master project: a novel in which the upper crust of Viennese society debate endlessly what form their latest public festival of self-congratulation is to take, oblivious of the dark clouds gathering on the horizon—a vision of a "grotesque Austria" on the eve of the First World War which is intended to be "nothing but a particularly clearcut case of the modern world." Supported financially by his publisher and by a society of admirers, he devoted himself entirely to *The Man Without Qualities*.

The first volume came out in 1930, to so enthusiastic a reception in both Austria and

Germany that Musil—a modest man in other respects—thought he might win the Nobel Prize. The continuation proved more intractable. Cajoled by his publisher, but full of misgiving, he allowed an extended fragment to appear as the second volume in 1933. "Volume One closes approximately at the high point of an arch," he wrote. "On the other side it has no support." He began to fear he would never finish the work.

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A move to the livelier intellectual environment of Berlin was cut short by the coming to power of the Nazis. He and his wife returned to Vienna, to an ominous political atmosphere; he began to suffer from depression and poor health. In 1938 Austria became part of the Third Reich, and the Musils removed themselves to Switzerland. Switzerland was meant to be a staging post on the way to the United States, but the entry of the United States into the war put paid to that plan. Along with tens of thousands of other exiles, the Musils found themselves trapped.

"Switzerland is renowned for the freedom you can enjoy there," observed Bertolt Brecht. "The catch is, you have to be a tourist." The myth of Switzerland as a land of asylum was badly damaged by its treatment of refugees between 1933 and 1944. The overriding priority of the Swiss government was not to antagonize Germany. Supervision of resident aliens fell under a *Fremdenpolizei* whose head disparaged philanthropic agencies for their "sentimental meddling" and made no secret of his dislike of Jews. Brutal scenes took place at border posts as refugees without entry visas were turned back. (To the credit of ordinary Swiss, it must be said, there was a public outcry.)

*The Man Without Qualities* had been banned in Germany and Austria in 1938 (the ban would later extend to all of Musil's writings). In applying for asylum, Musil was thus able to claim that he could not earn a living as a writer elsewhere in the German-speaking world. Yet nowhere in Switzerland did the Musils feel welcome. The Swiss patronage network disdained them; friends abroad exerted themselves only lackadaisically on their behalf (or so it seemed to Musil); they survived on handouts. "Today they ignore us. But once we are dead they will boast that they gave us asylum," said Musil to Ignazio Silone. Depressed, he could make no progress with the novel. "I don't know why I cannot manage to write. I seem to be under a spell." In 1942, at the age of sixty-one, he had a stroke and died.

"He thought he had a long life before him," said his widow. "The worst is, an unbelievable body of material—sketches, notes, aphorisms, novel chapters, diaries—is left behind, of which only he could have made sense. I have no idea what to do." Turned away by commercial publishers, she privately published a third and final volume of *The Man Without Qualities*: a set of chapters and drafts in no hard and fast order. After the war she tried to interest American publishers in a translation of the whole, without success. She died in 1949.

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The diaries to which Martha Musil refers are notebooks that Musil had kept from the age of eighteen. Meant at first to record his inner life, they soon began to serve other purposes as well. By the time of his death he had filled over forty of them, some of which were lost or stolen or destroyed in the postwar years. Although Musil calls these books *Hefte*, notebooks, his German editor prefers the term *Tagebücher*, diaries, and the English translation follows suit, though what we would think of as diary entries are in fact outweighed by summaries of and extracts from books, sketches for fiction, drafts of essays, lecture notes, and so forth. Even the German edition excludes some of this material. The selection in the English *Diaries* is less than half as long as the German, and gives only a slim selection of drafts. Readers who expect to follow in the *Diaries* the progress of *The Man Without Qualities* will be disappointed: they should turn, rather, to the selection of drafts reprinted in the 1995 Knopf translation of the novel, supervised by Burton Pike. On the other hand, the *Diaries* allow a picture to emerge of Musil responding to the history of his times, particularly in his last years, when entries become more expansive, perhaps because his energies are no longer being poured so fully into *The Man Without Qualities*.

In his study *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture*, David S. Luft identifies two key moments in Musil's political evolution, both connected with World War I. The first was his experience of the wave of patriotic passion that accompanied the outbreak of war, a passion that, to his surprise, he found himself sharing ("the ecstasy of altruism—this feeling of having, for the first time, something in common with one's fellow Germans"). The second was the Versailles Treaty of 1919, and what this punitive settlement meant for those who had hoped the exhausting war would at least give birth to a new political order.

The account Musil gives, in his *Diaries*, of how the humiliations of Versailles led to

the rise of Nazism has not been bettered. Fascism, in Musil's analysis, was a reaction against challenges of modern life—principally industrialization and urbanization—for which the German people were unprepared, a reaction which then grew into a revolt against civilization itself. From the moment the Reichstag burned in 1933, Musil foresaw how badly Germany was about to betray itself. "All the liberal fundamental rights have now been set aside," he writes from Berlin, "without one single person feeling utterly outraged.... It is seen as a spell of bad weather.... One might feel most profoundly disappointed over this but it is more correct to draw the conclusion that all the things that have been abolished here are no longer of great concern to people."

Of Hitler he writes: "We Germans brought forth the greatest moralist of the second half of the preceding century [that is, Nietzsche] and are today bringing forth the greatest aberration in morality that there has been since Christendom. Are we monstrous in every respect?"

Musil was affected at every level of his life by the rise of Nazism and the rejection of the best of the German past that Nazism represented. "[Hitler says] you must believe either in the future of N[ational] S[ocialism] or the downfall of [Germany].... How is it possible still to work when one is in this position?" (Setting down these words in Vienna in 1938, Musil prudently does not name Hitler, using instead a private code name, "Carlyle.") National Socialism made Musil invisible by driving him into exile and banning his books; it is hard not to suspect that his growing hopelessness before the task of finishing *The Man Without Qualities* came, at least in part, from a sense that his project, conceived in a spirit of what he calls "gentle irony," had been overtaken by the chariots of history.



From early on, Musil used people around him, including family and friends, as models for his fiction. The first notebook (1899-1904) includes a fictionalized treatment of his own childhood and adolescence, with a cast of characters who will resurface decades later in *The Man Without Qualities*.

His most striking use of personal material is in the story "Tonka" (in *Three Women*), where the central character is based closely on Herma Dietz, a young working-class woman with whom he had a serious and lengthy liaison despite the intense disapproval of his mother. In the diaries, Herma plays a double role. At one level, she is closely observed as a model for the fictional Tonka. At another, she is the object of

troubled feelings. Despite her denials, Musil has reason to believe Herma has been unfaithful to him. To his circle of friends he preaches the transcendence of jealousy, but privately he feels "a steady drip of poison." What should he do? The move he makes is deeply Musilian. He turns himself into a character in the story of Herma/Tonka, and tries, through the distancing power that fiction allows, to become the person that, at an ethical level, he wants to be.

To judge from the clarity and intensity of Musil's writing, in both the diary entries and, later, the achieved story, the ethical-aesthetic experiment works. Robert (or his created fictional self "R") visibly grows before our eyes, becoming less youthfully brash, less cynical, more tolerant, more loving. "Her [i.e., Herma/ Tonka's] fateful liaison with R," he writes to himself, "gives symbolical form to the fact that...one cannot place faith in the understanding." If he loves Herma he must believe her. Fiction has become an arena for working out his relations with others, a laboratory for the refinement of the soul. The young Musil is learning to love; and, in a strange way, the more he loves, the more clear-sighted and intelligent he becomes.

Herma Dietz died in 1907. By then Musil had already met Martha Marcovaldi, who had left her Italian husband to study art in Berlin. Soon he was living with Martha and her children; in due course they were married. "She is something that I have become and that has become 'I,'" he writes in the *Diaries*. The perfecting of their love—a love that would include a perverse readiness to betray each other—became a new ethical project in his life. To Musil, the most stubborn and retrogressive feature of German culture (of which Austrian culture was a part—at no time did he take seriously the idea of an autonomous Austrian culture) was its tendency to compartmentalize intellect from feeling, to favor an unreflective stupidity of the emotions. He saw this split most clearly among the scientists with whom he had worked: men of intellect living coarse emotional lives.

From the earliest notebooks, Musil displays a concern with erotic feeling and the relations between the erotic and the ethical. The education of the senses through a refining of erotic life seems to him to hold the best promise of bringing humankind to a higher ethical plane. He deplores the rigid sexual roles that bourgeois society has laid down for women and men. "Whole countries of the soul have been lost and submerged" as a consequence, he writes.

In asserting the sexual relation as the fundamental cultural relation, and in advocating a sexual revolution as the gateway to a new millennium, Musil is curiously reminiscent of his contemporary D.H. Lawrence. Where he differs from Lawrence is in not

wishing to exclude the intellect from erotic life—indeed, in seeking to eroticize the intellect. As a writer, he is also capable of an unmoralizing brutality of observation that is simply not in Lawrence's repertoire. He watches a young woman watching her mother kiss a younger man. "Up till now she has only known a woman's kiss as a tentative gesture; but this is like a dog sinking its teeth into another."

Despite his interest in the metamorphoses of desire, explored with unparalleled subtlety in *Unions*, Musil is unsympathetic to the psychoanalytic movement. He dislikes its cultishness, disapproves of its sweeping claims and its unscientific standards of proof. Psychoanalysis, he remarks disparagingly, deploys a mere handful of explanatory concepts; what these concepts do not cover is "left completely barren [with]...not a single path...[leading] on further from there." "Insights of great importance [intermingle] with things that are impossible, one-sided, even dilettante." He prefers psychology of what he ironically calls the "shallow"—that is, experimental—variety.

Nonetheless, there are scholars who see Musil as indebted to Freud, more deeply indebted than he cares to acknowledge. The *Diaries* offer little to support their case. Musil and Freud were part of a larger movement skeptical of the power of reason to guide human conduct; both became critics of Central European civilization and its discontents; both assumed the dark continent of the feminine psyche as theirs in particular to explore. To Musil, Freud was a rival rather than a source. Nietzsche remained his guide in the realm of the unconscious.

Musil objects in particular to the double-bind logic of Freudianism: if we cannot detect an Oedipal desire within us, for instance, this proves all the more that the desire is there, but deeply repressed. Recalling his own adolescence, Musil can detect no desire for his mother, only distaste for her aging body.

Is that not the truth—the sad and healthy and non-invented truth? It is the opposite of ps[ych]oanalysis]. The mother is not an object of desire but a mood-barrier, a stripping away of the mood of every desire, should chance present the young man with any sexual opportunity.

Would Musil have been so sure of himself if, before writing these words in the late 1930s, he had reread his notebook of 1905-1906? Here, in breathlessly novelettish prose, the young Musil drafts a scene of erotically charged reconciliation between his fictional hero and the hero's mother. Decades later, the energies at work in this scene will be drawn upon in the incestuous love between Ulrich, the man without qualities, and his sister Agathe. May sister-love not be a screen for mother-love?

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Musil uses his notebooks less to explore old memories than to capture data in the present: a moment of flirtatiousness with a postwoman, sounds of intimacy from a couple in the next hotel room. Among the most vivid entries are extended memoranda of this kind: pages of close observation of flies caught in flypaper (later to be used in an essay), descriptions of cats courting and mating in the garden of his Geneva house. Some observations are marvels of deft precision: birdsong "like the touch of soft, busy hands."

Notes on a visit to an insane asylum in Rome in 1913 become the basis of the chapter entitled "The Lunatics Greet Clarisse" in Part Three of *The Man Without Qualities*, via a series of drafts included in the Knopf translation. Musil makes the episode richer and more disturbing by giving it through the eyes of Clarisse, Ulrich's unstable, Nietzsche-worshipping childhood friend and later (in one possible continuation of the story) mistress. (The most impressive feature of these and many other drafts is how fully conceived and realized they are, and how finished the writing is. All that is unsettled about them is where they will fit into the whole.)

Among the writers who mattered to him and on whom he reflects in the *Diaries*, from Mallarmé in his youth to Tolstoy late in life, the dominating figure remains Nietzsche. He is oddly indifferent to James Joyce, but feels an affinity to G.K. Chesterton. (For a while Musil and Joyce lived a few houses apart in Zürich. They never spoke to each other.)

Musil recognized Nietzsche's influence on him as "decisive." In Nietzsche he found a form of philosophizing that is essayistic rather than systematic; a recognition of art as a form of intellectual exploration; affirmation that man makes his own history; and a way of treating moral questions that goes beyond the polarities of good and evil. "Master of the floating life within," he called him.

Some of the obiter dicta are striking. On Emily Brontë: "A tiny portion of irony and this housekeeper with her righteous misdeeds would be a figure of global dimensions." On Hermann Hesse: "He has the weaknesses appropriate to a greater man than he actually is."

On culture and politics he can be mordantly aphoristic: "The German doesn't know

which he likes better, Heaven or Hell. But he is definitely thrilled with the task of bringing order to one or the other—and probably he slightly prefers the task of setting Hell in order." After Goebbels has launched a decree forbidding "destructive criticism," Musil writes: "Since criticism is forbidden I have to indulge in self-criticism. No one will take exception to this since it is unknown in Germany."

At a humbler level, the *Diaries* include lists of books, coded notations on his sex life with Martha, and worries about his health. Musil was a heavy smoker. Smoking was inconvenient (it made it impossible for him to work in public libraries), but he could not give it up. "I treat life as something unpleasant that one can get through by smoking! (I live, in order to smoke.)"

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An unattractive side of Musil's character shows up in resentment of the success of writers he considers his inferiors (among them Franz Werfel, Stefan George, Stefan Zweig), and in fits of huffiness when he is not paid the respect he believes he is due. The sculptor Fritz Wotruba, one of the few friends of Musil's last years, remarked on the gap between Musil's polite treatment of people in public and the sharp attacks he would launch against them in private. The fame of Thomas Mann rankled particularly. Mann has lowered his sights to suit the capacities of his audience, Musil comments scornfully in his *Diaries*, whereas he, Musil, writes for future generations.

Mann's path briefly crossed Musil's in Switzerland, where Mann was fêted, Musil ignored. From Switzerland Mann went on to the United States, where, Musil complained, he did not do enough to aid his beleaguered fellow European writers. In fact Mann sent a handsome letter to the British PEN proposing that the club sponsor the emigration of "our great colleague Robert Musil." Another contemporary whom Musil disparaged in the privacy of his diary, Hermann Broch, added his voice: "Robert Musil belongs among the absolute epic writers of world stature." Hearing later what Mann had written on his behalf, Musil was brought up short: he had been unjust, he acknowledged to himself.

Musil is of course inconsistent in sneering at Mann for accommodating himself to the taste of his readers while blaming the same readers for neglecting him, Musil. Sometimes Musil recognizes this inconsistency and tries to persuade himself that the obscurity of his own "double exile"—from his home and from public attention—is an

advantage. "The feeling that I never quite fully belong either here or anywhere else is not weakness anymore but strength. Now I have found myself again and also my way of facing the world." The stance toward the world to which he refers is, of course, an ironic one. "Irony has to contain an element of suffering in it. (Otherwise it is the attitude of a know-it-all)."

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As a critic, Musil has an astute sense of his own strengths. "[I have] an intellectual imagination." "I am alert to processes in me and in others which elude most people." Equally acute are his insights into weaknesses in his work. The novellas in *Unions*, he sees in retrospect, lack narrative tension. "Grigia," the story in *Three Women* based on his wartime experiences, he dismisses as "a disaster." *The Man Without Qualities* itself is "overburdened with essayistic material that is too fluid and does not stick."

There are long periods when he is stalled, unable to write. He wakes in the morning in a state of "intellectual despair," of "powerlessness mingled with a dreadful loathing...at the thought of having to go back to the thing [i.e., *The Man Without Qualities*]." His books "do not have any urgent appeal," and he is unable to discover within himself the "gesture" that would be needed for such appeal. He feels like giving up. Nevertheless, he plods on, with a dim sense that what he is doing may be important. His self-explorations, because they take place within "an existential crisis"—a crisis, personal and historical, of failure—might serve to "shed...light onto the surrounding epoch."

Now and again he looks forward hopefully to a day when his labors on the novel will have ceased and he can make a living more easily, writing essays. He plays with essay titles, makes notes, drafts passages. But the drafts do not read well: it is as if his mind is elsewhere.

There is much bleakness in the entries from the late years. Libido is waning, and he interprets this as "the absence of a will to live." "Scales fall from one's eyes. You see those you love...in a merciless light." He does not like what he is writing yet does not want to change it. "I am a total stranger to myself and could be either a critic or a commentator of my own work."

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As the prospect of completing *The Man Without Qualities* begins to seem more and more remote, Musil plays with the idea of using the notebooks as the basis of an alternative project. "I must rather write on the subject of these notebooks," he tells himself, and even makes up a title: *The Forty Notebooks*.

As he imagines it, the new work will have two aims: to address the future of Germany, and its guilt; and to chart the growth of his *oeuvre*, presenting it "in the right way" (*richtig*—Musil does not elaborate on what he means). To trace the rise of "the present set of problems grouped around the MwQ," he tells himself, will not be difficult; but when he explores the plan in greater depth, he loses heart. Does he have the energy to embark on a "reconstruction of the almost incomprehensible path" of his own evolution? Yet the autobiographical project attracts him. "This epoch deserves to be handed down just as it is (not in the distanced mode of MwQ but), seen in close-up, as a private life," he writes in 1937.

If I describe my life as being exemplary, as a life in this age that I want to hand down to later ages, this can be toned down with irony and the objections raised [namely that one takes oneself too seriously] will then fall away.... My probing of conscience, contemplation of my shortcomings and the like, will also find their place here as a reproduction of the times.

Musil's plans to transform his notebooks into something else were never carried out. Yet in a strange way, it is as a body of writing that, intermittently and somewhat wistfully, contains the stillborn idea of becoming a literary work in its own right that the *Diaries* take on a life of their own. In their latter stages they become an admission by a great writer in dark times that he has come to a dead end and that he does not have it in him to rescue himself through a heroic new project, yet half hoping, nevertheless, that the record of his travails, in all its integrity and all the evidence it will present of a true and full engagement with the accursed era into which he was born, can be brought to weigh in his favor. This gives the *Diaries* an emotional dimension, even a dimension of pathos, that Musil could not have planned, and that turns them into a moving document in their own right.

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The *Diaries* cannot have been easy to translate. Since Musil is writing for his own eyes only, observations arrive out of the blue, with no context, sometimes in condensed or cryptic form. Philip Payne, the translator of the *Diaries*, copes admirably. Even when the general drift is dark, he seems able to intuit where Musil is going. His version is, by and large, of the highest order. If there are lapses, these are the result of careless moments, nothing more. When Musil remarks in 1941 that the Catholic Church has lost its *Religiosität*, he means that it is without the spirit of religion, not without religiosity, as Payne has it. Musil is made to write of his admiration for Dostoevsky's *The Player*; the reader may be forgiven for not recognizing *The Gambler*. Musil imagines Stendhal and Balzac trading insults, Balzac calling Stendhal a scribbler, Stendhal calling Balzac a *Fex*. Payne translates this colloquial Austrian word as "gusher," but Musil is being more pungent than that: he means a clown, an eccentric enthusiast.

Though the notebooks were never reworked for publication, Musil's writing is so disciplined, his word choice so exact, that sentence follows sentence with a pointedness that seems to come naturally. Here and there, even while remaining true to Musil's sense, Payne fails to capture that pointedness; or—a related failing—translates the words without translating their meaning. For instance, Musil observes that by birth he belonged, however peripherally, among the "class dictators." What does he mean? The context does not help. Was *Klassendiktator* a jargon term in the 1930s? At moments like this one expects a translator to be an interpreter too. Certain of the editorial decisions are also open to question. The English *Diaries* consist of a selection from the *Tagebücher* edited by Adolf Frisé. Quite justifiably, Payne relies heavily on Frisé's notes, augmenting them here and there, but more generally cutting them down. This pruning is not always wisely done. In 1939, for instance, Musil read three articles—one on Freud, one on mathematics, one on Polish philosophy—that had such a "profound effect" on him that he stapled them to his notebook. What were these articles? Frisé gives not only the bibliographic particulars but, in two cases, brief synopses. Payne gives nothing.

Between April 1908 and August 1910, and again for the period 1926- 1928, there are no entries. We know that two of Musil's notebooks were stolen in 1970. Do the gaps mark the lost notebooks? A few words of explanation would have helped. Musil's American publishers have also lost a golden opportunity to improve on Frisé. Musil habitually kept several notebooks running in parallel; within each notebook, entries are dated inconsistently and haphazardly. Jumping back and forth in time as we move from notebook to notebook in the *Diaries*, we all too easily lose the chronology. A running head, changing from page to page, keeping track of the date, would have been a boon.

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The volume ends with a fifteen-page list of the passages Payne has omitted from his selections. Valuable though it may be in itself, this list is unlikely to be consulted by anyone who cannot already read German. An index would have been more useful, but there is no index. Four photographs are reproduced, showing Musil at ages seven, twenty, and twenty-two, and his wife a year before he met her; there is nothing of a later date. In addition to Payne's own concise, informative, and critically acute preface, there is a rambling introduction by Mark Mirsky which duplicates much of what Payne has already said. All in all, an oddly put-together compilation.

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Musil's climb to eminence and even to greatness from the obscurity of the war years began in the 1950s. In the English-speaking world his most effective promoters were the scholar-translators Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins, who in the *Times Literary Supplement* praised him as "the most important novelist writing in German in this half century" and followed up their claim with a translation of *The Man Without Qualities* in three parts, between 1953 and 1960. The book was well received in Britain but not, at first, in the United States: "a...bumbling mass of Teutonic metaphysics," wrote *The New Republic's* reviewer.

The materials left in Martha Musil's hands amounted to some 10,000 manuscript pages. (This *Nachlass* is now available on CD-ROM. Thus, ironically, the merest graduate student can find a way through the labyrinth with an ease that Musil, despite his elaborate cross-referencing system, never possessed.) Scholarly explorations began in 1951; the first fruits in German were an edition of *The Man Without Qualities* by Frisé consisting of the portions of the text more or less finalized by Musil plus some supplementary drafts. A war of words then broke out over the question of whether Frisé was entitled to prefer one of Musil's possible endings (carnal union between Ulrich and his sister Agathe) to another (mystical union between the two). The four-volume *Gesammelte Werke* of 1978 presents Frisé's compromise. The draft continuation is no longer given in unambiguous form. Instead, we have first the chapters finished and approved by Musil; then those chapters still being worked on at the time of his death (often with variants); and finally, a selection from the remaining material.

In the 1995 Knopf translation of *The Man Without Qualities*, the second and final volume is bulked out with with some six hundred small-print pages of Frisé's supplementary material in a helpful new arrangement by Burton Pike, editor of the Knopf

mentary material in a helpful new arrangement by Burton Pike, editor of the Knopf project and perhaps the best translator Musil has had thus far. The main body of the work, consisting of the author-approved chapters, is translated by Sophie Wilkins, previously the translator of the Austrian novelist Thomas Bernhard, and not to be confused with Eithne Wilkins. Ms. Wilkins had gone on record in advance criticizing the older Kaiser/Wilkins version for its "errors and misunderstandings" and for the Britishness of its language. Her translation corrects the old errors but introduces some new ones; it updates the language at the cost of a certain flatness of style. Perhaps the most frequently quoted sentence in the novel—"If mankind could dream collectively, it would dream Moosbrugger" (Kaiser/Wilkins translation)—reads in the new version, "If mankind could dream as a whole, the dream would be Moosbrugger." (Moosbrugger is a psychopathic killer.)

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Musil did not end and probably could not have ended his huge novel. Even according to its own internal logic, it is far from complete. Plot elements are in place for which no outcome is in sight, even in the drafts (one thinks of the consequences for Agathe of forging her father's will); major decisions still loom that Musil seems to be postponing (whether Ulrich is to have an affair with Clarisse, for instance). More seriously, one must doubt whether the framework Musil has established can support the gathering weight of history it is being called upon to bear.

Musil's notes indicate that, even in the 1920s, he was sensitive to the question of why he should have embarked on so determinedly "pre-war" a novel. He seems to have been confident, however, that its conception was flexible enough to allow it to foreshadow, at least at the level of presentiment, the realities of postwar Europe too. (Here Musil would seem to have been relying heavily on the figure of Moosbrugger to embody the violently self-liberatory impulses of peoples bewildered by the conditions of modern life—impulses that would in due course be exploited by the fascist movements. Moosbrugger is a minor character in the text as we have it, but he looms large in the drafts.)

More and more, Musil's decision to withdraw the last twenty chapters of Part 3—chapters already in the hands of the printers in 1938—seems a correct one. These chapters consist substantially of an exposition of Ulrich's theory of the emotions; they are the last chapters to have borne, or nearly to have borne, their author's imprimatur. They have been praised for their lyricism, but that lyricism now seems rather

too airy, and the whole sequence bereft of the sharpness of observation that characterizes Musil's prose at its best.

The problem is not just with the writing but with Ulrich himself. The broad scheme of the novel is to push forward two counterpointed story lines: while a spiritually bankrupt Austria is allowed to play out its last days, Ulrich, with and through his sister, will negotiate a mystical-erotic withdrawal from society. "For the sake of a world which could still come, one must hold oneself pure," he says in self-justification.

But given the pressure on Musil's fictional Europe of 1914 to carry the additional symbolic weight of the Europe of 1938-1939, Ulrich's retreat must have seemed—and here, one must concede, the *Diaries* yield no supporting admissions on Musil's part—a less and less adequate or even appropriate gesture. The ethical and the political sides of the novel were drifting apart.

Reading *The Man Without Qualities* will always be an unsatisfying experience. In the kind of edition offered by Frisé or by Pike, we reach the last of the 1,700-odd pages in a state of confusion, even of disappointment. But given the richness of Musil's drafts, given, as well, the scale of the crisis in European culture that he was trying to map, not only in *The Man Without Qualities* but in the parallel action of the *Diaries*, too much is preferable to too little.