

Bloom's Modern Critical

INTERPRETATIONS

Edited and with an Introduction by HAROLD BLOOM

Robert Musil's The Man Without Qualities



Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations

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Things Fall Apart

To Kill a Mockingbird
Ulysses
Waiting for Godot
Walden
The Waste Land

White Noise
Wuthering Heights
Young Goodman
Brown

Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations

Robert Musil's
*THE MAN WITHOUT
QUALITIES*

Edited and with an introduction by
Harold Bloom
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Editor's Note

My Introduction centers upon the unfinished (and unfinishable) nature of Robert Musil's great book, and attempts to surmise why Musil cultivated so elliptical and experimental a mode.

Lowell A. Bangerter locates the novel's originality in its strange fusion of a particular cultural era with a transcendent order beyond time and place.

For Thomas Harrison, Musil's vast novel is a metaphysical experiment, a Utopian going-beyond of Marxist aesthetics, while "chance" is the over-determining element for Eric White, who interestingly contrasts Musil's art with the visual narratives of Luis Buñuel.

Burton Pike, an immensely informed scholar of Musil, meditates upon the new ways in which this novelist sought to represent the flow of experience, after which Robert Zaller explores the incestuous relationship between Ulrich and his younger sister Agathe which is the vital center of *The Man without Qualities*.

Musil's re-invention of the historical Austria-Hungary is charted by Alexander Honold, while Michael Bernstein analyzes the extraordinary book as a thought-experiment, a work-always-in-progress.

Stefan Jonsson finds ways of revealing that Ulrich transcends any possible social context, after which Austin Harrington describes the almost Platonic sense of community, a soul-sharing beyond alienation that becomes the impossible project of Ulrich and Agathe, and thus of Musil himself.

HAROLD BLOOM

Introduction

Robert Musil's literary eminence is beyond doubt. Because of the unfinished (and unfinishable) nature of his masterwork, *The Man without Qualities*, he cannot quite be placed in the company of Joyce and Proust and Kafka, or even of Thomas Mann and William Faulkner, among the High Modernists. His aesthetic splendor rivals that of Broch and Hofmannsthal, hardly a second order except in comparison to Joyce and Proust, Kafka and Beckett.

Proust and Kafka each loses by translation, rather more than Mann and Broch do, but Musil loses most, despite the distinguished and devoted efforts of Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike. Musil's language is as unique as Paul Celan's, and Musil's styles (there are several, beautifully modulated) never stay fixed. Burton Pike contributes an eloquent "Translator's Afterword" (pp. 1771–1774) to the 1995 American edition, in which he aptly remarks that there is no author in English who could provide a model for Musil's fusion of sound and sense. It is unnerving that Musil is both essayistic and a curious blend of Taoist-Sufi in his procedures. He also combines an inward voicing with an outward panoply that verges upon prose-poetry.

Musil's actual precursor was the Shakespeare of *Hamlet*, where the representation of thinking-in-language touches a limit in the Prince of Denmark's seven soliloquies that even Musil cannot attain. Ulrich is a descendant of Hamlet, who haunts German literature as pervasively as he does the Anglo-American tradition. Incest, termed by Shelley the most

poetical of circumstances, is deferred throughout Part III of the novel, and evidently continues to be deferred in the six hundred and fifty pages from the Posthumous Papers that Pike translates. The consummation of Ulrich's and Agathe's mutual passion would have been a kind of suicide, probably followed by a literal double-suicide, the only way in which this unfinishable novel could have been finished. Musil's own death became the circumstance that concluded what could not reach conclusion, the full union of Agathe and Ulrich, a cosmological metaphor for the end of Musil's cultural world.

And yet the word "incest" is grossly imprecise for the love between these extraordinary siblings. What after all *is* incest in a fictive work? In Musil, the long-impending but unrealizable total relationship between Agathe and Ulrich is the ultimate trope for the new kind of secular transcendence that is the endless quest of *The Man without Qualities*. Perhaps it might have been an atonement or sacrifice to avert the death of European culture, had the actual intercourse between brother and sister taken place. Throughout Part III of the novel, and in the Posthumous Papers, Musil manifests an uncanny precision in the dangerous conversations between brother and sister:

"And it's not at all against nature for a child to be the object of such feelings?" Agathe asked.

"What would be against nature would be a straight-out lustful desire," Ulrich replied. "But a person like that also drags the innocent or, in any event, unready and helpless creature into actions for which it is not destined. He must ignore the immaturity of the developing mind and body, and play the game of his passion with a mute and veiled opponent; no, he not only ignores whatever would get in his way, but brutally sweeps it aside! That's something quite different, with different consequences!"

"But perhaps a touch of the perniciousness of this 'sweeping aside' is already contained in the 'ignoring'?" Agathe objected. She might have been jealous of her brother's tissue of thoughts; at any rate, she resisted. "I don't see any great distinction in whether one pays no attention to what might restrain one, or doesn't feel it!"

Ulrich countered: "You're right and you're not right. I really just told the story because it's a preliminary state of the love between brother and sister."

"Love between brother and sister?" Agathe asked, and pretended to be astonished, as if she were hearing the term for

the first time; but she was digging her nails into Ulrich's arm again, and perhaps she did so too strongly, and her fingers trembled. Ulrich, feeling as if five small warm wounds had opened side by side in his arm, suddenly said: "The person whose strongest stimulation is associated with experiences each of which is, in some way or other, impossible, isn't interested in possible experiences. It may be that imagination is a way of fleeing from life, a refuge and a den of iniquity, as many maintain; I think that the story of the little girl, as well as all the other examples we've talked about, point not to an abnormality or a weakness but to a revulsion against the world and a strong recalcitrance, an excessive and overpassionate desire for love!" He forgot that Agathe could know nothing of the other examples and equivocal comparisons with which his thoughts had previously associated this kind of love; for he now felt himself in the clear again and had overcome, for the time being, the anesthetizing taste, the transformation into the will-less and lifeless, that was part of his experience, so that the automatic reference slipped inadvertently through a gap in his thoughts.

—From the *Posthumous Papers*, pp. 1399–1400,
translated by Burton Pike

As an instance of what is most original in Musil, this is both altogether typical yet also totally unique, the paradox that makes for what is greatest but sometimes maddening about *The Man without Qualities*. Some of the details in this passage I myself find unforgettable: Ulrich's brilliant evasion of "against nature," Agathe's "digging her nails into Ulrich's arm" so as to intimate "five small warm wounds," and Ulrich's subtle equation of revulsion against "the world" and a totalizing "desires for love." Is that world nature, history, society or immemorial morality? Musil insists that his reader decide that for herself.

LOWELL A. BANGERTER

Experimental Utopias:
The Man without Qualities

All of Musil's other works, including *Young Törless*, the novellas, the plays, and the essays, can be interpreted as preliminary studies to his monumental unfinished novel *The Man without Qualities*. In each creation, the author tested variations of ideas about man's relationship to the world, his self-concept, and the possibilities for realizing greater fulfillment and more perfect humanity within the context of life's experience. The analysis of the human condition, with special reference to the role of the thinking individual in modern technological society, is the common denominator of his literary art and his theoretical writings. *The Man without Qualities* is the grand culminating experiment in his creative-analytic process of exploring the unfixed domain of mortal potentiality.

Musil's masterpiece is not a traditional novel with a clearly defined plot and carefully orchestrated resolution of one or more central problems. It has been variously described as a "compendium of contemporary uncertainty,"¹ "a grand satire of the dying Austria,"² and "the supreme example in Western literature of the novel of ideas."³ The author himself characterized it as a novel "of a spiritual adventure," and as a "combat document." More than anything else, however, it is his strongest illustration of the creative power of his own sense of possibility.

The uniqueness of *The Man without Qualities* lies in the fact that on one

From *Robert Musil*. © 1988 by Lowell A. Bangerter.

level it is an analysis of historical reality, while on another it is an extremely complex metaphor for something that transcends the limits of specifically defined time and locale.

With reference to the real world, Musil was concerned about the human developments in Austrian society that inevitably led in the direction of World War I. In his notes about the novel's orientation and his approach to the material, he defines its artistic focus by saying that direct portrayal of the period leading up to the war must be the real substance of the narration, the context to which the plot can be tied, and the thought that provides the orientation for everything else.

It is important to understand that what mattered most for Musil were questions of human response to a spiritual atmosphere, and not the details of events. In his interview with Oskar Maurus Fontana in 1926, he disclaimed engagement in the writing of a historical novel, insisting that the actual explanation of concrete events did not interest him. One reason for this posture was that he considered facts to be totally interchangeable. Accordingly, he declared his fascination with what is spiritually typical, "the phantom aspect of the happening."⁴ For Musil, that "phantom aspect" is a timeless dimension of human experience. In the impact of events upon the individual, it is the factor that stimulates experimentation with new ideas.

Within the framework of *The Man without Qualities*, Musil treats what he sees as major problems of the immediate prewar years—the search for order and conviction, the role of the "Other Condition" in the life of the individual, the situation of the scientific person—as substance for experiments with ideas about achieving utopian forms of existence. His notes to the novel identify the most important of the projected patterns as three separate utopias. The first of these is the utopia of the given social condition, the second, the utopia of the "Other Condition" as found in love, and the third, a purely refined form of the "Other Condition" with mystical implications. In discussing these possibilities, he suggests that they differ in importance and that they can be reduced to two major utopias, that of real life and that of the "Millennial Kingdom," where the latter is a combination of the respective forms of the "Other Condition" experienced through love and mysticism.

The experiments pertaining to the first alternative receive their greatest emphasis in the early portions of the book. Exploration of the potentialities of the "Other Condition" then follows as the development of ideas for their own sake reaches its strongest intensity. Because Musil believed that attainment of the "Other Condition" could never be permanent in rational mortality, he projected an ending for the novel that would lead the central characters back into reality.

Musil's experiments with the search for utopia take the form of exposing his "guinea pig" to various stimuli and observing the results. The "guinea pig" is Ulrich, a representative specimen of technological man who is characterized by himself and others as a "man without qualities." The stimuli to which he responds include people who stand for different aspects of modern society, social, political, cultural, and intellectual situations that are typical of the times, and ideas that represent possibilities for alternate approaches to life and its questions. In each instance, the object of the experiment is to obtain a solution to a single puzzle. As the novel's male protagonist sums it up for his sister, the problem that troubles him most is concentrated in the question: "How am I to live?"

The outcome of each investigation is at once a function of and a contribution to the view of typical modern scientific man as a "man without qualities." On one level at least, the entire novel revolves around what it means to be such an individual. For Musil, a "man without qualities" is today's manifestation of the man of possibility, unfixed man in all his ambivalence and ambiguity. In defining the title figure as a typical representative of the times, one of his friends describes him as a man who always knows what to do, a man who can look into a woman's eyes, a man who is intelligent and able to use his mental capacities well under all conditions. More striking are the polarities that exist within him. In addition to talents of strength, objectivity, courage, and endurance, he can be either impetuous or cool and cautious. He can laugh when he is angry, reject things that stir his soul, and find good in things that are bad. His relationship to the world is completely unstable, because his surroundings represent infinite changing possibilities.

It is precisely this fluidity of his nature and his lack of a strong sense of reality, however, that make the "man without qualities" the ideal vehicle for Musil's experiments. His sense of possibility is manifested in a conscious utopianism that is a direct product of his intellectual mobility. It permits him to treat life as a laboratory and to contemplate the uniting of opposites to achieve a more fulfilling existence.

Ulrich's attempts to redefine his life are projected against a rich and complex fabric of interpersonal, social, political, and psychological relationships. At the age of thirty-two, he has behind him three unsuccessful endeavors—to become a "man of importance," first as an officer, then as an engineer, and finally as a mathematician. These efforts have been in vain because he is more at home in the realm of possibility than in the mundane real world. Accordingly, in response to what he perceives as a lack of order and meaning in his existence as a whole, he decides to take a year's vacation from his normal life. During that period, he hopes to discover the causes of

his surrounding reality's progressive collapse and a more suitable direction for his own future. The body of the novel is formed by the composite presentation of what he learns about himself and his environment in the course of this experiment.

To the extent that one can trace even a general story line for the completed portion of the fragment, its substance can be divided into two major sections with numerous subgroupings of connected situations, ideas, events, observations, and characters. The first main portion examines approximately half of the "vacation" year. It is primarily a description of Ulrich's efforts and ultimate failure to find an appropriate niche for himself within the context of Austrian prewar reality.

Diverse aspects of the decaying society are illuminated in a panorama of character types and behavioral patterns, as Musil depicts Ulrich's involvement in an empty political project called "the Collateral Campaign." Ulrich's participation consists primarily of passive observation of and reflection about events and situations. This fact determines the form of the narration. Essayistic integration of ideas, rather than elaboration of action and plot, receives the key emphasis.

In the second half of the narrative, the Collateral Campaign moves into the background as Ulrich abandons his attempt to find the right life for himself within the domain of material reality. His search enters a new phase in the intense exploration of the possibilities for fulfillment offered by the "Other Condition." The problem of finding the proper form of existence becomes that of self-definition as he grapples with the question of his relationship to his sister Agathe.

With this narrowing of focus comes a subtle change in the format of artistic presentation. Ulrich's examinations of a broad spectrum of ideas about love and mysticism are elaborated in long conversations between brother and sister. In the process of these discussions the siblings begin to function as complementary halves of a single spiritual unit.

How the author intended to end the novel is the subject of continuing controversy among Musil scholars. It is clear from unfinished fragments of chapters, notes from different periods of work on the novel, statements in interviews, and comments in letters that he considered many variations and possibilities for concluding his masterpiece. Nevertheless, only two things can be determined with relative certainty: First, Ulrich's experiments with both mysticism and love would fail to yield a final satisfying answer, just as the attempts to adapt to practical reality had done. Second, his "vacation" year would end with the protagonists and their world being swallowed up by the war. In the notes to the novel, where he projects the ultimate collapse of the Agathe-Ulrich relationship, Musil characterizes the combination of

Ulrich's decision to participate in the war and the miscarriage of their excursion into the "Other Condition" as the "end of the utopias."

One of the most significant features of *The Man without Qualities* is Musil's general portrayal of prewar Austria as the setting for his "adventure of the spirit." Kakania, as he calls the dying Austro-Hungarian monarchy, is a land for which spiritual inertia is characteristic. In retrospect, he describes the vanished Austria of former years as an unacknowledged model for many things, a place where speed existed, but not very much of it. Despite the genius that it has produced in the past, it has lost its cultural energy: "It was the State that was by now only just, as it were, acquiescing in its own existence." For that reason, it is ripe for some historical event that will bring about radical changes and move things in a new direction.

A major part of Musil's purpose in writing his critical analysis of the times was to demonstrate how such conditions must inevitably lead to the explosive consequences of war. In that respect, the invented characters and situations of the narrative become symbols and metaphors for broad social and political phenomena.

Despite its de-emphasis in the later portions of the novel, the Collateral Campaign provides what Werner Welzig has labeled "the thread of action that holds the work together."⁵ On the surface, the project is simply an endeavor to give Austria new visibility in the world, through the creation in 1918 of a yearlong seventieth anniversary celebration of the reign of Emperor Franz Josef. It is conceived as a direct response to the planned Prussian commemoration of Wilhelm II's thirty years on the throne, an event scheduled for the same year. Within the narrative framework, committee meetings and planning sessions, individual responses to the envisioned festivities, and discussions of the action's implications are employed as vehicles for the presentation of a wide variety of representative Austrian social types. The Collateral Campaign thus becomes on a deeper level Musil's focal metaphor for the spirit of the era. That point is hammered home in the author's notes to the final portion of the work, where he says that the Collateral Campaign will lead to the war.

Musil's ironic treatment of the prevailing social, cultural, and political attitudes in prewar Vienna is extremely successful from an artistic point of view. In the diverse reactions to the Collateral Campaign he offers a stark picture of the pathological condition of an Austrian society made up of people great and small, all of whom are concerned only with their own trivial or glorious schemes while the empire staggers on the edge of collapse.

The portrayed perceptions of the grand patriotic endeavor are as disparate as the characters and the parts of the national community that they represent. Count Leinsdorf, for example, views the coming celebration as an

opportunity for Austria to reclaim its true essence. Ulrich's friend Clarisse becomes obsessed with the idea of promoting an Austrian Nietzsche Year. Associated with that, she wants to do something for the homicidal maniac Moosbrugger. For still another figure, the appropriate action is the establishment of an Emperor Franz Josef Anniversary Soup Kitchen.

At the same time, broad factions within the society greet the whole idea with skepticism and suspicion. Already-existing tensions are intensified when ethnic minorities come to regard the project as a Pan-Germanic plot, while extremists in the other direction view it as threatening to destroy the German nation both spiritually and intellectually.

Marie-Louise Roth has summarized effectively the function of the proposed patriotic demonstration in exposing the society's mortal weaknesses. She says:

The Collateral Campaign that was invented by Musil illustrates in its main representatives the false values of an era, the abstract idealism, the confusion of the spirit, the bureaucratism, the phraseology, the impersonalism, the nonsense and the sterility of all endeavors.... The leading persons of the Collateral Campaign live and act according to fossilized principles, the unsuitability and falseness of which they feel themselves.⁶

Ulrich's response to the Collateral Campaign is especially important because it illuminates the project as a parody of his own individual quest for life's meaning. As the figures who promote the cause of celebrating the prolonged reign of their "Emperor of Peace" continue to search for a powerful focus for the undertaking, Ulrich makes his own suggestion as to what the movement should accomplish. Speaking to Count Leinsdorf, he proposes that the Collateral Campaign initiate a general spiritual inventory, as though Judgment Day were coming in 1918, signaling the end of the old spiritual era and the dawning of a higher one. He concludes his presentation by stating that until an official institution is created that is responsible for precision and the spirit, other goals remain either unattainable or illusory.

It is significant that nobody takes Ulrich's recommendation seriously, not even Ulrich himself. Just as the very nature of the spirit of the times will not permit a true synthesis of reality and the soul on a national scale, so Ulrich's own goal for himself cannot be realized because his attitude of "active passivism" (Musil's term for passivity masked by meaningless action) prevents a similar synthesis on an individual plane.

There is stark irony in the parallel between the results of Ulrich's "active passivism" approach to his search for the right life and the

accomplishments of the Collateral Campaign in its attempt to renew Austria's sense of identity. At one point the protagonist clarifies his stance with respect to external events by comparing it to that of a prisoner who is waiting for the opportunity to escape. While emphasizing the anticipation of action, the image conveys the tension that exists in a situation of static longing for something that never materializes. Pursued to one possible conclusion, it suggests that escape from confinement may occur only as the prisoner experiences his own execution. Similarly, the progress of the Collateral Campaign is limited to the maintaining of expectation concerning potential future activity. The pattern of "active passivism" is underscored most strongly in what one character calls "the slogan of action." When it becomes apparent that the semiofficial planning committee is accomplishing nothing, Count Leinsdorf utters a hollow watchcry for its continued wheel spinning. He says that something has to be done. Because the Collateral Campaign, like its secretary Ulrich, is representative of the zeitgeist, its response to Leinsdorf's challenge is the same as his. Nothing happens beyond the contemplation of possibilities.

To the extent that the movement's failure to act symbolizes Austria's passivity toward the conditions leading to the war, the outcome is the same as for Ulrich's prisoner. Release from the waiting comes about only through the empire's destruction. As Wilfried Berghahn has pointed out, that fact becomes apparent at the moment when Ulrich first learns of the Collateral Campaign's existence through his father's letter: "For the father's letter, of course, acquires the satirical function that is decisive for the novel only through the dating of the Austrian apotheosis in the death year of the monarchy. With that, the Collateral Campaign is characterized from the first moment on as a burial undertaking. Its protagonists become the masters of ceremonies for a modern *danse macabre*. They just do not know it yet."⁷

The project's function as a metaphor for the disintegration of a stagnant order is further emphasized in the lifelessness of the interpersonal relationships experienced by its actual and would be participants. As Ulrich makes his way back and forth among the "death-dancers," observing and experimenting with them, his encounters reveal both the tenuousness and fragility of existing connections and an increasing inability to establish new, meaningful bonds based on traditional concepts of love and affinity. This accentuation of isolation and alienation is visible not only in the way in which other figures respond to Ulrich, but also in the manner of their interaction among themselves.

A vivid illustration of the Collateral Campaign's lack of power to bring about unifying change is given in the figure of Ulrich's cousin Diotima Tuzzi, whose drawing room is the planning committee's headquarters. In the

picture of Viennese society that Musil creates, Diotima is the bourgeois defender of a romantic vision of Austrian culture. She views the Collateral Campaign as a unique opportunity to realize on a practical level the things that are of greatest importance. For her, the paramount goal is the rediscovery of "that 'human unity' in man's life which has been lost because of the advent of modern materialism and scientific reasoning."⁸ Yet her inability to achieve anything more than superficial oneness with others is demonstrated clearly in her respective relationships with her husband, Ulrich, and the Prussian Arnheim.

The impractical, idealistic notions that Diotima cultivates in her salon only estrange her from her bureaucrat spouse. Tuzzi, whom Ulrich sees as the embodiment of pure, practical manliness, is totally absorbed in his profession. He feels no kinship at all with those involved in extracurricular intellectual pursuits. Accordingly, in the scenes where he appears, he is an outsider looking in at the peculiar world of Diotima's involvement in the Collateral Campaign.

Diotima is unable to realize any sort of deep personal union with Ulrich for at least two reasons. On a purely matter-of-fact level, the two cousins possess sharply different attitudes and personalities. That is, Ulrich is the embodiment of Musil's idea of healthy, scientific man, while Diotima represents what is unrealistic and decadent in the contemporary world. More important is the fact that for Ulrich, Diotima is simply another subject for detached experimental observation. Ulrich is prepared to enter only an intellectual relationship governed by carefully controlled conditions. He suggests that they try to love each other like fictional characters who meet in a work of literature, leaving out the superficial padding that gives reality a phony appearance of fatness. Because Diotima's spiritual focus is at best counterfeit intellectual, she is incapable of playing the role that Ulrich envisions for her, and the experiment fails before it begins.

In its meaning for the novel as a whole, the most important of Diotima's vain attempts to unite with another individual is her abortive liaison with Arnheim. A Prussian industrialist and writer whom Musil modeled after Walther Rathenau, Arnheim plays the role of Ulrich's spiritual antagonist. His hollow affair with Diotima thus becomes a shadowy parody of the intense Ulrich-Agathe involvement that dominates the second half of *The Man without Qualities*.

During the course of her participation in the Collateral Campaign, Arnheim becomes a peculiar symbol for the irrationality of Diotima's perception of the project. Under the spell of his external facade, she comes to view him as a kindred spirit with whom she can bring to pass the cultural rejuvenation that she sees as the campaign's goal. Her quixotic approach to

her self-made task is given its most grotesque manifestation in her grand idea that her Prussian friend must become the spiritual leader of the Collateral Campaign, despite the fact that it competes jealously with a concurrent celebration in Prussia-Germany.

On the surface, Arnheim appears to share Diotima's vision of their common cause, and he does little to discourage her growing attachment to him. As their spiritual relationship grows stronger, the Collateral Campaign becomes for the two of them an island of refuge. It takes on the dimensions of a special destiny that shapes their lives at a critical moment. As they participate in the project, they grow to share the perception that it represents an enormous intellectual opportunity and responsibility. For that reason, Diotima eventually reaches the point where she considers leaving her husband and marrying Arnheim in order to make their apparent spiritual union permanent. That plan collapses under the strain of reality's intrusion into her romantic illusion. The process of events uncovers the fact that Arnheim's real interest in her salon has little or nothing to do with the Collateral Campaign. He has simply exploited the situation to make business contacts. The envisioned union of souls founders on his pragmatism.

In its artistic function as a recurring symbol for Musil's main ideas, the Collateral Campaign spins within the novel a structural thread that binds together key character groups and situations. Parallel to it, although receiving less emphasis, is a second strand of thought that fulfills a similar purpose, reinforcing the author's statements about the prewar Austrian world by illuminating it from an entirely different direction. The resulting contribution to the narrative fabric is one of harsh, chaotic color in sharp contrast to the more subdued, passive hues of the Collateral Campaign's characteristic inaction.

At the center of this more threatening representation of the spirit of the times is a symbol for what one critic has called "the insanity of a world out of control."⁹ It takes the form of the homicidal maniac Christian Moosbrugger.

Like the Collateral Campaign, Moosbrugger provides stimuli to which the various figures respond, revealing things about themselves and the society of which they are a part. Through the brutal slaying and mutilation of his prostitute victims, he arouses peculiar feelings within others, feelings that throw into question traditional concepts of social normality. The judicial system's visible inability to ascertain his mental competence and his accountability for his actions becomes a grotesque caricature of what is happening on the other levels of the novel. His apparent rationality in the courtroom parallels the facade of reason that conceals the tragic internal decay of the social order. According to Musil, Moosbrugger reflects the

pertinent conditions within the surrounding environment, as if they were seen in a broken mirror.

Ulrich's views concerning him are especially important for the elucidation of Moosbrugger's meaning for the work. For Ulrich, Moosbrugger is the inevitable product of the world's collective irrationality. In one instance, the thought occurs to him that if it were possible for mankind to dream in unison, the resulting vision would be Moosbrugger.

Because the murderer's behavior is not bound by the restrictions of reason, he is able to participate in the life of a realm beyond material reality, where the "goodness" of an action is determined entirely by individual perception. In that respect, he becomes a perverse manifestation of transcendence into the "Other Condition," where the sense of possibility is unfettered by a traditional morality based upon external social standards. As Johannes Loebenstein has observed: "In this murderer ... Ulrich sees all of humanity's possibilities combined together in a radically paradoxical unity."¹⁰

Just as Arnheim functions as Ulrich's antagonist in the practical, material world, so Moosbrugger plays the role of his opposite in the domain of the spirit. A significant aspect of Ulrich's search for fulfillment is his attempt to establish his complete identity by finding and uniting with the missing feminine component of his soul. His experiments with a number of different women bring him no closer to that ideal until he finally rediscovers his spiritual "Siamese twin," in his sister Agathe. In the figure of Moosbrugger, on the other hand, the image of a society that rejects and destroys spiritual completeness is given its strongest elaboration. What the murderer achieves in killing his victims is the excision of the unwanted feminine dimension from his own being. That fact is made abundantly clear in the narrator's description of one of the murders.

In the scene in question, Moosbrugger is presented lying rolled up in a ticket booth, with his head in the corner, pretending to be asleep. Next to him lies a prostitute who has attached herself to him during the night. The narrator labels her Moosbrugger's "accursed second self." When the psychopath tries to slip away from her in the dark, she holds him back, wrapping her arms around his neck. His response is to pull out his knife and stab her with it. When she falls with her head inside the booth, he drags her out, stabbing her repeatedly until he is satisfied that he has "cut her completely away from himself."

The behavior of Moosbrugger's victim is especially meaningful for the scene that is presented here. It signals that within the destructively insane world symbolized by the murderer the feminine element seeks undeterably for the union that he rejects. That idea is given even greater emphasis in the

descriptions of Ulrich's interactions with Clarisse, Moosbrugger's strongest female spiritual counterpart.

During the course of the novel, Clarisse becomes progressively more obsessed with the idea of a personal mission to transform European society. Within the context of that fixation, she comes to view herself as a "double being." Intrigued by her husband Walter's fear that she is going insane, she associates the awareness of man's inherent doubleness with that insanity, and she concludes that modern "normal" society has lost its knowledge of humanity's true nature. Pointing to what she sees as a precedent in classical antiquity, she talks about representations of Apollo as both man and woman, insisting that human beings, like the Greek gods, are dual in nature. When Walter presses her to define her own duality more specifically, she responds that she is both man and woman. From this time on, she identifies more and more strongly with the concept of the hermaphrodite.

Clarisse's conscious association of insanity with the redemptive power of the dual individual draws her to Moosbrugger. She begins a crusade to set him free. Within her thoughts he becomes a particularly potent example of the double man. Specifically, she views him as the embodiment of her own mission to unite within herself the opposing extremes of the male element, identified in her mind with the figures of Christ and Nietzsche respectively. For that reason, she tries to persuade Ulrich to help her break Moosbrugger out of prison. She believes that if he can be freed, the redemption of the society will be the result.

To a large extent, Clarisse and Moosbrugger are symbols for what Musil saw as the ultimate focal idea of the novel, carried to its pathological extreme. The starkness of their portrayal sets off through contrast a more contemplative, philosophical development of the author's concept of human duality. The latter is presented during the progress of what the narrator describes as "a journey to the furthest limits of the possible, skirting the dangers of the impossible and unnatural, even of the repulsive, and perhaps not always quite avoiding them." This "journey" is Ulrich's final attempt to find the missing portion of his own identity. It takes place as he seeks to enter the "Other Condition" through the increasingly intense relationship with his sister.

In an important passage from his notebook, Musil suggests that the nucleus for *The Man without Qualities* is contained in an early poem that he wrote, entitled "Isis and Osiris" (Isis and Osiris). Both for its relevance to the discussion of the Ulrich–Agathe portion of the novel, and as one of few surviving examples of Musil's early awkward experimentation with lyric forms, the poem is presented here in its entirety:

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