

Eric Voegelin and Robert Musil: Literary Approaches to Spiritual Pathology

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Why did the disasters of the twentieth century happen? By "disasters" I mean the enslavement of nations to totalitarian regimes, the exterminations of class and race, the world wars and revolutions, and also the apparent cultural degeneration of elites in democratic countries, whose members accommodated themselves one way or another to the power of these external regimes and to the movements that instigated them, to the geopolitical claims of the regimes over territory and the dogmatic claims of the movements over science and the human spirit. This "why" is the pragmatic and theoretical question giving rise to the political philosophy of Eric Voegelin. By 1965, the problems of culture and the spirit were problems that had not been studied very deeply within the academic discipline of political science, when Voegelin said, "If, for instance, one wishes today to gain information about the great problems of thinking about order in Germany, one would be well advised to read the literary works of Robert Musil, Hermann Broch, Thomas Mann, Heimito von Doderer... rather than the professional literature of political science."¹ [1] Elsewhere Voegelin gives partial credit to creative writers such as Proust, Valéry, and Joyce, for opening the field of consciousness to him.² [2] In an age of spiritual closure, realms of experience that are ideologically closed for academic and political elites

1 [1] Voegelin, *Anamnesis (Collected Works, Vol.6)* p. 389, in the 1965 lecture entitled "What is Political Reality?"

2 [2] See p. 5 of "Remembrance of Things Past," the 1977 essay in the Niemeyer edition of *Anamnesis* (Notre Dame, 1978). Last year I spoke here on the possible influence of Proust on Voegelin's "Anamnestic Experiments." Part of that paper appeared in "From Symbolism to Consciousness via Proust, in *Modern Age*, 45: 3 (Summer, 2003), pp. 218-228.

may still be open to poets and novelists, particularly ones who stand apart skeptically from movements and parties and report what they have known about life directly and pragmatically. Both the knowing and telling may be direct and pragmatic, even without being philosophically naïve.

At the head of Voegelin's list of insightful German novelists is Robert Musil (1880-1942), whose name he often invokes in connection with the concept of "second reality," which is Voegelin's concept for a self-blinded condition suffered by ideologues when they substitute manufactured images for perceptions of reality, the authentic reality that everyone experiences. While Doderer, not Musil, is the novelist who uses the terminology of "second reality" explicitly, there is another exclusively Musilian concept that Voegelin finds useful in explaining ideological susceptibilities, indeed the concept that gives rise to the title of Musil's great unfinished novel, *The Man without Qualities*.³ [3] "Second reality" is a pathology of deformed consciousness that we might observe, not only in ideologists, but in many other people whose states of delusion nevertheless leave them ambulatory; and such is its universality that Voegelin uses the case of Don Quixote to illustrate it in his *Hitler and the Germans*. I find the concept of "man without qualities" harder to get at, even after reading Musil's enormous novel. Provisionally, let's say that a "man without qualities" is the modern man who is susceptible to conceiving his own second reality or who easily allows the ideologists and intellectual faddists of a climate of opinion to impose their second realities upon him. Whatever structure of the soul is meant by it, it is the defect of character that gives rise to indulgence in second realities. And perhaps one could find literary and

3 [3] Quotations come from the two-volume translation by Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike (Knopf, 1996). A review in *The New Criterion*, which I fail to lay my hands on at the moment of writing, expresses doubts about some overly helpful gestures in the translation, such as the heading of Part II, "Pseudoreality Prevails." If the translation is to be trusted, there are in this book pseudoreality, second reality, suprareality and also antireality.

philosophical antecedents for this qualityless condition, but Voegelin does not provide them; and we are left needing to read Musil in order to discern Voegelin's intention fully.

My problem in writing this paper is the burden of riches I have discovered in Musil, beyond that of performing any exegesis of Voegelin. There is a congruence of backgrounds and interests.⁴ [4] As I said, a novelist may capture experience with great directness without necessarily being philosophically naïve, and Musil had written a dissertation on Ernst Mach, a phenomenological critique of Mach's positivism.⁵ [5] He wrote this dissertation while studying experimental psychology, problems of sense perception, Gestalt psychology, and (one may assume) morbid psychology to some extent also. For in the novel, Musil contextualizes his "second reality" pneumopathology with clinical cases: one plot line involves a sex murderer (Moosbrugger) and the fascination he causes among "normal" people which results in a plot to release him; another plot line involves a victim of child sex abuse with a fixation on Nietzsche (Clarisse), who tours a sanitarium and feels kinship with its inmates and eventually suffers a breakdown; and there is plenty of hysteria among other characters to spread around. Musil takes an interest in the same psychological issues that interest Freud and Jung; but he regards Freud with suspicion and perceives Freudianism's growth as an ideological movement, and he doesn't need Jung because he already has found his own handle on the typology of human personality and on mysticism. Musil and his main character embrace the study of mysticism as they search for the authentic spiritual experience that has been lost to European culture since the Enlightenment at least. Musil is interested

⁴ [4] One wonders about the extent to which they knew each other. There is a letter from Musil in Voegelin's papers which I have not been able to consult. In the Diaries, Musil mentions Voegelin's *The Race Idea*, and the passage suggests that it assisted his thinking on theories of race. See *Diaries 1899-1941* (Basic Books, 1998), 385, 386.

⁵ [5] *On Mach's Theories*, Introduction by G. H. von Wright (Cath. Univ. of America Press, 1982).

enough in the philosophy of history to write a skeptical essay on Spengler,⁶ [6] and he is a European liberal who nods to the free market economics of the Viennese school.⁷ [7] Then there is Musil's criticism of ideology and utopia which I will touch on in his paper. And there is the heritage of early twentieth century Symbolist poetry, giving rise to early modern literature, out of which Musil's fiction grows, and which was Voegelin's literary field of interest and lies in part behind his study of consciousness and mysticism, about which I will try to say a little.

Taking all these strands together, I have acquired a surer sense of the milieu in which Voegelin arose, a context of themes and influences which have had an effect on the American conservative climate of opinion in the later twentieth century not only through Voegelin. Musil deserves to be studied whole, both for his own sake and in relation to Voegelin. The present paper, however, is the fruit of only a single year of Musil reading, which I embarked upon as an experiment, and I am afraid that I can only ask questions here and provide tentative answers.

My year of Musil studies parallels the plot of *The Man Without Qualities*. The fictional time of Musil's tale is one year, Summer 1913 to Summer 1914, during which a thirty-three-year-old Viennese dilettante named Ulrich takes what he calls a vacation from life itself, in order to pursue life as a pure experiment. I say "fictional time" because this novel is a story taking place in a parallel universe of fiction. The country of this fictional Vienna is not the Austro-Hungarian Empire but a satirical, fictional country called Kakania, after the honorific initials that precede the names of the dual monarchy's rulers

6 [6] "Mind and Experience: Notes for Readers Who Have Eluded the Decline of the West," in *Precision and Soul: Essays and Addresses* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 134.

7 [7] His businessmen in *Man Without Qualities* include Arnheim and Leo Fischel. In his ethical theorizing Musil speculates on the "good evil," which is ultimately a beneficial privation.

and its ministries and institutions.⁸ [8] (As sarcastic as this *kaka* reference seems, Musil pays many backhanded compliments to a regime where life was definitely better than in the independent Austrian republic *entre deux guerres*.) Why does Musil underline the fictive nature of his novel this way? History is important to him, but he does not mean to write a historical novel,⁹ [9] not the Austrian *War and Peace*, not the Great Austrian Novel.¹⁰ [10] *The Man Without Qualities* is meant as a philosophical, psychological, and sociological novel, an investigation of the bankruptcy and lostness of people in a doomed regime in which they carry on with no inkling of its doom; it is a story in which things happen that did not happen in the Austria-Hungary of 1913, so that the collapse of the real Austria-Hungary as a society, starting with its elites, may be understood.

Let me say here, though--by way of clarifying Musil's intention in the novel--that you cannot look to *The Man Without Qualities* for an analysis of the rise of Nazism, even though Musil worked on it throughout the Nazi period until his death. Even so he had a full and immediate sense of Nazi evil; the Musils had to flee Austria because his wife was Jewish; and to protect himself in case his private papers were confiscated he referred to Hitler in his diaries under the code name "Carlyle." In *Hitler and the Germans*, Voegelin summarizes very well Musil's address to his fellow writers "On Stupidity," an analysis of the pneumopathology of a "higher stupidity" suffered by those who should know better but are able to become spiritually closed in order to accommodate themselves to ideological movements.¹¹ [11] In

8 [8] *Kaiserlich und Königlich*.

9 [9] "...the novel does not describe this time the way it really was, so that one could learn about it from this book." MwQ II, 1722.

10 [10] MwQ II, 1763.

11 [11] *Precision and Soul*, 286. Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans (Collected Works, Vol.31)*, 98-102.

The Man Without Qualities, however, Musil believes he has higher concerns. There is a young antisemitic German nationalist in the novel (Hans Sepp), leader of a student circle in which poems of Stefan George are chanted chorally, and this character commits suicide rather ignobly; Musil admits that there could have been more realism and relevance in the portrait of this character and his National Socialist politics, "but there is already enough of the ridiculous in the book..."¹² [12] While acknowledging in his notes from the 1930's that the present European catastrophe presents non-European enemies that Europeans may indeed fear with the spectacle of Europe destroying herself in an act of spite,¹³ [13] he still believes that the catastrophe is only an episode, and that the cultural problem which is resulting in the rise of National Socialism will still be there when National Socialism has perished:

I dedicate this novel to German youth. Not the youth of today--intellectual vacuum after the war--quite amusing frauds--but the youth that will come after a time and that will have to begin exactly where we stopped before the war, etc. (On this also rests my justification for writing a prewar novel today!)¹⁴ [14]

Now these particular sentences are notes from the 1920's for an unwritten preface. A "prewar" novel is absurd because it may not be fully clear to him yet that he is again living in a "prewar" period. He knows that a novel on pre-war Austria-Hungary is losing more of its relevance every day. He persists, however, because as an inwardly free man working in obscurity, this is how he conserves the modicum of truth that he feels has been entrusted to him. He has very little strength or influence to exert publicly

¹² [12] MwQ II, 1724. Note that the rightist national socialism of Sepp has a leftist parallel in the international socialism of the Schmeisser, the indignant son of Ulrich's gardener.

¹³ [13] " ♦ If Europe doesn't join together, in the foreseeable future European culture will be destroyed by the yellow race.' [Musil quotes some ideologist.] This could be reduced [he comments,] to the formula: "they would rather destroy their own culture themselves!" MwQ II, 1751.

¹⁴ [14] MwQ II, 1723

against the ideological regime, and so he continues the struggle for his own experience of truth in private, even if it seems like an indulgence. I recall Voegelin saying somewhere that "a man is not obliged to participate in the crisis of his times."

Aloofness and social disconnection, ironically, are characteristic of Ulrich, the hero, who is like a comic version or self-satire of Musil himself. But Ulrich is not the only man without qualities. "Of course they are all without qualities," Musil says in his notes, "but in Ulrich it is somehow visible."¹⁵ [15] The other quality-less characters are seeking social connections ambitiously and frenetically, particularly Arnheim the fabulously wealthy son and heir of a German industrialist--a man who writes the most vacuous pop-psychology and political commentary best-sellers and who may be a spy--and also Ulrich's cousin Diotima, the salonniere and hostess of a grand civic project called the Parallel Campaign, which is on its way to becoming the most important movement in Kakanian because no one knows what it is while everyone has an idea of what they could turn it into.¹⁶ [16] In a special way, Ulrich is the man without qualities par excellence, and is ideally suited to involvement in this ridiculous movement, because no one can know what he is while everyone has an idea of what they could turn him into. If we translate "man without qualities" literally into Aristotelian terms, we would say "substance without accidents." Of course, as a man, he possesses all kinds of specific attributes and talents (handsomeness, a capacity for recklessness that outwardly resembles bodily courage, athleticism, marksmanship, mathematical

¹⁵ [15] MwQ II, 1729.

¹⁶ [16] Rather than summarizing the entire plot, let me say that the ultimate irony of the Parallel Campaign lies in the fact that it is preparing for the celebration of the Kakanian Kaiser's coronation anniversary in 1918 when, of course, the regime will no longer exist. It "parallels" a similar observance planned in Germany, and it is an unofficial, popular parallel observance to some official state observance. Perhaps there is also some parallelism planned between Austria and its subject nations. But ultimately the campaign is a parallel universe itself, incorporating many people each of whom lives in his own parallel universe.

powers bordering on genius, skepticism); but, paradoxically, these attributes and talents have no connection to his core or essence as Ulrich. They are mere phenomena circulating around him, and other people are mere phenomena who react and relate to him; they contrive situations which call his "qualities" into play without involving his will or desire. How then can we like him or sympathize with him, if we do? Because we sympathize with his alienation or we enjoy his passive infiltration of Kakanian society or we are titillated by his erotic adventures which are still those of a Schnitzlerian rogue. And how does one function at all as a quality-less man? The narrator says, "nevertheless, one is undoubtedly conditioned by one's qualities and is made up of them, even if one is not identical with them, and so one can sometimes seem just as much a stranger to oneself at rest as in motion."¹⁷ [17]

In a chapter headed "Effect of a Man Without Qualities on a Man With Qualities,"¹⁸ [18] Ulrich is given this name or diagnosis by his rather nerdy childhood friend Walter, the failed artist-husband of Clarisse the Nietzschean hysteric; and let it be said here that if being a man without qualities goes with amorality and passive involvement in entanglements imposed from the outside, then an implicit erotic triangle here between Ulrich, Clarisse, and Walter comes as no surprise and must eventually lead to trouble. Here is the dialogue in which the married couple discuss Ulrich's condition:

Suddenly [Walter] burst out: "He's a man without qualities!"

"What is that?" Clarisse asked, giggling.

"Nothing. That's just it, it's nothing... There are millions of them nowadays... It's the human type produced by our time... Just look at him! What would you take him for? Does he look like a doctor, a businessman, a painter, or a diplomat?"

"He's none of those," Clarisse said dryly.

¹⁷ [17] MwQ I, 157.

¹⁸ [18] MwQ I, 58.

"Well, does he look like a mathematician?"

"I don't know--how should I know what a mathematician is supposed to look like?"

"You've hit the nail on the head! A mathematician looks like nothing at all--that is, he is likely to look intelligent in such a general way that there isn't a single specific thing to pin him down!..."¹⁹ [19]

Ulrich is an unusual man. He manifests characteristics of the Attention Deficit Disorder: an inability to confine himself to one job or career or subject of specialization or line of thought. So after failed careers in the army and engineering, he becomes a dilettante, and an intellectual with more than one area of scholarly competence. The one field that appeals most to him, however, is pure mathematics, which suits him perfectly as a man who refuses to maintain any connection with society since it is inapplicable to any endeavor. But if morality is possible only for a unified character, then a man without qualities could be dangerous.

Earlier, however, the novel's narrator approaches the modern pathology in a slightly different way, as the problem of multiple "characters," a loss of a core of selfhood in the division of the person between various social roles and identities:

...the inhabitant of a country has at least nine characters: a professional, a national, a civic, a class, a geographic, a sexual, a conscious, an unconscious, and possibly even a private character to boot. He unites them in himself, but they dissolve him, so that he is really more than a small basin hollowed out by these many streamlets that trickle into it and drain out of it again, to join other such rills in filling some other basin. (I, 30)

But the consequence of this is to create a "tenth character" which partakes of the void left over, the shadow from which these visible personalities emerge,

...nothing else than the passive fantasy of spaces yet unfilled. This permits a person all but one thing: to take seriously what his at least nine other characters do and what happens to them; in other words, it prevents precisely what should be his true

¹⁹ [19] MwQ I, 62-3.

fulfillment. This interior space--admittedly hard to describe--is of a different shade and shape in Italy from what it is in England, because everything that stands out in relief against it is of a different shade and shape; and yet it is in both places the same: an empty, invisible space, with reality standing inside it like a child's toy town deserted by the imagination.

This negative space or shadow space becomes visible only in Kakania, the mythical country of the tale, the kingdom and empire of Musilian irony where people enjoy "a negative freedom" along with "the sense of insufficient grounds for one's own existence" and are surrounded by "a great fantasy" of things that never happened as by an ocean of possible existence (I, 31). So Kakania is the invisible Austria-Hungary made visible by the exploration of possibilities that were never really explored in history. And so it can be a place where a mathematician manifests himself as the new alienated human type, through adventures that include attempting to release a convicted sex murderer from prison and an affair with his own sister that seems likely to lead to a suicide pact.

What marvellous experiences, indulged in for their own sake, it would seem. And one takes a "vacation from one's life" because one has a disturbing sense about what one is (or is not), and must try to find experiences that would compose a life. "In earlier times, one had an easier conscience about being a person than one does today," the narrator says in Ulrich's behalf about his bad conscience (I, 158). It is as if his disconnected qualities weigh too heavily upon them and he would like to become a man without qualities in the absolute sense.²⁰ [20]

Persons, in the old sense, were centers of moral responsibility. Now there is a cult of experience, and the experiences are cultivated in an experimental way so that people talk about them as

²⁰ [20] Ulrich looks at the facade of a church and wishes he *were* a man without qualities! (I, 136), as he reflects that "everything I think I am attaining is attaining me" (135).

categories of being apart from the persons who experience them. "Who can say nowadays that his anger is really his own anger when so many people talk about it and claim to know more about it than he does." So just as "a world of qualities without a man has arisen," so there are now "experiences without the person who experience them." And Ulrich smiles and realizes that he is, "after all, a character, even without having [a character]." (I, 159)

But does he belong to a generation of men without qualities? He says that the disposition of his generation was to protect one's inner freedom by respecting "only a few external laws." The result means "knowing, in every human situation, why one doesn't need to be bound by [one's own inner freedom], but never knowing what one does want to be bound by." So it is a boredom with freedom that is purely negative. As a result, Ulrich's connections to society have become "pale, shadowy, negative" (285-6). The "vacation from life," then, perfects the state of noncommitment, noninvolvement, and heightens it to the level of ultimate absurdity.

As one chapter heading reads, "Even a Man Without Qualities Has a Father With Qualities" (I,8). This father is a more or less Kantian legal scholar who plays the game of toadying to the aristocracy and eventually becomes a knight, receives the "von", and is taken into the upper house of the legislature.²¹ [21] At the father's death, Ulrich and his long-lost sister Agathe (whom he hasn't seen since early childhood) commit two thrill crimes involving the violation of their father's will: burying him with his medals (the real ones are supposed to be returned to the Imperial government and copies affixed to his corpse) and changing the will to disinherit the sister's husband, whom she wishes to divorce. The brother-sister affair itself contains a gesture of revolt against the father. In each case the crime can escape detection and does not, in their eyes, authentically injure another

21 [21] They are disillusioned somewhat to learn of feuding between two great legal minds, the father and his academic arch-rival, over the legal culpability of the insane. This awareness may shrink his sovereignty over ethical science in their eyes.

party; there is, for example, something fundamentally unjust about the law of inheritance that would place Agathe's share of the father's estate entirely under her highly unsympathetic husband's control, and so she alters the will so that it goes to a deserving third party and not herself. The seemingly amoral Ulrich is more and more concerned in the abstract with ethical issues, and as he follows his instincts into a reading of ancient religious mystics, he finds his way to a belief in an unsystematic and spontaneous morality based on living spiritual experience, and comes to blame the Enlightenment for a spiritually stultifying cult of normality based on an instrumentalized reason. Here he seems about to find a cure for qualitylessness.

This mystical turn is a fairly direct statement of Musil's own critical hypothesis: "I attempt to show what I call ♦the hole in European morality' (as in billiards, where sooner or later the ball gets stuck in such a hole), because it interferes with right action: it is, in a word, the false treatment that the mystic experience has been subjected to" (II, 1746). Placed in the context of the novel, Musil's theory is subject to irony. It partakes of the Nietzschean flavor of man divinizing himself, even as brother and sister place themselves on the level of gods and commit incest, like divine Egyptian monarchs or Wagner's Siegmund and Sieglinde.²² [22] And both experiments fail. They cannot halt the approaching World War, and the affair is a moment of false exaltation that coexists with a mood of depression and seems destined to lead to death. (Musil held several plot lines in reserve, the possibility of a suicide pact, or Ulrich's decision to seek his death as a soldier at the front.)

In *Hitler and the Germans* Voegelin summarizes the qualityless condition:

22 [22] Voegelin mentions the mythical dimension of Musil's story in his "Postscript: On Paradise and Revolution" to the essay on "Henry James's ♦The Turn of the Screw" (*Southern Review*, New Series VII, 1971), p. 45: "the pursuit of immanentist perfection through incest in Robert Musil's *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*." The aspect of the myth he concentrates on here is androgynism, which is a theme elsewhere in the novel also, with Clarisse the hermaphrodite savior who seeks to mate with another hermaphrodite.

...the man without qualities is contrasted with the qualities without the man. The hero lives in a shadowy relationship with himself. He doesn't recognize his qualities as his own because they operate as qualities of a particular role and not as the qualities of a man. The qualities are classified within specific contexts. The 'man without qualities' can do this and that' he merely carries out different roles. The qualities are defined in terms of their social function. But no man belongs to them. In this context, the expression "spirit" has become meaningless; there's no longer any meditative experience. The hero finds out that he doesn't love himself. Aristotle had defined *nous* as the core of personality. If man doesn't love this core, and thus his own self, he has lost contact with reality... The self-love implicit in 'Love your neighbor as yourself' also implies love of the divine. But in Musil, the hero doesn't love himself because he doesn't have a self, and so the world becomes an apparent reality. Musil thus has performed a decisive analysis of the breakdown of contact with reality.²³ [23]

As Voegelin says, the man without qualities doesn't love himself. As Ulrich designs the year of vacation from life, during which to make the ultimate choice of life he feels his lack of direction, his restlessness which is the essence of his spirit, and it suddenly occurs to him. "Without knowing why, Ulrich suddenly felt sad, and thought: 'I do not love myself.' Within the frozen, petrified body of the city he felt his heart beating in its innermost depths. There was something in him that had never wanted to remain anywhere, had groped its way along the walls of the world, thinking: there are still millions of other walls; it was this slowly cooling, absurd drop 'I' that refused to give up its fire, its tiny glowing core." (I, 162).

When Ulrich and Agathe discover each other wearing their harlequin pajamas like Papageno and Papagena in their deceased father's house, and thereafter slide towards a consummation that literalizes pagan myths, the love affair holds the perverse promise that Ulrich may find a way to love himself by loving his mirror image. And maybe he does, for a time. Oddly he thinks he is doing something historic, combining his mystical research with an incestuous affair, discovering a lost cultural road, returning to a

²³ [23] *Hitler*, 253.

lost paradise, establishing a utopia. He calls it "the Millennium." There are many "hovering" moments in which another dimension of existence seems to break through, as long as physical desire stays in the background. There is a lyrical description of a Spring afternoon the pair spend in the grounds of Ulrich's house when blossoms are falling and the pantheistic eye of nature looks down on them which in Emerson's writings puns with the "I."²⁴ [24] In their conversation they play with the word "reality," and Ulrich silently questions himself, "What reality am I talking about? Is there a second one?" (II, 1179) And when he rhapsodizes to Agathe about the discovery of truth, life, and love as an experiential unity, she explains, "But that *is* another reality!" (1210). These moments are qualified, however, by ironic or hyperbolic chapter headings: "Beginning of a Series of Wondrous Experiences" and "Moonbeams by Sunlight" (1182), and they all occur while the affair is in its Platonic stage, so to speak. And then the phrase "second reality" appears in the quasi- or pseudo-prophetic ravings of Clarisse in the madhouse when she is lost in thoughts of Nietzsche, Wagner, and the hermaphroditic Ludwig II, and is struggling to resume the redemptive work that Nietzsche failed to complete when he went insane:

...There are two realities!

"One" is called: "The way I see it"--

The "Other": "The way I don't see it."²⁵ [25]

Even Ulrich, in one of his paradoxical and insincere moods, says to Diotima the salonniere, "Everyone wants what is hard to get, and despises the attainable. What I mean is this: within reality there is a senseless craving for unreality" (I, 311). In his garden with Agathe, however, he starts to find the sense of it.

²⁴ [24] Musil is very intrigued with Emerson and quotes him more than once in the novel.

²⁵ [25] II, 1584.

Clarisse's definition of the two realities seems to be something Voegelin could apply to the ideologists. As he explains in *Anamnesis*, the consciousness of "a person who refuses to live in existential tension toward the ground" is still human; and because "his consciousness continues to intend a form of reality, he will generate substitute images of reality in order to gain order and direction for his existence and actions in the world." This is the "second reality" in which the person lives,

as this phenomenon is called since Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. The substitute images can draw their reality contents from various sources, the most important ones being the lust for wealth, power, or sex, as well as the *superbia vitae*, positing the autonomous Ego in place of the ground of being. The loss of reality results in pneumopathological disturbances in the existential order of the respective person, and if life in the "second reality" becomes socially dominant, there follow the massive disturbances of social order... (368-9)

Voegelin's "second reality" diagnosis seems to work only for people who are not fully aware of the substitution they are effecting; that would seem to be the higher stupidity. Clarisse is prophetically aware of her choice between sanity and insanity. Utopias are symbols within someone's second reality, and when Ulrich and Agathe speak of their "second reality" as another realm of existence, they are speaking specifically of a utopian condition on the basis of their power to believe in its illusion. That condition of illusion is the second reality, as a pneumopathological state, shared by Ulrich and Agathe, in which they are able to indulge in utopian thinking. They know, nevertheless, that they are trying to pass through the looking glass, that it will be a magical act, and that it is dangerous.

Yet they are past worrying about danger. Agathe is a depressive who doesn't feel much attachment to life, and she carries a vial of poison against the day when she will make her final rejection of life. In Musil's notes, one finds the full plan of Ulrich's experimental year of vacation: if he does not find the answer by the Summer of 1914, he will kill himself. Musil worked on various plot solutions, but

in any event there was no way for brother and sister to return to normal life, and one possible ending involved a suicide pact, and not as a way out of embarrassing or criminal circumstances, but as a positive attempt to immanentize an erotic eschaton. How romantic, when one thinks of Kleist; how Wagnerian, when one thinks of Tristan and Isolde who die together by a nice coincidence; how decadent, when one thinks of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's play *Axel*; and how truly Austrian, when one thinks of Crown Prince Rudolf and the national tragedy and mystery of Mayerling. But Musil knew it would kill the story, and perhaps it would be too over-the-top. Nevertheless, on the private and personal scale of two lovers, it would be the equivalent of a suicidal war waged by a national gnostic movement, a private Albigensian consolamentum rather than a national Wagnerian *Götterdämmerung*.

That is all very negative. But it may be possible to say something positive about Ulrich and Agathe's utopia, and Musil definitely thinks so. The phrase that appears mostly in the novel, and also in essays such as "The German as Symptom"²⁶ [26] outside of the novel's ironizing context, is "other condition"--in contradistinction to the "normal condition" which rules in everyday civilized life. The relationship of these two conditions is like that of parallel universes in "string theory." The "normal condition" of ordinary rationality and a morality of imposed rules and the suppression of emotional impulses is a public order imposed by rulers, hierarchies, institutions; the "other condition" is a supra-rational (and "supra-real" (1721)) state in which reason and emotion are a simple unity, as are morality and impulse. Musil believes that it is a state commonly accessed in former times by religious mystics and that the institutional Church made war upon it; in post-Enlightenment bourgeois civilization, the average man finds his way to it only through (usually illicit) erotic experience.²⁷ [27] The normal

²⁶ [26] *Precision and Soul*, 150.

²⁷ [27] The best discussion of the two conditions I have found is in David S. Luft, *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture, 1880-1942* (Univ. of California Press, 1980), Chapter 4, Section 2, entitled "Symbolism and the Other Condition," pp. 178-198. See also J. P. Stern, "

condition is the state of fallen humanity, the other condition of a primitive, free humanity that we should hope to restore. Completing Musil's picture, there is a kind of conspiracy of mediocrity or preference for calm by average people which Musil calls the "mittlere Gefühlslage," a phrase Pike translates as "middling condition" (1429). It is a climate of emotions, an unconscious equipoise, a cancelling-out of emotional pluses and minuses which keeps the world running in its state of mediocrity and prevents us ordinarily from discovering the other condition.

All sentiments, all passions of the world, are a Nothing in relation to the enormous but utterly unconscious struggle which mankind makes, every instant, to preserve its peace of mind.

Fundamentally everything is the same when, during every moment of his existence, man moves among the most awesome forms, whether he recognizes them as table, chair, or screaming man; or when he moves upwards into the infinite expanses of the atomic realm, and when, between them, a stratum of forms are considered as things in the world, without disturbing us in the least.²⁸ [28]

Well, one has heard of conspiracies of silence and of course Marcuse's "repressive tolerance." Musil's "mittlere Gefühlslage" sounds like another ideological term. But one doesn't want to dismiss Musil outright when he seems to agree with Voegelin's observation of the loss of spiritual substance. If Musil is flawed because of an imperfect opening to transcendence, he belongs with other Symbolist writers such as Valéry in whom Voegelin found inspiration. The problem with these writers is that they are "mystics without God," which is the spiritual diagnosis Mme. Teste's confessor gives when trying to

◆ 'Reality' in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*" in *Musil in focus : papers from a centenary symposium*, edited by Lothar Huber and John J. White (Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1982), p. 74, and Friedbert Aspöck, "◆ 'Der andere Zustand' in its Contemporary Context," in the same volume, p. 54.

28 [28] My translation of passages from Musil's unpublished MwQ drafts (*Nachlass*) quoted in Aspöck, 54.

explain her husband's oddity to her.²⁹ [29] And indeed there may be much in common between Ulrich and Musil and Valéry's parabolic philosopher whose autonomous intellect seems to swallow up the entire world. As the narrator says of Ulrich, "He was doubtless a believing person who just didn't believe in anything" (II, 897).

At the end, Agathe was to say to Ulrich, "We were the last romantics of love" (II, 1756). And indeed, despite the irony which is supposed to cover a multitude of offences, the novel is vulnerable to the twentieth-century neoclassical polemic against "Romanticism" of Irving Babbitt (who was very insistent on its political consequences), of the Bergsonian T. E. Hulme, and of T. S. Eliot, and also the Calvinist polemic of Denis de Rougemont against the allegedly underground Albigenianism of romantic love. Musil's "Other Condition" is definitely for what these critics are against. Voegelin seems unique in his willingness to allow that such writers are actually a bright spot in the dismal night of modernity.

Musil's incest story is the reprise of a theme in romantic and decadent literature. Musil had misgivings about using it; he could have relied on the Ulrich-Clarisse-Walter triangle to convey most of his message. "I greatly regret that this problem has a certain higher banality, but on the other hand, this proves that it is the expression of broad currents. My representation is aimed at the needs leading to this expression" (1746). There is only banality in Thomas Mann's brother-sister story, "The Blood of the Volsungs."³⁰ [30] If one takes Musil the man and the writer as a case study, he is a man without siblings, or indeed who never knew a sister who predeceased him, and who explores his longing for another self through the imagination in this story, a purely literary phenomenon unlike Chateaubriand's *Sylphide*. In

29 [29] This passage from *Monsieur Teste* is the point of departure for a dissertation on mysticism in symbolist literature, Laura Vera Hartwood-Wittman, *Mystics Without God: Spirituality and Form in Italian and French Modernism* (Yale, 2001).

30 [30] And, for whatever reason, Musil despised Mann.

any event, it seems only a Voegelinian treatment will expose the story's pneumatic and pneumopathological dimensions.

I regret that my experimental year of reading Musil has ended, and that I have not had time to explore Musil's interest in Nietzsche or in Gestalt philosophy and psychology, topics which should provide further Voegelinian resonations. The relations of Musil with decadent and symbolist literature is a topic that must also be pursued.
