



The Man Without Qualities: Vol. 2

Robert Musil, Sophie Wilkins (Translator), Burton Pike (Translator)

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" Musil belongs in the company of Joyce, Proust, Kafka, and Svevo. . . . (This translation) is a literary and intellectual event of singular importance." --New Republic.

The Man Without Qualities: Vol. 2 Details

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Author : Robert Musil , Sophie Wilkins (Translator) , Burton Pike (Translator)

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From Reader Review The Man Without Qualities: Vol. 2 for online ebook

David says

I read the whole sequence on the recommendation of Jeff Bursey. Probably a good 20 years ago now.

Sunny says

this is undoubtedly the most underrated book i have ever read in my entire life. amazing. i must have underlined somethign thought provoking on every second page.

Lee says

Putting it down for now at the end of the chapters published during Musil's life -- that is, before the onslaught of 600+ pages of posthumous papers. If Volume II maintained Volume I's towering literary artistry (TLA), I'd read all the drafts and notes etc, but I need a break from so much talk and talk and talk and talk about morality and willpower and the soul and action and the science of thought and feelings and stuff. All these ideas were animated and elevated and entangled in the first volume by consistently robust/deepening characterization and a bit of plot tension and old-fashioned love/power intrigue among the characters, but all that pretty much comes to a halt in Volume II -- characterization ceases or at most functions to remind you what's already been established, and there's really no tension except whether or not Ulrich and his sister Agathe are gonna make out. There's an affecting bit from the perspective of Agathe's husband, some good bits from Clarise's progressively insane perspective, a vivid scene in an insane asylum, high level stuff early on about Ulrich's father and his funeral etc, and also insight into the historical/intellectual foundation of what would become Nazism, but otherwise in Volume II the POV shifts way more often (sometimes among a few people within a paragraph), the conversations seem to go on too long and too often they cover similar ground, and the newly introduced characters aren't particularly interesting, other than Agathe, who's more or less Ulrich's twin in female form. The first volume makes it worthwhile reading, like watching the deleted scenes on the DVD of a movie you love, but I think Musil was writing a shorter novel than he thought he was and so after a while what he was bringing up from the well was dull and murky instead of refreshing and clear. Also seemed like there was a different translator. Many more apostrophes and awkward phrases. Oh well. I'm more likely to go back and read Volume I again than I am to read the remaining 600+ posthumous papers and notes.

Lisa says

On second read, this volume is much less interesting and enjoyable than the first. Musil's wonderful sarcasm and almost bitter humor are nearly absent and he grapples with "big questions" with much less grace.

Luís C. says

Gisela Kaufmann holding brilliantly, against wind and tide in 20 years the bookshop Buchladen, Parisian place devoted to German literature often notes with some sadness that now, behind a media chatter, the French will no longer really interested to this literature. If Kafka quote could still be very decorative in a conversation, most of his books were sleeping on the shelves without ever being read. As if talking about Musil and his *Man Without Qualities* was still very rewarding in so-called intellectual circles, she was well placed to know that over the past twenty years, it had sold only dozen copies of this second part. What does it mean? This work, universally acknowledged as one of the most important of the Twentieth Century, so is almost never brought to completion by the very people who make finery! I have no doubt that this exceptional place that is Goodreads, it is quite different but just in case, however, I would stress the extraordinary interest of the contents of this second volume, without which the seizure of meaning the work would certainly be missed.

Michael says

Note: Volume II of the newer Pike/Wilkins translation and Volume II of the older Wilkins/Kaiser translation do not cover the same material. This review is for the later.

From the first time I heard it, the title, *The Man Without Qualities*, struck me as surreptitiously suggestive of some vital meaning that I could only find behind the cover on which it was written. And perhaps it was all of my previous reading experience that then subtly bade me to wean my expectations from this promise. For that experience defensibly says: rare is the book that meets those unjustifiable things called expectations when - based on a mere title - those things are unjustifiably high. And first grade math tells me: 1000+ page books have greater potential disappointment than 500- ones. I owe my present rapture to my Goodreads community for efficiently bleeding dry what reservations might have given unto eternal delay. Thank you.

First, take a quick look around you.

‘You would like to live according to your own ideas,’ he [Ulrich] heard himself say, ‘and you would like to know how that can be done. But an idea is the most paradoxical thing in the world. The flesh combines with ideas like a fetish. It becomes magical when there’s an idea in it. An ordinary box on the ears may, by association with the ideas of honour, punishment, and the like, become a matter of life and death. And yet ideas can never conserve themselves in the state in which they are strongest. They are like those substances that when exposed to the air instantly transform themselves into another, more permanent, but corrupted form of existence. You have been through it often. For you are an idea yourself, one in a particular state. You are touched by a breath of something, and it’s like when the quivering of strings suddenly produces a note. And then there’s something there in front of you like a mirage, and the tangle of your soul takes on shape, becoming an unending cavalcade, and all the beauties of the world seem to stand along its road. Such things are often brought about by one single idea. But after a while it comes to resemble all the other ideas that you have had before, subordinating itself to them and becoming part of your outlook and your character, your principles and your moods. By then it has lost its wings and taken on an unmysterious solidity.’

Now, pick up your jaw and take a brief look around once more. This connection that can be made between words and your own immediate reality, that can change what you see by dilating wide that mind-eye that is so snidely audacious as to believe it does see and understand reality, so that it sees that this seeing and

understanding is in no way so fixed into these proportions, this connection, that Musil is a master of, should define what is worth reading. If you read only to escape reality, you might as well escape this review right now. Musil is not for you. (Even though, for you, he most urgently is.)

In my review of Volume One, I heed the compulsion to compare the value of that volume/this book with Ulysses and Leaves of Grass. Perhaps part of me was trying to pick a fight the many champions of Joyce and Whitman. Perhaps I was hoping to be defeated in such a fight - to be learned of what I was missing. Perhaps it was only my feeble protest against the 'they' that say I must read those books, by aligning myself with the 'they' telling you to read this one (pst, read this one), and then straying a bit further in suggesting you might read this one instead. But however incomplete my understanding of this urge was and is, what I recognize in Musil that I do not in those to whom my whim chose to compare him, is that he writes what is worth writing about. He has something to say about reality, even if it is only the notion, 'stop what you're doing until you figure out what is worth doing.' "Active passivism," is what Ulrich calls it when cornered by Clarisse, who later demands there should be a Year of Ulrich, just as a little voice in my head is demanding from my reading attention a Year of Musil.

What is worth doing? Figuring out what to do? And what is worth reading? As many pretty books as possible or the few that will change your life by declawing some of the certainty from the world you see? Let me be so presumptuous as to tell you that this is the book you sift through all those thousands of pretty others to find. It is, at least, for me. And now I find myself with the bitter-sweet, betting-man's certainty that I will never read a better book. My instinct recognizes itself in Musil (and this is perhaps *the joy of reading*): Question everything yourself. Do not for a second believe that any human born into this world before you or since has or has had it figured out. Don't be so quick to assume so-and-so, not to mention you yourself, are the exception to those many you do see susceptible to their inner sheep, even if what they are following is not so obviously the herd as it could seem.

Imagine reading something that makes one nearly spout out (following some profane exclamation) such nonsensical things as, 'he is some raconteuring reincarnation of the Buddha,' (to whom it perhaps belongs the earliest attributing of the concept 'question and find out everything for yourself'). Reading Musil makes you realize that a near infinite variety of such and exceedingly nonsensical things are not only widely said but widely accepted and have been throughout all recorded time, and we are, from the moment we are born, swept in the swirling current of this mud river. Imagine reading a narrative set exactly 100 years ago, written nearly that long ago, that combines the ancient wisdom of eastern philosophy with the latest proclamations of literary theory, but busting these from the respective ores of aphorism and hypothesis, so as to present them in that clear shining jewel our western mind finds so very difficult to resist: The novel.

Joyce said, "I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that's the only way of ensuring one's immortality." I say, therein lies both Joyce's brilliance and ignorance. To recognize that all it takes for generations upon generations to be enamored with something is to beset them with enough puzzle for puzzles sake, enough tangential and sputtering ambiguity, to give them so much structure with so little meaning that any single reader is all but forced to fill in her or his own, thus drawing the conversation (if that is the word) in so many different and contending directions that it will never end, is to have a certain and brilliant understanding of the human condition. To then pull this off is a stunning achievement. But to confuse such an achievement for immortality is a blunder of understanding the human condition that cannot be overemphasized. Joyce may have died knowing his achievement - and what comfort that must have been for him. But it was delusion. Joyce doesn't know he isn't really immortal; he doesn't know how successful his works are today; he doesn't know that for some, trading one's sight of reality for the comfort that is the delusion of status is not by any math worth it. Because Joyce is dead. He doesn't know anything. He didn't ensure his immortality; he

ensured his own delusion by realizing his ability to set his own status in motion in a world that shares the delusion that status is soul. But the light that yet shines is of a star that has already died.

The Collateral Campaign, as it is called in this translation, is beset in a similar delusion. It quite consciously is making a concerted effort, gathering some of the world's greatest minds, with the idea that from such a formula, an idea can be synthesized that when applied to the world (status) will transcend one and all (immortality). But as Ulrich continually predicts, it doesn't matter who, how brilliant, how many, from what fields, they are, the effort is doomed to fail. The one mind this campaign could profit from - and ironically has in its company - knows the futility of its own participation. Ulrich's contribution would begin with the immediate dissolution of their misconstrued efforts. For he sees quite definitely that idealism is the imposition of confusion in the name of order upon reality, whereby reality then, by something beyond duty and beyond definition, invariably makes the correction. It shakes off the delicate reins these human hands put upon it, as if to teach us such pursuits are silly unto tragedy. But as ubiquitously and continuously as this lesson is taught, it seems we don't want to learn that reality itself is the only worthy pursuit, and to impose upon it whatever our pathetic judgement deems to be good, no matter how flawless the execution, is always a self-injurious and self-deluding endeavor. Welcome to humanity!

To Musil this delusion that made Joyce think Homer and Shakespeare were gods and caused him to endeavor to place himself among them is but another *quality* to be left by the wayside. If I have even the slightest power to serve Musil a positive shift in that posthumous renown that Joyce abuses the term immortality with, I would posit to any who might heed that where Joyce is content, even eager, to place himself like a barnacle on the backs of falsely assumed immortals - and by such tenuous and trivial means as dot-connecting - Musil, by doing nothing more than heeding his own passion, is, among other things, challenging Shakespeare in the game of his own preferred swordplay. Leaving aside the differences in times and style, I will claim that Musil's Clarisse is a more vivid and poetic depiction of human tragedy than any among the dying young in Shakespeare. For, even if she would physically survive this uncompleted masterpiece, what is at stake in Clarisse is no less than life itself. It is simply that the boogymen here is not so literal, simple and visible as in the Bard's world. It is more the ever-seeping, slow-working, and all but imperceptible digestive juices of domestication, that by which one is tricked into a world where no one is really living. It is the ubiquitous horror of realizing that one's life is not just diverging but divergent from the beautiful ideas one came to keep for it on some audacious alter above mere expectation, so that we, like Clarisse, mistake it for eventuality. For it is this subtly enemy - the same who haunts Richard Yate's brilliant Revolutionary Road - that we much more urgently need to become aware. Because it is he who will evoke our own tragedy. In a quote too disruptively long and beautiful to insert here, Musil's narrator warns us not to forgo purifying ourselves against reality - which quite germanely equates to shedding our qualities.

You might (you should) ask how I can be so sure that Musil isn't just as delusional as I claim Joyce to be. The answer is that my certainty should mean little to nothing to you. Because all you or I have to do is listen to Gautama Buddha when he tells us to find out for ourselves. Only then might we know that:

“...my instinct is right and the work worth doing, because of its saturation in the conviction that the sub specie aeternitatis [under the aspect of eternity] vision is the only excuse for remaining alive.”
—Samuel Beckett

Torsten says

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Jon Norimann says

Volume two of Musil's Masterpiece is slightly more focused than vol 1. Other than that its mostly more of the same. The hero, Ulrich, walks through life commenting on daily events. It becomes a literary version of the TV series Seinfeld, mostly about "nothing". Musil does have some original ideas and choice of words here and there but to me it overall just becomes many pages of rather dull musings.

Vit Babenco says

“What we still refer to as a personal destiny is being displaced by collective processes that can finally be expressed in statistical terms.”

The main character – the man without qualities – continues to rebel against conformity and uniformity...

“...he had been annoyed countless times by his contemporaries’ capacity for enthusiasms, which almost invariably fasten on the wrong object and so end up destroying even what indifference has let survive.”

And he literally hates social conventionalities and false artificial morality...

“The morality that has been handed down to us is like being sent out on a swaying high wire over an abyss, with no other advice than: ‘Hold yourself as stiff as you can!’”

Some musings become more abstract and viscous while the narration turns more linear. And **Robert Musil** immerses yet deeper in the contemplation of sexuality, sexual freedom and sexual pathology.

“Nowadays, when a woman’s appearance suggests that of a well-plucked fowl ready for the oven, it is hard to imagine her predecessor’s appearance in all its charm of endlessly titillated desire, which has meanwhile become ridiculous: the long skirt, to all appearances sewn to the floor by the dressmaker and yet miraculously in motion, enclosing other, secret gossamer skirts beneath it, pastel-shaded silk flower petals whose softly fluttering movements suddenly turned into even finer tissues of white, which were the first to touch the body itself with their soft foam.”

The culmination of the *Into the Millennium* part is a visit to the madhouse and the high social assembly ending up with the foolishly mad yet smashing resolution, both events happen at the same day and there are the apparent parallels between them.

All the additional chapters withdrawn by **Robert Musil** in galleys are actually an anticlimax and even seem to be somewhat excessive.

Red says

divine madness

that day in an early month of 2005 i took a high-speed train to heidelberg. my traveling companion was tmwq. the people in the coupe looked a bit gruesome to that book. oh yeah tmwq... after checking in a hotel i did a walk on the boxberg that is basically max planck institute dominion. in the evening looking out of the window of the hotel this is what i saw. the sky was blue at the bottom and pink on top. some fluffy clouds and birds gave it deepness and a private jet gave it even more deepness.

likewise tmwq resembles to me a clear mind that is a framework for unbiased reflection.

well if you happened to have read the glass bead game by herman hesse you'll maybe agree that tmwq is like a lucid twin. both in a fictive country i.e. castalia and kakania. hesse received a nobel prize for his work. tmwq on the other hand became nr.1 on the german list for most important books of the 20th century written in german.

robert musil is deglamourizing life to it's bare nudity.
with so much respect for all of his characters
that i compare him to the dutch painter johannes vermeer.

David says

“...By connecting no idea or every idea with myself, I got out of the habit of taking life seriously. I get much more out of it when I read about it in a novel, where it's wrapped up in some point of view, but when I'm supposed to experience it in all its fullness it always seems already obsolete, overdone in an old-fashioned way, and intellectually outdated.”

Ted says

There is more on a single page of this masterpiece than most novels hold in their entireties. It is a work of unparalleled genius (so don't ask what it's about, as I would not be able to say).

Pierre E. Loignon says

Après avoir été franchement épater par la génialité du tome 1, j'étais vraiment enthousiaste en ouvrant ce livre. Je savais qu'il ne contenait que des ébauches pour la suite. J'avais un peu peur d'être déçu, mais j'étais trop curieux. Il me fallait aller lire ça tout de suite!

J'ai donc été très agréablement surpris de découvrir que les 450 premières pages contiennent les premiers chapitres publiés de la troisième partie qui était alors en cours d'écriture lors du décès de Müsil. Les cent pages suivantes ont également été données à la publication, mais avaient été reprises pour être retravaillées éventuellement. Le niveau d'écriture y est d'ailleurs tout aussi brillant que l'est celui du tome 1 et nous pouvons ainsi suivre le cours du roman pour 550 pages.

Ulrich s'est alors complètement lassé de se divertir de son ennui en servant de secrétaire à l'action parallèle. Il se concentre alors complètement à vivre une relation incestueuse avec Agathe. Il ne voit presque plus personnes, hormis le brave et rondelet général Stumm, qui passe de temps à autre, en donnant des nouvelles et en cherchant conseil pour tenter de sortir Ulrich de son isolement afin de le rendre utile à nouveau à l'action parallèle.

En ce qui concerne la scandaleuse relation entre le frère et la soeur, elle permet un reflet féminin de l'homme sans qualité. Agathe trouvera aussi, à son tour un pendant masculin à la Bona Dea du premier tome en un professeur veuf dont le caractère morale ressemble à celui de Kant, mais en plus fragile. Cette ébauche aboutit sur la lecture que fait Agathe de textes brouillons écrit par Ulrich sur le sentiment.

S'ensuit quelques 200 pages données à la publication par Müsil, puis reprises pour être retravaillées.

L'écriture n'est plus à la hauteur du roman ici. Müsil n'arrive pas à synthétiser ses réflexions à sa trame narratrice comme il le faisait précédemment. Il se contente de faire lire des brouillons d'Ulrich à Agathe où de nous faire entrer dans la réflexion intérieure d'un Ulrich se préparant à écrire un article sur le sujet.

L'essentiel de ces pages présente une conception du sentiment qu'Ulrich développe, conception qui, pour l'essentiel, exprime en termes plus actuels ce qu'on trouve déjà dans les traités de Hume et de Descartes sur les passions et le sentiment. Le tout est intéressant, mais manque de fini.

S'ensuit une véritable exploration au pays de l'écriture de Müsil. Les conversations y sont souvent données laconiquement avec les noms précédents chaque échange, comme pour une pièce de théâtre, et quelques descriptions d'un vêtement, d'un rire, d'un meuble liés à cette conversation se trouvent parfois ensuite données, séparément, diverses ébauches d'un même passage et plusieurs indications d'auteur sont données entre parenthèses, etc.

Mais on trouve aussi certains passages achevés qui n'ont simplement pas eus le temps d'être greffé à l'ensemble et qu'on pourrait s'imaginer qu'ils s'y trouvent réellement, rétrospectivement, comme, par exemple, celui où Clarisse raconte sa seconde visite à l'asile à Stumm, l'évasion de Moosbrugger, le moment où Clarisse convainc Rachel de prendre Moosbrugger sous son aile après son évasion, pour le cacher, etc. L'ensemble donne une très bonne idée de ce qu'aurait pu donner le roman achevé.

Enfin, les 100 dernières pages contiennent les possibilités préparatoires que Müsil a explorées avant de se lancer dans l'entreprise titanique de L'homme sans qualités. Les râles mal articulés retrouvés dans les cahiers d'un cadavre s'achèvent ainsi avec les balbutiements incertains des tous premiers commencements.

Jesse says

With the exception of the second part of the posthumous papers (which I intend to browse over time), I've finished. I don't know how Musil could have finished this novel but the ample material he provided us is enough to make it worthy of comparison to Joyce and Mann.

The galley chapters are worth reading and the selections from Ulrich's journal on emotions are absolutely brilliant.

I am somewhat saddened by having reached my endpoint in reading this book since I feel as though, even after nearly 1400 pages, it still possessed a quality of mysteriousness and elusiveness that was both maddening and delightful. And, though I feel some guilt about not immediately reading the pages and pages of drafts/notes, etc., I justify my decision by Musil's obvious obsessiveness over every minute detail and feel as though peering into his notebooks is almost a betrayal. (Retaining my sanity is also a consideration) I have gone through two bouts of insomnia while reading this book and, though it is probably unrealistic, I can't help but feel that some of the anxiety I felt in relation to morality and immorality (or what McBride, in his book on MWQ, calls "The Void of Ethics") stemmed from this book. I felt the beginnings of a gnawing nihilism that caused me to greatly admire and relate to Clarisse and Moosbrugger. This was somewhat alleviated by the entrance of Ulrich's sister, Agathe, in the third (and unfinished) volume.

I will continue to mull over my thoughts about this massive novel over a great deal of time but, for the sake of the simplicity of Goodreads, will temporarily refer to it as an undeniably "5 Star" novel.

??x Nestelieiev says

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Sinem A. says

Hayattaki her ?eyden bahsedebilmek, hepsini böyle bi kurgu içinde biraraya getirmek ve bunu yaparken mikroskopik detaylar?n ince derinliklerini ilmek olarak kullanabilmek... ke?ke bitirebilseymi?, kitap hakk?nda hissetti?im tek kötü ?ey bu; yar?m kal?p insan? da havada b?rakma hali...

Stephen P says

It happens after the transfer. The tedium, then the lurking state of thought-rush, irretrievable perceptions. It may be for three minutes or many hours. I no longer live in time. I am alone in the small cottage. It isn't that I have anything to prove. Simply, I want to be alone with my thoughts. The absence of the weight of another person's unspoken ideas became important. Oppression has become my medium.

The transfer occurs in stages. It must be thought out first. Each stage etched into the mind. Then, the mind leads to action. There is the moment of the thrill where mind and action meet and are one. I recall it on the basketball court; the fake left, hard dribble right, stop in the moment within a moment, twenty feet out, the lifting high and away, and at the peak the ball spinning off the fingertips arcing high.

The coach once yelled at us to concentrate when shooting foul shots. The mind didn't shoot the ball.

Thinking on the court dulled the instincts, destroyed the rhythm. The cat in the jungle missed its prey.

It was the stalking cat I watched out of the fade of darknesses, the shifting ethereal images, when I heard a knock at the door. Just once. A lonely knock I imagined, patient. It fit with the shifting panoramas as pain began its ease blending between sleep and wake or the imagined sleep; the sleep within sleep, the sleep within wake and its scrum of partial gradients. I liked the sound of the word gradients. It stayed with me, its sounds, echoes of its own music.

Gradients. The stages in reverse; I didn't know if I locked the chair. Unlocked, I swiveled down the hall. The

wheels smoother at dusk, night, the blackness peeling its whir. In the past, I halted at a determined distance, reaching. Now I angled up turning the knob, scuttling back, the door opening.

Drenched, his long soggy coat, puddled shoes, single pure drops pealed off the brim of his broad-brimmed hat, the double handled leather satchel clutched in his hand.

"I'm afraid I'm lost. Could I just come in to get out of the weather for a moment?"

"Are you alone?"

"Very."

Bending slow he hung the steaming coat, hat, on the hooks a few feet up the wall over my coat. He made the soft groans of aging, the whispered ease into fading.

From the satchel he removed a square of polished wood. Then popping levers beneath, legs appeared, a bunsen-burner, a lighter arced in the fluid curve of a winged swan. A pure white cup. His graceful movements produced the tea, its solvent of whipped curls of steam. He sipped. Elegant.

"Oh, you are...?"

Shaking his head, smiling, "No, I'm not who you think."

"But you speak, appear, just as you write. This book..."

What did I say? What would one say? It needed to be witty, doubled-meaning, learned. No, no. Casual.

Grovel. That would embarrass him. Me. I'm already embarrassed. Denying who he is for the sake of putting me at ease. Now posture correctly being at ease. He has heard it all already over the years, the preening, the trying to not sound so. The attempts to sound collegial. Everything sounds false.

"What others think I am is not wholly accurate. I am simply an old man with an Austrian accent, drenched, wet, dripping on your nice wood floor and sipping ancient tea which I carry with me."

"Where is it you are going?"

"Maybe we should start with the elephant in the room, a cliche not to be used."

"My missing legs?"

"No." He scratched his chin. "My death. You see it is not simple or easy. Much of it is like being a door-to-door traveling salesman. You said you were or have read the first volume."

"No, I didn't. But I have. On my bed."

"Good," he brought his hands together, "so maybe you have the sense that all that I am is a man trapped in the battle of his own thoughts, trying just to free them from the boundaries and bonds of familial, cultural, national, political prejudices," he shrugged his shoulders. "To spend my life as so, what value is thought compared to action? Have I maybe," he held his opened wrinkled palms out, "wasted my life?"

"But sir...," my voice cracked. I sounded genuine. On the right track.

"Robert."

"Robert," I repeated solemnly, "You...you..."

"You," he noticed, "look like you need to, not rollover but reposition yourself slightly to the left to be more comfortable."

"I can put up bars by pressing a button around the sides of my bed. I walked in my sleep. Used to. I could only dream while in motion."

He laughed, "I could only write while on the move." I carried and worked on this manuscript," he pulled the stack of yellowed marked papers from the leather satchel. Years between Austria and Germany, then of course out of Germany and finally in Switzerland."

"Sir. Robert," I heard this voice in the room asserting itself, then realized...it was mine, "you...the way I read it showed the importance of thought, the weave through your mind which deepened it, drilling and scraping until you reached its essence..."

"But then all..."

"Quiet Robert." Oh my god. Holy shit. I just told Robert Musil to be quiet. "Bob, in Volume 1 I read that... in my own words," he nodded his head, encouraging, prodding me, " that the crystallization of an idea into its essence enjoins action. There can be no action, no moral action without thought. Also," since I was on a roll I put my un-quivered hand up to stop him, "there was a gem tucked in that basically said that any small

thing that we do, stance we take, idea we explore, may appear insignificant at the time but may very well be the small piece that will lock other pieces together, which we will never know of."

"Yes," He reached into his trouser pocket, "I carry it with me." He held up two folded pieces of lined paper. "Ach. They stick together. This one is about each generation's rebellion and counter rebellion. Always they feel the fervor that theirs is the first, unique. In youth's passion they can only be oblivious to the repetition through the ages. I wrote this volume during the nineteen thirties, the stories time was nineteen thirteen. I bet it sounded, felt exactly as your rebelling during nineteen sixty nine." Reluctantly I admitted it. "No, don't feel bad it still contributed," he said pushing this piece of paper back into his trouser pocket. "It is cumulative. Remember? "I leave these with people when I visit them. I have another visit three blocks up from here. I only visit in the rain. People are more likely to read then, to allow the dead in."

"I'm glad I have. Your book is a towering achievement of thought, how to think, its great importance. You did Bob what Proust accomplished. You dissected and analyzed human nature in its general and particular forms."

"Hey, you're getting good here."

"Don't stop me, I may lose it. But...and here is the thing, you say it in the style of clarity, simplicity, elegant grace. You not only preach but follow your fear that, 'beauty,' of language could distract, possibly hide meaning."

"You are falling into the trap," he said.

"What trap?"

"You are leaning now too far over to the left. You must roll back to the right. Shift. There you have it. Now you will be comfortable."

"Thanks."

"That is what I am here for. But also another trap. The trap of fame. It is the hollow adoration of what is in vogue or adoring who one is told to adore. Either way the adored is no longer a person but an inflated icon. I do not get the privilege of being with other people, or did not."

"Is it difficult to be dead?"

"No," shaking his head. "Is it difficult to not have legs."

"No," I say.

"And maybe this is because we still are who we are inside, still seeking who that is, and have the courage to express this person. Here, this is who you are, who I am."

"Inside I don't feel any different."

"No. So maybe you can get this person who you are inside to continue forgetting I am famous and inform me about what you do not appreciate about my writing, this book."

"Robert..."

"Bob."

"Bob," I tightened the safety belt on the chair rolling into another more comfortable position, "you...here it is...now don't take offense because I truly care about Ulrich, Clarisse, Walter but there are a few times where you allow them to slide into being..."

"...The idea I am trying to express to the reader and..."

"...Not the full rounded characters you have created."

I listened to the joints and rafters of the small cottage yield and join, its poignant reminder and threat, a large dog's bark in the night's patter of rain. He placed a finger against his chin.

"So," he said, "You have done it now. Criticized my work. Are you okay?"

I laid my hands where my legs had been then folded them below my chest almost touching the tightened safety belt. "I'm fine."

"Good. Then maybe there is more."

"Well, there is one more thing. There is much more importance now, in writing, the showing versus telling, the lesser involvement of the narrator...it is very sensitive...but it determines a space which allows the reader to drop into the story, the narration. It is difficult to measure and more to calculate."

"He nodded his head, "I can approach this in many ways. I wrote during a different time, time replaced by survival, a smaller harried readership. Not always understanding myself what was coming from my pen, I found the fear of how the present might turn into the future. The need to start to explain." He laughed, "As though explanations can ever change anything. Ultimately my hope was to raise readers level of thought. There are some things I strive for that is beyond what can be dramatized through characters, which can only be left to be filled in. What I would like to leave you with is that unintentionally I may have minutely altered the style of writing, which after many alterations by others over the years, we have arrived here and on our way to somewhere else. Speaking of which please excuse me for a moment."

I called out where the restroom was. He returned quickly. Then the table was folded up and all items disappeared back into the satchel. He slipped into his coat and arranged his still dripping hat on his head.

"You need gloves," I said.

He looked at his hands, his long fingers.

The wheelchair glided with ease. I returned with a pair of my lined leather gloves. He took them and thanked me.

"I," he said, "wrote a note to you. In the book on your bed. You have started the second volume?"

"Yes. Some. I already..."

"I will return. Again, tomorrow."

The rain continued to patter against the cottage roof. I raised the bed's safety bars. Turning left then right I slid into dreams. Dreams of dreaming. Dreams of writing. Dreams of writing about dreams. My room is windowless. It is why I chose it. It's hard to say when I woke. How long I slept. The book lay by my side. I opened it and read the note. His hand? Mine? When I heard the lone knock I lay there, listened.

Hadrian says

The quintessential 'ideas' novel, where twenty page long discourses on the meaning of love can happen after 'I love you'. It's thick and interlaced with meaning, and it works just fine that way.

This edition had several hundred pages of notes and earlier drafts, which were also fascinating.

Stefania says

Ο ?νθρωπος χωρ?ς ιδι?τητες , ο Ζαρατο?στρα του Μο?ζιλ!

Victoria says

Can one finish a book that itself is unfinished? I've stopped reading in the fourth book, feeling that I was going where the novel itself had not gone -- through a final editing to a finished or abandoned work. Here we're approaching the territory of the well-known idea that a novel is never finished, it's simply abandoned. Thus death prevented Robert Musil from getting *The Man Without Qualities* to the point of abandonment.

So I'll say a bit about the parts he abandoned to print during his lifetime, secure in the belief that more was to

come. Perhaps it wasn't just my imagination that the attitude and writing seemed inconsistent with the earlier parts once one entered the fourth volume, the sensibilities seeming less finely honed, justifying Musil's dissatisfaction.

The imminence of WWI hangs over the work, the date letting the reader know that everything described is going to change radically and often horribly very soon. Does the novel record the way the world was before the cataclysmic war, or show us the origin of the folly and waste that brought it on?

There's no answer to this, but while inwardly quaking at the disaster to come, we can enjoy the social comedy Musil lays before us, the great national event to be commemorated in ways everyone can object to, planning done at posh gatherings in posh surroundings by high society with a sprinkling of the titled among them.

Against this, Walter and Clarisse and Ulrich and Agathe thrash out intellectual propositions that mean everything to them but are remote from the world and even their lives.

A wonderful book, unfinished or not: its reputation precedes it and sets the stage for disappointment, which never appears. I plan to re-experience it in the shorter version by different translators published earlier, material Musil saw through publication. It's been said that translation is more appropriate if less smooth, though this one, by Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike, was expressive and elegant.

Despite the growing disorganization of the last volume, withdrawn from publication for reworking which his short life denied him, interest and even excitement lasted to the end...and may continue some day with the drafts and sketches that give this complex, polished work such a rag-tag ending.
