

Chapter 5

**SVEVO'S *UOMO SENZA QUALITÀ*:
Musil and Modernism in Italy**

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Critics tend to concentrate on the importance of the land of Italy to the German imagination and of German thought to Italian intellectuals (see Magris 1996), but the literary interactions between Italian and German-speaking countries have been less frequently examined. This paper goes beyond the familiar themes of Austrian depictions of Italy and accounts of Austrians travelling in the peninsula to explore the complex relationship between the works of Italo Svevo and those of Robert Musil.

In Italy Svevo's protagonists are frequently referred to using Musil's term, "man without qualities." The phrase is a sign of Musil's extraordinary Italian reception which, according to one critic (Zettl, xiii), was more enthusiastic than his reception in Germany and Austria (see also Iurlano and Venturelli, De Angelis, Freese, Rogowski, and Mehigan). Numerous notable Italian critics have been drawn to comment on Musil's essayistic novel, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (*The Man without Qualities*), and on Ulrich, the eponymous "man without qualities." This situation may surprise English-language readers, since English-language critics and reviewers in particular have contested the merits of Musil's novel. Early criticism in English even tended to discourage new readers from reading Musil's work, although a distinction has been drawn (Coetzee, 101) between the British and the American receptions, with the British as more receptive to Musil earlier and the Americans later. Meanwhile, Musil is frequently linked by Italian critics with Svevo and Carlo Emilio Gadda to help bolster their prestige (see, for

instance, Bertoni, 55, and Gàbici, 19). Although Musil read Svevo's last novel and noted that he enjoyed it, Svevo is hardly ever mentioned in works on Musil.

Nevertheless, Svevo's protagonists—Alfonso Nitti in *Una Vita* (1892, *A Life*), Emilio Brentani in *Senilità* (1898, *As a Man Grows Older* or *Emilio's Carnival*), and Zeno Cosini in *La coscienza di Zeno* (1923, *The Confessions of Zeno* or *Zeno's Conscience*), who all pre-date Musil's Ulrich—have all been referred to as *uomini senza qualità* ("men without qualities") (see Maier 1980, 60, Sarzana, 25, and Napolitano, 124; for somewhat longer comparisons between Ulrich and Zeno, see Mahler-Schächter, 547–48, Castex, 51–53, and Maxia, 127). Svevo's protagonists are usually given this epithet without any further explanation of what it means or in what ways they are "men without qualities." Of the three protagonists, the last bears the closest resemblance to Ulrich and can perhaps most fittingly be called a "man without qualities." I shall begin by fleshing out the connections between Ulrich and Zeno.

The use of the term *uomini senza qualità* to designate Svevo's protagonists is particularly notable since there also exists a term of authorial origin to describe the characters. *Un inetto*—a "misfit" or an "unfit," "inept" or "incompetent" man—was the title that Svevo originally chose for his first book, but his publisher responded negatively and refused to publish the work with that title, a sign of the offputting nature of the term and its connotations. Nevertheless, all of Svevo's characters have been labeled *inetti*, a grouping that underscores some of Zeno's qualities, which Italian critics have often found unattractive. These *inetti* have been criticized for their passivity, weakness, and lack of masculinity. Although scholars have, with varying degrees of appreciation, characterized both Zeno and Ulrich as passive and weak, the Italian term used to label Zeno underscores this aspect of their personalities more than Musil's "man without qualities" does. Interestingly, however, Stanislaus Joyce, James Joyce's brother, disputed the critical claim that Svevo's characters were "inept" or weak, viewing this characterization as an attack on Svevo's work (Lebowitz, 208).

Despite their similarities, there are important differences between Zeno and Svevo's earlier characters. The protagonists of *Una Vita* and *Senilità* take life seriously and are dismayed by their inability to insert themselves into it. In *Una Vita* the protagonist kills himself and in *Senilità* Amalia, the male protagonist's double, dies. Meanwhile, by the end of *La coscienza di Zeno* many men with qualities—Giovanni, Guido, and Zeno's father—have died, whereas Zeno continues to live. While Zeno's qualities are ambiguous, the world he inhabits is also ambiguous and chaotic, and, although the narrative ultimately may pass judgement on these

men with qualities, Zeno does not do so as clearly as Ulrich does. Zeno repeatedly remarks on his envy of Giovanni's health and Guido's talent. Driven by its more open and playful protagonist, the form of *La coscienza di Zeno* is more experimental than Svevo's earlier works. Indeed, one of the transformations between both Musil's and Svevo's earlier work and their later work is their development of a more ironic, distanced, and humorous style. As Thomas Harrison (60) puts it, in Musil's case, "What does change in the twenty-four years separating *The Man without Qualities* from *Törleß* is an attitude from visible and earnest distress to ironic pleasure in intellectual entanglement." While the phrase "man without qualities" reflects this change, "inept" does not. Whereas Svevo's three protagonists have all been labelled with the term *inetto* from Svevo's first work, Musil's later "man without qualities" is used to consider his earlier characters, underscoring their modernism. In contrast, the term *inetto* drew attention to many of the characteristics that early critics found least appealing about Svevo's protagonist, without, however, highlighting Zeno's modernism.

Being "inept" is hard to read as exciting and has connotations of being pathetic, connotations that a "man without qualities" does not necessarily have. The translator Sophie Wilkins regarded the term *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* as "exciting, quasi-futuristic" (Huber, 118), and considered giving the translation of the novel that she and Burton Pike published in 1996 the title *The Possibilist*, as she did not consider the English translation animated enough. Considering Svevo along with Musil more clearly underscores Svevo's modernism, which was not immediately appreciated in Italy (see Minghelli, 56, Lebowitz, 175–76, and Ghidetti). Ulrich and Zeno's qualityless homologies can be examined further in light of what are considered to be prominent characteristics of Viennese or Austro-Hungarian modernism (see Le Rider, Magris 1963, and Schorske). While the use of the term "man without qualities" to label Zeno reveals Musil's popularity in Italy, a more thorough examination of Zeno and Ulrich highlights the shared cultural background of their authors (see Magris 1984, 192–208; for more on Svevo's connection and similarities to Austro-Hungarian authors, see Camerino 1974). Despite the connections between them, Musil and Svevo have both been more frequently paired with other authors, such as Proust, than they have with each other (see Chardin, Godeau, Longuet Marx, Benedetti, Kayser, and Almansi).

Musil's Italian reception was more positive and more profuse, and came earlier, than his English-language reception. There are several reasons, historical, cultural, and coincidental, for Musil's striking Italian fame. After his death his widow Martha Musil, with her husband's thousands of unpublished papers,

moved to Rome to live with her son from a former marriage, Gaetano Marcovaldi. Until the 1970s scholars had to visit Italy to consult Musil's notes, drafts, and diaries, which helped to generate Italian interest in Musil's work. Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser, the translators of the first English edition of *The Man without Qualities*, temporarily moved to Rome, where they also helped to put together the first Italian edition, which, since it contained translations of pages that were not yet published in German, some considered more complete than the existing German edition.

Even before the complete Italian translation of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* was available, many scholars already knew of Musil's novel because of debates around the work of Georg Lukács's, which garnered a notable reception in Italy (for more on Lukács's role in the Italian reception of Musil, see Corino 97–98, and De Angelis, 23–24, and for his role in the popularity of German works in Italy more generally, see Bevilacqua, 15–16). Musil figures prominently in the first chapter in Lukács's book *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus*, which was based on lectures given in Rome, Bologna, Turin, and Milan, as well as other cities (Lukács, 5), and the Italian translation of which, *Il significato attuale del realismo critico*, was published in 1957, before the German edition (it has since been translated into English as both *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* and *Realism in Our Time*). In Italy, Lukács often provided the frame or initial point of discussion for debates about whether Musil's work should be considered bourgeois, decadent, avant-garde, or politically engaged. In general, the intellectual left in Italy greeted *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* positively, reading its critique of society through a Marxist lens, in contrast to the German left's more critical and less enthusiastic reaction at the time (Corino, 98, and Mehigan, 39–42). Although Claudio Magris's critical concerns are distinct from Lukács's, he cites Lukács's works (Magris 1963, 9) as significant for the development of his ideas for his book, *Il mito asburgico nella letteratura austriaca moderna* (1963, *The Habsburg Myth in Modern Austrian Literature*). Magris places Musil in a longer Austrian tradition and a 20th-century context, concentrating closely on expressions of fracture and portrayals of crises in Musil's works. The translation of Magris's work into German in 1966 has been identified as the beginning of cultural criticism of Musil's work (Mehigan, 11).

While earlier English-language criticism tended to focus on the unfinished nature of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, what the ending of the novel could or should have been, Musil's essayism, and why his work should, or should not, be read, Italian critics drew on Magris's work and explored Musil's presentation of the fall of an empire, his idea of utopia, and his reflections on the crisis of modernity.

Although *Il mito asburgico nella letteratura austriaca moderna* enjoys considerable international fame, its Italian reception was particularly strong and even, as Magris notes in the most recent foreword to his book, added to the phenomenon he had described, the "myth" of the Austro-Hungarian empire (Magris 1963, 7). The work's reception helped to establish Musil's popularity in Italy.

When reflecting on the origins of his book in an interview for a conference celebrating it, Magris (2003, 13) mentioned that it would not have been written if he had not lived in Trieste, a city that is now in Italy but has an Austro-Hungarian past. Although Trieste's formal nationality was altered drastically after the First World War, its citizens, who belonged to various ethnic, religious, and national groups, did not immediately or completely change (see Ara and Magris). Even after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Trieste remained an important passageway for Austrian thought and culture into the rest of Italy. Many of Trieste's multilingual citizens could read German originals before they were translated into Italian, and Magris is thus part of a tradition of Triestines expanding Italian readers' knowledge of German-language works. (Trieste's varied population and complex history continue to interest anthropologists, historians, policy-makers, cultural historians, literary critics, and novelists, and the breakup of Yugoslavia increased attention to the territory. A large number of fictional and critical works have been published in the past fifteen years: see, for example, Morris, Sluga, Hametz, Ballinger, Pizzi, and Veit Heinichen, a German-language mystery writer whose numerous popular works set in Trieste, such as *Gib jedem seinen eigenen Tod*, have inspired a German television series.)

Musil's work had an early Triestine proponent, the intellectual Roberto "Bobi" Bazlen, who recommended the novel for publication in 1951. By that point, only certain sections of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* had been published ("A Kind of Introduction" and "Pseudoreality Prevails" in 1930; thirty-eight chapters of "Into the Millennium" in 1933; and, following Musil's death in 1942, twenty more chapters of "Into the Millennium," prepared by his widow Martha, in 1943). Trieste played an important role both in bringing Austrian thought and works, such as Musil's, to the rest of Italy and in fostering authors, such as Svevo, whose work exhibited a kinship with that of authors from other cities in the Austro-Hungarian empire, such as Vienna or Prague.

Before exploring how Svevo's protagonist is a man without qualities, the definition of the term "man without qualities" needs to be examined. The immensity of Musil's novel has resulted in a range of what critics emphasize as the most significant aspects of being part of a "man without qualities," as they

have considered its meanings, its numerous uses in the novel—by the narrator, by the characters, and in chapter headings—its relationship to Musil's earlier work and drafts, and authorial quotations that lie outside the scope of the novel (for a broader consideration of the term, see Goltschnigg). Here, however, I shall focus on the explanation problematically offered within the novel by the character Walter, who expresses a strong dislike of Ulrich, since Walter's understanding of the term is one of the parts of the work that is most cited, and his clarification of it provides one of the earliest, longest, and clearest explanations of what it means (Musil 1996, 62–63):

"He's a man without qualities!"

"What is that?" Clarisse asked, giggling.

"Nothing. That's just it, it's nothing."

But Clarisse found the phrase intriguing.

"There are millions of them nowadays," Walter declared. "It's the human type produced by our time!" He was pleased with the term he had hit upon so unexpectedly.

Ulrich's friend and competitor, Walter, claims that a "man without qualities" is without qualities primarily because of the chaos of his period, from the *fin de siècle* to the early 20th century. A man without qualities not only considers different scientific, philosophical, technical, and psychological ideas of his time but is also more likely to be without qualities because of the variety of theories from which he has to choose and consider.

In one of the most extensive investigations of the term in the text, Walter continues to expand upon what he means by the expression to his wife, Clarisse. Walter clarifies the point (Musil 1996, 63) that in a man without qualities, his qualities "don't belong to him. When he is angry, something in him laughs. When he is sad, he is up to something. When something moves him, he turns against it. He'll always see a good side to a bad action." Because of his capacity, or curse, of analyzing everything, and the resulting distance between him and the world, a man without qualities is unable to take anything completely seriously. A man without qualities can always see another side to any matter and is unable, or unwilling, to remain dedicated to one point of view: "everything is subject to change, in flux, part of a whole" (Musil 1996, 64). Since he is always able to see another side to an issue, a man without qualities can seem contradictory.

The eponymous protagonist of *La coscienza di Zeno* is a fairly unaccomplished Triestine businessman who, partly to see if he can stop his incessant smoking, visits a psychoanalyst, who recommends that he write down his thoughts and memories. Zeno's writings reveal that, like the protagonist of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, he is ironic, contradictory, analytical, and open to a range of perspectives, never committing himself to just one. The threat of war underscores the sense of instability that both characters express and the impossibility of finding wholeness in their modern worlds. Zeno's first entry is written in 1914, before the First World War directly affected Trieste, and ends with battlegrounds forming close to the city. (Brian Moloney, 95–111, views the war as the event that inspired Svevo to write the novel, and Richard Robinson, 49–51, also draws attention to the connections between the war and Zeno's character.) Ulrich, Musil's man without qualities, decides to take his "vacation from life" the year before the war and the novel was planned to end with the outbreak of the war. Zeno's continual search for health, the impetus for his visit to the psychiatrist, is analogous to Ulrich's taking a year off to investigate how he should live. Both Ulrich, in his year off, and Zeno, in his search for health, seek unity instead of the sense of fragmentation they experience.

Zeno and Ulrich are too interested in any and all perspectives to possess any stable sense of their concerns and themselves. Zeno cannot choose just one topic that he believes deserves more study. Like Ulrich, he is instead open to all types of examination. Zeno muses on a discussion with a friend about Christianity (Svevo 2003, 38): "My usual weakness! I could bet that even today I'd be equally incapable of resisting, if someone made a serious attempt to persuade me to study astronomy for a while." Zeno expresses a "weakness" for all and any type of thought. He brings religion and science together, combining contradictory modes of perception without further reflection. For example, he has two explanations for his father's final words before becoming seriously ill (Svevo 2003, 43):

Certainly, in the last lucid moment of his life, my father's feeling of intelligence originated in his sudden religious inspiration, and in fact he was led to speak to me about it because I had told him of my discussion of the origins of Christianity. Now, however, I know also that this feeling of his was the first symptom of a cerebral hemorrhage.

Zeno reveals how both interpretations have something to offer and presents both a religious and a scientific explanation as definitively true ("certainly" and

"I know"). The reader is left to infer that both are, in fact, incomplete, and that neither religious feeling nor science explains everything.

Zeno changes his options or alters his understanding of an entire situation within moments. He violently disagrees with Ada's opinion that he hated her husband, Guido, but then later reconsiders her perspective (Svevo 2003, 397): "When my eyes closed, however, in the darkness I saw that her words had created a new world, like all words that are not true." Even if he believes statements to be false, he can see their possible truth.

Similarly, Ulrich is always ready to reapproach a topic of discussion, but he generally does so with more consideration and for a longer period of time. Ulrich contemplates at length what science and religion lack and have to offer, and how they could be brought together. Instead of leaving it to the reader to infer that the explanations are incomplete, he comments on how they are incomplete or faulty. Ulrich more consciously explores different ideas, in the hope that his understanding of life will progress. Despite Zeno's similar instincts that a new perspective may bring him closer to "health," he is more haphazardly interested in everything.

Zeno and Ulrich's constant thinking often prevents them from acting, and they generally end up in situations rather than create them. Zeno stumbles into marriage, while Ulrich decides to do nothing and then agrees to participate in the *Parallellaktion*, a highly ironic narrative construct in the novel, a (fictional) planned celebration of two anniversaries, Wilhelm II's thirty years on the throne of the German Empire and Franz Joseph's seventy years as Emperor of Austria. (Musil's irony depends on the reader's historical knowledge that this joint celebration would have happened in 1918.) As they have various views on everything, Zeno and Ulrich view their lack of qualities differently at different moments, and at times have negative opinions of themselves because of their inactivity. As Elizabeth Goodstein (371) points out: "Depending on his mood, the fact that for [Ulrich] no values are absolute and everything gains its meaning only from its context may be either a source of pride or a cause of dismay." The protagonists' constant explorations not only hinder them from participating more actively in life but often hinder them even when they do wish to act. Zeno writes (Svevo 2003, 5), "My thinking seems something separate from me. I can see it. It rises and falls, ... but that is its only activity." Zeno's limp is perhaps the most obvious example of how analysis can be, literally, paralyzing (Svevo 2003, 105): "I reacted with a start, and my thoughts immediately rushed to my legs, to seek this monstrous machinery. . . . But even today, as I write about it, if someone watches me when

I move, the fifty-four muscles become self-conscious and I risk falling." Zeno is capable of defamiliarizing everything, including his own body, while "Ulrich programmatically defamiliarizes everything he encounters" (Bernstein, 47). The difference between Ulrich's programmatic character and Zeno's unpredictable one again distinguishes the two protagonists. Ulrich appears more in control than Zeno does. While Zeno's defamiliarization has been read as a character flaw, Ulrich's "active passivism" (Bangerter, 10) is often interpreted as a choice.

Due to his range of interests, it is perhaps easier to clarify what a man of qualities is not than what he is. The other characters in the two novels, particularly the male ones, offer contrasts that help to illuminate the protagonists' natures. All the other characters, in both novels, are more committed to a specific worldview than Ulrich and Zeno are, and they are more easily characterized as types or "embodiments of ideas" (Fokkema and Ibsch, 233). Giovanni, for instance, is a businessman whose outlook contrasts with Zeno's far-ranging interests (Svevo 2003, 65): "[Giovanni] believed that everyone, reading the newspapers, has his own business interests in mind. I, on the contrary, when I read a paper, feel transformed into public opinion, and seeing the reduction of a tariff, I think of Cobden and free trade. The thought is so important that it leaves no room for me to recall my wares." As with Ulrich, Zeno's interest in the bigger picture distracts him from, or he considers it more worth exploring than, "real" life. Zeno comments on how Giovanni's focused, limited view not only helps Giovanni to conduct his business, but also makes him healthy and peaceful (Svevo 2003, 62): "He, on the contrary, was a great businessman, ignorant and active. But from his ignorance he drew strength and peace of mind, and I, spellbound, would observe him and envy him." Giovanni, Guido, and Zeno's father are the major figures who, because of their differences, help to illuminate Zeno's character. Ulrich's social world is more densely populated than Zeno's, and Musil's novel contains a greater range of identifiable figures than Svevo's does, including sexual Bonadea, industrious Arnheim, practical Tuzzi, principled Leinsdorf, idealistic Diotima, Nietzschean Clarisse, and anti-Semitic Hans Sepp.

In both novels, the dissimilarities of sons and fathers, whose significance is underscored by the organization of the novels and the protagonists' reactions to them, shed light on many shared aspects of Ulrich's and Zeno's personalities. The chapters introducing the fathers come early in both novels and even the title of the chapter in which Ulrich's father is first described, "Even a Man Without Qualities Has a Father With Qualities," reveals the vast differences between father and son. The tension between father and son can be related to the particular nature

of Austrian modernity, which was shaped by a sharp divide between son and father, or son and authority: "The new culture-makers in the city of Freud thus repeatedly defined themselves in terms of a kind of oedipal revolt. Yet the young were revolting not so much against their fathers as against the authority of the paternal culture that was their inheritance" (Schorske, x). Both fathers, unlike their sons, are in harmony with themselves and their worlds, a similarity emphasized in the English translations of both novels. In *The Man without Qualities* (Musil 1996, 10) we learn that Ulrich's father "sincerely venerated the state of affairs that had served him so well, not because it was to his advantage, but because he was in harmony and coexistent with it, and on general principles." Zeno tells us (Svevo 2003, 33) that his father "lived in perfect harmony with the way he was made, and I believe that he never exerted any effort to improve." Both Zeno and Ulrich notice that their fathers are oblivious to how their situations could be different; they instead adamantly adhere to the status quo. Ulrich's and Zeno's descriptions of their fathers reveal how being at peace entails ignoring certain aspects of life.

Being in harmony means being in harmony with all aspects of life: family, work, society, and the state. Both fathers, accordingly, see their governments as unquestionable. Zeno's father is shocked when Zeno uses the system as part of an elaborate joke to prove that he is not crazy (Svevo 2003, 35): "He never forgave me and so never laughed at it. To persuade a doctor to examine you as a joke? To have a certificate drawn up, as a joke, complete with tax stamps? Madness!" Ulrich's father does not understand how his son can be irreverent about such a serious matter as social convention and is uncomfortable that Ulrich has, for instance, chosen to live in a chateau. This shift from father to son is partly generational, as the fathers, in contrast to their sons, were raised in a period in which society and the state may have appeared permanent. This stark generational divide can be partly attributed to how modernity was experienced in Austria-Hungary: "Vienna had no 19th century as we understand it, or even as the Parisians understand it. The 18th slowly waned and then with that calamitous upheaval the 20th was suddenly, starkly there" (Crankshaw, 50-51). The fathers indicate how being "without qualities" relates to the cultural transitions of the time and the modernism of being a man without qualities.

While their fathers' gravity blinds them to how they could live differently, Zeno's and Ulrich's openness pushes them toward the boundary between sanity and insanity. Partly due to his lack of seriousness, Zeno is repeatedly called crazy, often by his father. In Zeno's world, people are expected to take something completely seriously, so when Zeno approaches everything as mutable he is labelled mad.

Ulrich shares certain characteristics and ideas with Clarisse, who descends into madness, and Moosbrugger, a sex-murderer whose sanity is put on trial. The sons are frequently incomprehensible to their fathers, who are sane and law-abiding citizens.

Despite their strained and distant relationships, their fathers' deaths are transformative experiences for both Ulrich and Zeno. The news of the death of Ulrich's father is the focus of "A Turning Point," the last chapter in Part 2 of Musil's novel (Musil 1996, 714): "There had been little enough affection between them; in fact, the thought of his father had almost always been rather disturbing to Ulrich, and yet, as he now read the quaintly sinister text [conveying the news of his father's death] over again, he was thinking: 'Now I am all alone in the world.'" The definitive shattering of Ulrich's ties to a man with qualities exacerbates Ulrich's sense of being unhinged and without qualities. In his *Aphorismen* (in Musil 1955, 490, translation mine), Musil connects one's personal father to more abstract fathers: "Father, Fatherland, Father-God: it was the musical scale of the old Austria of my father." The disappearance of the personal father in Austria-Hungary, where these three fathers were closely linked, often leads to a more general sense of rupture and loss: "Any weakening in the authority of one of the fathers leads to the gradual instability of the whole, to that crisis in authority that is an essential element of the crisis of modernity" (Spencer, 4). Zeno feels similarly alienated after his father's death (Svevo 2003, 32): "My father's death, on the contrary, was a great, genuine catastrophe. Heaven no longer existed, and furthermore, at thirty, I was finished." The fathers are crucial for Zeno and Ulrich to have any sort of identity. Even the protagonists' first names—a person's most standard identificatory information—are not given until the respective chapters in which their relationships with their fathers are described. (Ulrich's is even more of a mystery, since Zeno's name is, of course, in the title of the book and the reader can surmise that the "I" is named "Zeno.") Ulrich is designated as just the "man without qualities," while Zeno is referred to first as the "patient" and then, when he begins to write, by the first person singular pronoun. Zeno and Ulrich's initial namelessness establishes them as figures for modern exploration before establishing their identity.

Their fathers, paradoxically, also help make it possible for Zeno and Ulrich to be men without qualities. Not only does a man without qualities have a father with qualities, but he perhaps needs to have a father with qualities. Zeno and Ulrich have the luxury of time to contemplate, and to rebel, thanks to their fathers' financial stability and support. Although the fathers find their sons' repeated changes in

their career paths irresponsible, they are unable to compel Ulrich and Zeno to make a choice. Both men have shown promise but cannot limit themselves. A man without qualities lacks purpose because he is open to the possibility of all purposes. At university, Zeno alternates between law and chemistry, finally causing his father to doubt his sanity (Svevo 2003, 35): "When, after having transferred from the study of law to that of chemistry, I sought [my father's] permission to return to the former, he said to me amiably: "The fact remains that you are certifiably crazy." Ulrich started in the cavalry before becoming a mathematician, then an engineer, and, finally, deciding to take his year-long vacation.

Neither Ulrich nor Zeno initially thought that he would be without a career. Zeno, like many of his generation, began with Napoleon I as a model (Svevo 2003, 61): "In the mind of a young man from a middle-class family, the concept of human life is associated with that of a career, and in early youth the career is that of Napoleon I." Napoleon represented a man who had dedicated himself entirely to clear goals. Napoleon as a symbol of greatness, though not of goodness, is a fundamental figure in Ulrich's development as well, providing the inspiration for him to join the cavalry in the chapter "The First of Three Attempts to Become a Great Man" (Musil 1996, 31): "In his school days his model had been Napoleon, ... partly because his teachers had made a point of calling this tyrant, who had tried to turn Europe upside down, the greatest evildoer in history."

While issues of morality are explored in much greater depth in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, and have even been considered by some the primary reason why Musil wrote the novel (see McBride), Zeno also reflects on morality and his views leave him open, as Ulrich's do in his case, to questions of criminality. Their openness to all perspectives creates the potential for moral ambiguity. Zeno and Ulrich conduct thought experiments on what it would be like to commit a crime. Ulrich explores the mind of Moosbrugger, a sex-murderer, and Zeno considers killing Guido, his competitor for Ada's hand in marriage.

The fathers in the two novels emphasize the shift in generations and eras, but Guido in Svevo's novel and Arnheim in Musil's reveal that it is still possible to be a man *with* qualities. In contrast to Zeno and Ulrich, Guido and Arnheim feel secure about their qualities. They are confident both about their artistic abilities and about their financial success. Guido and Arnheim are also ready to use their artistic abilities to further their success in other areas. Arnheim's intellectual involvement with the *Parallellaktion* turns out to be partly due to his interest in Galician land. Guido repeatedly uses his violin as a tool of seduction. In both novels, a man with qualities initially often appears more attractive to the opposite

sex than a man without qualities. Ada and Carmen are more attracted to Guido than they are to Zeno, and Diotima prefers Arnheim to Ulrich. However, despite their talent and attractiveness, being modern men with qualities is not portrayed as definitively superior to being without them. Both Guido and Arnheim are ultimately shown to lack emotional depth. Their easy talents in various areas point to the problem—discussed in Musil's chapter "A Racehorse of Genius Crystallizes the Recognition of Being a Man Without Qualities"—that it has become too easy to be great, or superficially great, in modern times, and that this diminishes the meaning of greatness. Guido and Arnheim believe that they have control over their lives. This presumption is one that Ulrich and Zeno lack, and it ultimately proves problematic for both of the modern men with qualities. Guido's illusion of control eventually ends in his death. Both narratives suggest that the only genuine choice in the modern world is to be a man without qualities, a reflection of the crises experienced during modernity in general and also of the crises during the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, where identity was especially in flux.

While other men offer points of contrast to men without qualities, women sometimes offer Ulrich and Zeno opportunities to overcome fragmentation, to become men with qualities (for more on the importance of Ulrich's gender for his character, see Luft, 123–34, and Appignanesi, 124–56; for an exploration of women's roles in both novels, see Castex). Although neither man is successful in his attempt to become whole in a lasting way (at least given the state of *The Man without Qualities* as it is now read), the love relationships in both novels offer the tantalizing possibility that qualities and completeness are within the protagonists' reach.

Zeno is definitely unsuccessful in his attempts to be with Ada, who rejects him before her sister Augusta accepts him (Svevo 2003, 73): "I felt a prompt conviction that this woman was the one I needed, the one who would lead me actually to moral and physical health through holy matrimony." Zeno had looked toward marriage as a kind of solution, but, although he claims to love his wife, the epitome of health, love does not make him healthy.

The difference between the lengths of the protagonists' searches for unity with a woman is, again, indicative of differences in style and form between the two novels. Both happen in the sections following the fathers' deaths, but while Zeno's comments are quickly made, Ulrich explores the possibility of finding unity with his sister Agathe for large portions of the second part of his novel. Since the novel is unfinished, it is not clear what the ultimate results of his attempts would have been, or for how long Ulrich and Agathe would have continued their relationship,

but Ulrich is depicted as probably too fragmented and too analytical to find completion in another, mentally or physically. (When offered an edition with a more mystical conclusion, critics have vociferously complained, claiming that it misrepresents Musil's project. It has been noted that a positive, conclusive ending would involve the suppression of the historical aspects of Musil's representation and much of his irony.) Together, Ulrich and Agathe cannot leave a topic unexplored. Ulrich's constant analyzing, hypothesizing, and rationalizing, even when he feels deeply, limit his passion and demythologize the love he feels for his sister. Passion is pushed away as the characters find logical explanations for their incestuous act or thoughts (depending on the version of the novel). When discussing the idea of completion through love, Agathe raises some of the problems she sees with the concept (Musil 1996, 1408):

She was, nevertheless, a little afraid of the reply, and protected herself with the generalization: "Is it comprehensible that in the whole world the ideal of all loves is to become one being, without considering that these ungrateful people owe almost all the charm of love to the fact that they are two beings, and of seductively different sexes?"

As her brother does at times, Agathe protects herself with abstract thought. She phrases her comment in such a way that it distances the discussion from the more concrete, more dangerous love developing between herself and her brother. Agathe and Ulrich's actions are almost deprived of active meaning as they re-examine them, and the text is unable to stop as it draws back and looks at itself.

One of the barriers to Ulrich's finding a more lasting sense of unity with Agathe, the embodiment "of the urge within [Ulrich] toward active realisation of possibilities" (Sokel, tr. Payne, 232), is his need to analyze everything constantly, including his own feelings. Zeno also examines love (Svevo 2003, 96): "I loved Ada! I didn't yet know if that was the right verb, and I continued my analysis." Zeno's and Ulrich's tendency to analyze creates distance between themselves and others, and often creates the space for humorous, analytical irony. The connection between analysis and humour is highlighted by Zeno's and his father's differences in perspective. Zeno's father accuses him of laughing at religion, but Zeno clarifies (Svevo 2003, 40): "Laugh? No, I study it!" Zeno's father considers his son's ruminations on various topics a sign of his levity and inappropriate behaviour (Svevo 2003, 36): "This is no moment for philosophizing—least of all, with you!" Men with qualities frequently find Zeno's and Ulrich's ideas verging on the

ridiculous, if not entirely so, because their explorations tend to lack a definite purpose.

Although Ulrich and Zeno constantly philosophize, both have problems with philosophy. Ulrich declares (Musil 1996, 272), "Philosophers are despots who have no armies to command, so they subject the world to their tyranny by locking it up in a system of thought." Zeno's inconsistency is related to the same need to resist being tyrannized by a system: "[Zeno's] dilettantism is then the condition of availability, a refusal to be imprisoned in a pattern" (Luperini, 124, translation mine). Part of Zeno's problem with psychoanalysis is that, according to Zeno, the psychoanalyst believes that he has found a system that can explain Zeno's complications and life (Svevo 2003, 403): "how could I bear the company of that ridiculous man, with . . . that presumption that allows him to collect all the phenomena of this world within his great new theory?" For Zeno, no view is left unproblematicized. In both novels philosophy means inventing theories, and therefore professing lies that restrict life and vision, something both protagonists aim to avoid. Their ability to remain open to any type of thought contributes to the modernism of both characters, as it complicates their subjectivity: "As the unity of the person and the 'classical subject' broke down, Robert Musil's 'man without qualities' stood out as the man who refused all hasty identifications and remained in suspense, perennially receptive" (Le Rider, 41). In both novels, theories are portrayed as attempts to hide modern man's lack of wholeness, a masking that Ulrich criticizes in others. While the idea that a world view cannot be constructed without deception is a characteristic of modernism more generally, it is also representative of the times and places in which Musil and Svevo were formed.

Ulrich's and Zeno's searches for totality, and their ultimate failure to find it, form a common theme for writers who lived in what once was the Austro-Hungarian empire. Ulrich's careful exploration of different sides of every matter and of other characters' perspectives achieve something akin to what Zeno's constant changes of perspective achieve: the sense that reality cannot be grasped or explained. "Nothing in *The Man Without Qualities* can be trusted as true or real. The novel speaks in several voices, each contesting the others" (Jonsson, 98). Like their protagonists, Svevo's and Musil's novels are open, inconclusive, and without solutions. Protagonists who are open to all possibilities make it difficult for a novel to end in any satisfactory way. In the end, Zeno declares himself "cured," but his statement has been repeatedly refuted. It has also been argued that Ulrich becomes a man *with* qualities by the end of the novel, but the novel's inconclusiveness makes this a difficult claim to make (see Payne and Dinklage for different ideas

on Ulrich's progression). The protagonists are, at least partly, vehicles for thoughts, and thoughts are never ending. Musil's work is literally inconclusive, since he "left in suspense all possible solutions to the plot of his masterpiece" (Mirsky, xxxv). Although leaving the novel unfinished was not necessarily a choice, since Musil was still working on it at the time of his death, Musil did consider ending his work in the middle of a sentence, perhaps with a comma. It may well be that "Musil's modernist novel does not end—perhaps cannot end—because he wants it to remain open to the unfolding of modernity" (Spencer, 27).

Although Svevo's novel proper is complete, Svevo returned to the character of Zeno and continued to chronicle his changing thoughts: his *quarto romanzo*, as it has been called (see Contini), is referred to as the *Further Confessions of Zeno* in English and consists of more of Zeno's thoughts and examinations. The fact that the structure of the original novel is open, organized by Zeno's reflections, allowed Svevo to return to his protagonist with relative ease, reminding the reader that "the keynote of Modernism is liberation, an ironic distrust of all absolutes, including those of temporal or spatial form" (Hollington, 432). Eugenio Montale (107) refers to Svevo as "a writer who is always open: he accompanies us, he guides us up to a certain point, but he never gives the impression of having said everything: he is broad and inconclusive, like life." The way in which the novel ends is not even an end for the protagonist, but an ending in which the protagonist imagines the destruction of the entire world (Svevo 2003, 436–37):

Perhaps, through an unheard-of catastrophe produced by devices, we will return to health. When poison gases no longer suffice, an ordinary man, in the secrecy of a room in this world, will invent an incomparable explosive, compared to which the explosives currently in existence will be considered harmless toys. And another man, also ordinary, but a bit sicker than others, will steal this explosive and will climb up to the center of the Earth, to set it on the spot where it can have the maximum effect. There will be an enormous explosion that no one will hear, and the Earth, once again a nebula, will wander through the heavens, freed of parasites and sickness.

Zeno thus suggests that the only way to achieve health and unity is through complete obliteration, for without sickness there is no life and perfection requires the destruction of mankind. This is not really a conclusion, but an imagined end, not only to the book but to everything.

Although critical works on Svevo often mention the importance of his Austro-Hungarian background, thanks primarily to Claudio Magris and to Giuseppe Antonio Camerino (1973 and 1974), comparisons of Svevo and other Triestine writers with German-language writers remain unusual (see, for example, Castex, Bondanella, and Mahler-Schächter). More specifically, despite the similarities between Musil's and Svevo's works, Musil's popularity in Italy, and the fact that Musil read Svevo, detailed comparisons of the two authors' works are infrequent: Castex's article is a rare example of such a comparative critique. The idea that Musil's and Svevo's novels belong to distinct national literary traditions may explain why they are not coupled more often. This frequently limited view of national literatures is one that should continue to be reconsidered. Explorations and comparisons, between Austrian and Italian literature, for example, are all too often neglected because of the influence of the 19th-century idea of literary studies divided along linguistic lines. The imposition of disciplinary boundaries has also contributed to the obfuscation of the connections between Italian and German-language literatures. With some exceptions, Italian literature tends to be housed with literature in other Romance languages. The connections between the literatures of these languages, already linked due to their shared linguistic family, are increased by these associations. Examinations of a work in translation have obvious limitations, but, combined with readings of the original, they can also point to new lines of exploration. Svevo was both Italian and Austro-Hungarian, just as Musil was both Austrian and Austro-Hungarian, and studies of their works should not confine them to just one of their nationalities. (While Svevo has not been compared to German-language authors as often as he could have been, critics have also complained that he is not Italian. Because it was influenced by his mother tongue, Triestine, and the language of his education, German, his Italian has been a cause for great debate (see Maier 1984). However, his work is now read in Italian literature courses and he is considered one of the most important modern Italian authors. Considering him "both/and" is more productive for readings of his work than considering him "neither/nor.")

Considerations of Musil's and Svevo's shared background deepen an understanding of their men without qualities (see Magris 1984, 192–208). Inclusive concepts of literature and geographical space, such as world literature, should not neglect more concentrated concepts, which, although they bring together works from different language families, are rooted in a historical reality such as that of the multilingual Austro-Hungarian Empire. The history that brought Italians and Austrians together is part of what has also kept them apart. Anti-Austrian

sentiment grew as Italian nationalism developed, and reached a peak at the beginning of the 20th century: "We nurture in our blood the principal hatred of 20th-century Italians: hatred for Austria!" (Marinetti, 248, translation mine). The First World War, and the growing animosity between Italy and Austria, obscured some existing literary relations that remain largely explored (Peter Demetz provides the interesting example of Theodor Däubler). Trieste's former connection to Austria-Hungary, as part of the *Adriatische Küstenland*, was the motivation for its special status during the Second World War, when, like Austria, it was annexed to the Third Reich. This political annexation, fairly or unfairly, linked Austria and Germany and added to the distance between Italy and Austria. However, the complex politics of Austro-Italian relations should not prevent scholars from exploring the works of Musil, Svevo, and other writers of their era, especially as even these fraught interactions have at times led to literary encounters. For example, Musil's parody of Gabriele D'Annunzio in the army newspaper *Tiroler Soldaten-Zeitung* (1916) demonstrates tension but also influence.

Beyond Trieste, and the specific geographical and historical connections between Austria and Italy, the connections between the literary works of the two countries themselves merit more attention. For instance, not only did the reception of Musil's novel help to shape the Italian critical conception of modernism, but Italians also played a notable part in Musil's development and understanding of modernism. Musil read and commented on three authors who have been considered great exemplars of Italian modernism. First, he read D'Annunzio's *Il piacere* (1889, *The Child of Pleasure*) twice, in 1898, the year it was published in German (as *Lust*) and years later he remarked on how his first reading had altered his understanding of the "modern": "It was the first book through which, forty years ago, I first became acquainted with the 'modern' and one of the first to influence me" (Musil 1976, 31, translation mine; see also Lorenzini, and Venturelli). Second, Musil reviewed the first German staging of Luigi Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*) in 1924. Finally, he and his wife read *La coscienza di Zeno* "with great pleasure" in 1930 (Musil 1976, 694, translation mine).

In general, the connections between the literature of Italy and that of France have been more fully examined than others. Italian modernism is generally considered weak, and comparisons between French and Italian works often underscore this characterization. France is accepted as "the country that exercised the strongest and most visible influence on Italian culture throughout the [modern] period in question" (Somigli, 912). This critical concentration on French and Italian literary relationships, while important, has overshadowed other lines

of interaction, such as the Austro-Italian one, which can shed a different light on Italian literature and literary modernism. For example, Thomas Harrison (36) draws attention to a specific instance of this problem in understanding Dino Campana's work: "Some elements of Campana's style are familiar to us from French Symbolist poetry, so much so that scholarly emphasis on this lineage has obscured a proper view of the more raw, 'Teutonic,' Expressionistic dimensions of his verse."

Critics have been less likely to compare Svevo and Musil, not only because of the languages in which their novels were written but also on account of their arguable status as modern classics, their "half-fame" (Kowal, 37). Musil has been referred to as the "Austrian Proust" and Svevo as the "Italian Proust"—a characterization Svevo himself found confusing—and both men's works have frequently been compared to Proust's. Yet, while comparison with Proust often does little to reveal Svevo's more intriguing qualities, the similarities and differences between Zeno and Ulrich shed light on Zeno's open, modernist, and humorous character. Whereas comparisons between French and Italian works often underscore the characterization of Italian modernism as less notable or less interesting than other national modernisms, comparisons of Austrian and Italian authors, concentrating primarily on the similarities between them, can point to what is present in Italian literature, rather than dwell on what is absent from it. In this paper I have aimed to contribute, through the rich examples of Musil's *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* and Svevo's *uomo senza qualità*, to a larger dialogue on Austro-Italian literary relations.

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IN CENTRAL EUROPE**
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