



ROBERT
MIVSIL

THOUGHT
FLIGHTS



THOUGHT
FLIGHTS

ROBERT MUSIL

John Bayley

Selected Other Works by

Robert Musil in English Translation

The Confusions of Young Törleß

Diaries

The Enthusiasts

Five Women

The Man without Qualities

Posthumous Papers of a Living Author

Precision and Soul: Essays and Addresses

Vinzenz and the Mistress of Important Men

THOUGHT FLIGHTS



ROBERT MUSIL

Robert Musil

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
GENESE GRILL



Contra Mundum Press New York · London · Melbourne

Selections from Die Klagenfurter Ausgabe © 2009 by the Robert Musil Institut. All rights reserved. Translation of these selections from *Die Klagenfurter Ausgabe* © 2015 Genese Grill.

First Contra Mundum Press edition 2015. This edition of *Thought Flights* is based on the 2009 edition of the *Klagenfurter Ausgabe*

All Rights Reserved under International & Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

CONTRA MUNDUM PRESS gratefully acknowledges the financial support received for this translation from the AUSTRIAN MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ARTS, & CULTURE.

Library of Congress
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
Musil, Robert, 1880–1942
[Selections from *Die Klagenfurter Ausgabe*. English.]
Die Klagenfurter Ausgabe / Robert Musil; translated from the original German by Genese Grill
—1st Contra Mundum Press Edition
348 pp., 5×8 in.

ISBN 9781940625102

- I. Musil, Robert
- II. Title.
- III. Grill, Genese.
- IV. Translator & Introduction.

2015936820

TABLE OF CONTENTS

o TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION



I. STORIES

- 2 Susanna's Letter
- 10 Susanna's Second Letter (Our Men)
- 16 Page from a Diary
- 22 The Fairy Tale of the Tailor
- 28 Robert Musil to an Unknown Little Girl
- 32 Across Charlottenburg
- 38 The Inn on the Outskirts
- 46 Broken Off Moment
- 52 The Storm Tide on Sylt
- 58 The Thirsty Ones
- 68 Small Journey Through Life



II. GLOSSES

- 74 Generation of Styles and Styles of
Generations
- 80 Johann Strauss as a Giant
- 84 The Criminal Lovers: The Story of Two
Unhappy Marriages

- 88 Moral Institutions
94 Twilight of War
100 Civilization
102 An Example
106 Intensivism
110 Speed is Witchery
114 When Papa Learned to Play Tennis
126 Talking Steel
132 The Art and Morality of the Crawl Stroke



III. LITERARY FRAGMENTS

- 144 From Out of the Stylized Century
(The Street)
150 Cannibals
156 Travel Notes
160 P.A. & the Dancer
168 Summer in the City
172 Shadow Play in the Small City
180 War Diary of a Flea
188 The Toady
192 The Race Horse of Genius
198 (Susanna's Third Letter) There, Where
You are Not



IV. UNPUBLISHED GLOSSES

- 208 Emotional Illusions
212 Budapest
216 Little (Bad) Mood Picture
224 The Red Hat
228 Gessler Garments
230 Philosophy of a Shoe Factory
234 Monologue of a Cultural Aristocrat
238 The Age of the Authors
240 On the Names of Sovereigns & Streets
246 Fashion
250 The Double Mæcenas
256 Gœthe Year

260 ENØNOTES

284 BIBLIOGRAPHY

296 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



INTRODUCTION

I. THOUGHT FLIGHTS

My thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them in any single direction against their natural inclination — and this was, of course, connected to the very nature of the investigation. For this compels us to travel over a wide field of thought crisscrossing in every direction... The same or almost the same points were always being approached afresh from different directions, and new sketches made...

—Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*



An expert legal counselor in Robert Musil's "The Fairy Tale of the Tailor" accuses the tailor of suffering from "thought flight": "He cannot remember what others have told him a hundred times already; instead he is always looking for new ideas" (25). Insofar as new ideas are anathema to the preservation of the status quo, thought flight may be seen by some to be an anti-social disease that breeds art. For Musil, & for his one-time neighbor Ludwig Wittgenstein, art is a special mode of expression that resists ossification and false deductive reasoning by specializing in the particular case presented in *living* words. It is a "conduct of life in examples," whose form & content can not be categorized into clichés.

The tension between clichéd categorization, more meaningful abstraction, and the proliferation of particular or partial cases constitutes one of Musil's central concerns in these small prose pieces. His experimental use of language is an object lesson in how a creative use of the shared store of used and even abused words can explode standardization and ossification. As a master of unexpected metaphor and surprising analogy, Musil vividly enacts in these pieces a strategy for both illuminating & ameliorating the crisis of language that haunted his contemporaries.

As always, Musil is really asking: how shall we live? And how can an artistic, experimental method of looking at the world help us to keep the debasement of language and the advent of deadening standardization at bay? How can we resist succumbing to that "stereotyped world" of theory and habit that Walter Pater already warned against in his conclusion to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*? Today, in a time of pervasive standardization of thoughts, objects, and persons, an age wherein language is deteriorating into a handful of utilitarian abbreviations, an age of globalization, homogeneity, & the reduction of almost everything to the lowest common denominator, Musil's defense of the individual, of the idiosyncratic, & of the free thought, word, or act, his often hilariously ironic — but quite serious — treatment of the "age of money," simulation, & sameness, is now more trenchant than ever, and equally if not more pertinent. While Musil vividly evokes the secrets and

scandals of cosmopolitan Vienna and Berlin in the 20s & 30s, reacting with wit and wisdom to innovations in technology, art, and politics in his glosses, and exploring the psyches & lives of himself and his contemporaries in his stories and literary sketches, we cannot help but recognize in them our own time and troubles.

It is Musil's special genius to be able to move effortlessly from discussing fashion to the Kantian categorical imperative, and to write with humor, lyricism, and fervor in an open genre availing itself of poetic prose, philosophical essay, fictional narrative, and feuilletonistic lightness. He writes about suit styles, political corruption, social conformity, morality, industrial standardization, language, technology, the legal system, his childhood memories, love, modern art and the destruction of nature; but he is simultaneously asking exacting philosophical questions about the relationship between recurring abstractions and particular facts. He strenuously advocates for the individual, the exceptional, the empirical and experimental mode of *what is*, without ever fully relinquishing the uses of abstraction, idealism, or the importance of imagining *what could be*. Because for Musil, a self-styled "*Monsieur le Vivisecteur*," it is, to borrow Pater's words, "only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations seem alike."¹

1. Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan & Company, 1873) 211.

The real is variegated, changeable, irreducible. And art — as opposed to science or abstract philosophy — can readily figure forth that differentiation. Yet again, art and language do require some level of abstraction, some commonalities, and some concessions to metaphoric similarity. And metaphor brings, in Musil's words, "beauty & excitement" into the world.² And when two usually separate things unite, thoughts "fly."

II. SELECTION & ARRANGEMENT

The texts in this volume have been selected by myself out of a mass of *Nachlaß* material (literary remains) and collected under the title *Thought Flights*. Despite the fact that Musil jokes in the introduction to his own collection, *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, that he does not usually approve of posthumous publications, we also know that he tried very hard amid the fascist atmosphere of the 1930s, as the publication of his continuing work-in-progress on the novel became increasingly improbable, to make arrangements for the publication

2. Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, Vol. I, tr. by Sophie Wilkins, ed. by Burton Pike (New York: Knopf, 1995) 625.

of many unpublished small prose pieces and aphorisms abroad, hoping to have them translated into English & French, but mostly to no avail.³

It is a daunting responsibility to select which pieces of Musil's voluminous *Nachlaß* to present to an English-speaking public that has little to no idea of the mass or content of the existing texts. There are myriad fragments, in diary entries & in folders arranged by Musil, with complex numbering and cross-referencing systems, arranged by theme, character, plot line, possible project. One such folder is titled suggestively, "Beginnings and Notes"; another, revealing our author's ambitions beyond *The Man without Qualities*, is called "The Twenty Works." While one may naturally be eager to access this *Nachlaß* in its entirety, some method of selection is called for, whereby one judiciously ascertains which texts warrant being shared first, and in what context.

3. See Gunther Martens, "Robert Musils Kurzgeschichten: an den Rand geschrieben?" [Robert Musil's Short Stories: Written in the Margins?] *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Germanistenverbandes*, 61.2 (2009) 246–257. "For Musil, the short prose only became relevant again when, after 1933, the possibility of even publishing the remaining part of the still unfinished novel *The Man without Qualities* became increasingly unlikely. In letters Musil mentioned more than once the consideration of publishing "short prose works & aphoristic reflections' (in the format of N[ietzsche] or V[aléry] for example)" (248).

Thus I have been fortunate to have the guidance of Walter Fanta, an expert in the genealogy of Musil's texts, and the chief editor of the *Klagenfurter Ausgabe* (the edition from which I have taken these pieces), in making the selections. All of the small prose pieces that we can reliably attribute to Musil, ones that he published in journals, newspapers, and magazines during his lifetime but did not include in his *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, are included here in sections one and two ("Stories," "Glosses").⁴ The latter two sections of this book ("Literary Fragments" and "Unpublished Glosses") contain unfinished pieces, selected among many on the basis of a few simple criteria, mainly a matter of genre & level of completion. While there are numerous short drafts of similar length in Musil's *Nachlaß*,



4. This excludes the many pieces written during World War I for the Tirolian *Soldatenzeitung* (Soldier Newspaper) that Musil edited, which are mostly unsigned and still require editing before definitive attributions can be made to them. One slightly controversial piece, "The Twilight of War" (not written for the war paper, but published rather in the journal *Roland* on January 1, 1925), has been included in this volume although at least one scholar seems to think it may not have been written by Musil since it is not signed and is the only published piece of Musil's writing that directly argues against war. Others, like Walter Fanta, see it as self-evident that Musil wrote this piece and deliberately did not sign it because of his professional affiliation with the Austrian army.

many of them were conceived as parts of the project that eventually became *The Man without Qualities* (fragments under the titles "Grey-Eyes," "The Archivist," "The Twin Sister," et cetera), while others were conceived as, or later developed into, entirely separate novel-length projects (such as the fascinating notes for Musil's utopian fantasy *The Land over the South Pole*, otherwise known as *Planet Ed* or *The Contemporaries*). Some fragments that seem to have been intended as small prose pieces have not been included because they are only a few sentences long, are mixed in with notes for other projects, or are too sketchy to provide a clear idea of Musil's vision. Others have not yet been definitively attributed, or the manuscripts from which they have been transcribed are still being edited. For this volume, then, I have chosen to include works that have attained a certain level of finish, that are ascertained to be definitively his, and that generally fall within the genre called "small prose."

But what is "small prose" and why did an author consumed with a large unfinished (and possibly unfinishable) project take the time to write it? Many of Musil's contemporaries wrote brief, often light, discursive, observational pieces for newspapers and journals, mixing autobiography, prose poem, philosophical commentary, social critique, fairy tale, lyricism, parable and humorous squib, and often collected them into books. While some of these authors are still known today, others have been largely forgotten, at least in the English-speaking world.

A brief who's who of the world of Germanic small prose would include Robert Walser, Alfred Polgar, Franz Kafka, Peter Altenberg, Walter Benjamin, Karl Kraus, Jan Neruda, Egon Erwin Kirsch, Siegfried Kracauer, inter alia. That many writers, including Musil, wrote brief *feuilleton* pieces, or "glosses," for newspapers in order to make money certainly played a role in the proliferation and establishment of the genre,⁵ but brevity, speed, lightness, sketchiness, freshness, and the agility necessary to quickly shift perspectives or relative stances were also generally valued qualities of the day.⁶ In an imagined interview with Alfred Polgar, whose book of small prose



5. See Gunther Martens: "Robert Musils Kurzgeschichten: 'An den Rand geschrieben?'" where he notes that authors of the time, including Musil, wrote to fit the constraints of the *feuilletons*, the length & the "casual improvised" nature. Authors used these constraints to develop "a unique form of self-referentiality & multi-level coding" (246).
6. See "'Stoffe sehr verschiedener Art... im Spiel... in eine neue, sprunghafte Beziehung zueinander setzen': Komplexität als historische Textur in Kleiner Prose der synthetischen Moderne" ["Putting material of very different sorts... in play... in a new, mercurial relationship to each other': Complexity as Historical Texture in Small Prose of Synthetic Modernism"] in Thomas Althaus, Wolfgang Bunzel, & Dirk Göttsche (eds), *Kleine Prosa: Theorie und Geschichte eines Textfeldes im Literatursystem der Moderne* [Small Prose: Theory and History of a Textual Field in the Literary System of Modernism] (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2007) 254–279. Small

Written in the Margins he celebrated, Musil writes that, “The literature of the future will have something of newspaper prose about it, not its false ethos, but its prosaic prose.”⁷ And this prose will, despite the shortcomings of newspapers, have the energy of a “volcano from which the times spews its fermentation,” or the complexity of the “unceasing ringing of contradictions in all telephones.” It will, like Musil’s own prose, avail itself of Polgar’s subtle technique of “simultaneity,” whereby he presents “things that go together in life but really cannot abide each other as soon as the atmospheric sauce of habit is removed,” or it will echo Polgar’s tendency

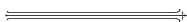


prose is defined by Frank & Scherer as a form characterized by “unfinished combinations, small models of alternate perspective, of sensory perception & an intellectual synthesis of empirical phenomena, which avails itself of the knowledge of as many disciplines as possible — delivered in a prose form that is manageable, one that no longer explicates but rather condenses lyricism, narration, and reflection into literary images” (254).

7. *Klagenfurter Ausgabe* [Klagenfurt Edition]: *Annotated Digital Edition of the Collected Works, Literary and Biographical Remains, with Transcriptions & Facsimiles of All Manuscripts*, edited by Walter Fanta, Klaus Amann, and Karl Corino (Klagenfurt, Austria: Robert Musil Institute, Alpen-Adria Universität, 2009). From now on KA. *Transkriptionen und Faksimiles. Nachlaß Mappen. Weitere Mappen. Abschriften aus Essays/162. (Literaturheft № 10. März 1926. Interview mit Alfred Polgar von Robert Musil.)*

of “letting things that he wants to criticize promenade guilelessly about in the middle of the most praiseworthy impressions.”⁸

In a piece included in this collection, Musil’s “P.A. & the Dancer,” Peter Altenberg, that famous Viennese café flâneur and feuilletonist, is depicted as a “beloved author” who walks tirelessly along the edge of a mountain, sweetly and sadly, ever retreating into the distance as the times rush on away from him: “He heals the soul with a hundred genuflections and the body with encouragements; he calls this awakening the life energies. He is at his best when he is laughed at” (165). The writer as half fool, as observer on the margins, as a tender motile eye looking at a world that is constantly shifting too.⁹ While it may seem strange to suggest that Musil, who was actually accused of being “too intelligent to be a creative writer,” might associate himself with foolishness, his “On Stupidity” essay makes a good case for both the æsthetic & ethical uses of being a fool in the eyes of the world; and in an early version of material that would make its way into *The Man without Qualities*, he imagines his protagonist Ulrich as a “Hans Narr,” a German version of our proverbial Jack the Knave.¹⁰



8. KA: *Interview mit Alfred Polgar*.

9. Gunther Martens notes that Musil’s “essayistic small prose” foregrounded “self-reflexively, the conditions of observations” (255).

Musil once revealed something about his own working methods in a double review of Robert Walser's *Geschichten* (Stories) and Franz Kafka's *Betrachtungen* (Observations) written in 1914 for *Der Neue Rundschau*.¹¹ Walser is depicted in the review almost like Musil's own tailor who suffers from thought flights. Musil imagines Walser on trial before a readership that finds him to be lacking in moral seriousness because he does not seem to have the expected reactions to either bad or good events (theater fires or nature walks). Musil ends by admitting that Walser's pieces are "Spielerei" (capers, shenanigans); and yet they are not merely *literary*, but rather human "Spielerei," "with much softness, dreaminess, freedom, and the moral richness of one of those seemingly unprofitable, lazy days, where our most settled convictions dissolve into a pleasant languorousness." Musil continues by telling us that although Walser's

-
10. See Musil's notes for an early version of the novel titled "House with No Other Side of the Street": "II. Version: The Foolish Hans who has come to an awareness of the uniqueness of his powers. The Foolish Hans who has cultivated his intellect. He searches for his sister — the one who was engaged, engaged late in life, and convinces her." KA. *Lesetexte. Band 4, Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften. Die Vorstufen. Aus dem Nachlaß Ediertes. Vorarbeit zum Roman. Haus ohne Gegenüber.*
11. KA. *Lesetexte. Band 13. Kritiken. Buchrezensionen. Literarische Chronik* (Berlin: Der Neue Rundschau, 1914).

style is too unique to become its own genre, Kafka's first book, *Observations* (1913), seems (even though it appeared before Walser's book) like a special case of the Walser type:

Here too, contemplation of a kind for which a writer fifty years ago would have invented the title *Soap Bubbles*; it suffices to note the specific difference and to say that here the same kind of invention has a sad tone while it is merry in the other, that there we have something freshly baroque, while here we have, in purposeful page-filling sentences, rather something of the conscientious melancholy with which an ice skater performs his long sweeps & figures. Very great artistic mastery here as well, but perhaps only an echo of those small endless paths into emptiness, a humble deliberate nothingness, a friendly tenderness of the kind that prevails for the suicide in the hours between decision and act, or however one will name this feeling which one could name in so many ways, because it simply resonates like a very soft dark middling tone.

It seems likely that Musil wrote his own small prose pieces as a distraction from his more strenuous work on his novel, and thus possibly considered them "Spielerei" too — but not merely of the literary kind; rather, human and morally rich, like Walser's; avoiding, also,

expected uses of words and expected convictions; and conscientiously melancholy, endlessly expanding within the sort of mystical states Musil called "the other condition," timeless states hovering between decision and act, like Kafka's. Serious matters can be explored within seemingly light, frivolous frames and forms, large matters within short texts; whispers can carry weighty portent. Nothing is quite what we would expect; & above all we must guard against putting something entirely new into an old category. A "Spielerei" can be the perfect medium for turning an old certainty on its head, inciting profound insights, or making light of something all too ponderous or ossified.

Musil tells us something more about his approach to his small prose pieces in a December 8, 1924 letter to his friend Franz Blei, who had solicited a short piece for his journal:

As I laid this letter aside yesterday as too gloomy, something came to me that I noted down. A little travel sketch with the code word coquetry; overnight it turned into a scheme. It is not at all original and is called "Susanna's Letter" because I turn the thing on its head and see it from the woman's perspective. In a few days you will receive it and more can come after. You'll have to take the lack of originality that comes with the letter form & with the disguise as a woman in stride if

the rest of it is good; for this masquerade is personally fun for me, & my mood is in need of such a stimulus, even if it is a somewhat cheap one; on the other hand, the extraterritoriality of the woman in the world of men is an easy standpoint from which everything that one wants to discuss can be expressed in the same tone. This time it is only a little gossip within the realm of flirting, but the next time, or soon after, something else could follow... I don't want to sign these letters as Musil, but rather as Rychtarschow [Matthias Rychtarschow, a pseudonym Musil occasionally used, constructed from his paternal grandfather's first name and birthplace in Moravia], since I have not written anything serious for too long; in this way I do away with inhibitions which would otherwise certainly restrict me.

Within the pieces collected here, the reader will note repeating concerns and references, "Stichworte" (key words) which open up doors leading through the labyrinthine hallways of Musil's mind & meet up again in unexpected places. And these "Stichworte" run through all of Musil's work, and recur over and over again, as abbreviations and variations in notebook entries and drafts of essays, aphorisms, stories and novel chapters. As such, almost any genre of writing would serve just as well to explore whatever question exercised our author, seeming to invert Musil's commitment to the particular

case. In fact, Musil once noted that the story of his twentieth-century siblings Ulrich & Agathe would have been “more impressive told as a story about Abdul Hasan Sumnum and Sufism.”¹² In this instance, the general theme is more central than the particular iteration of the individual case, and may be represented or explored via a number of disparate examples. Theme then becomes particular case, and particular case becomes theme. The space between ideal and real, archetype and example, shrinks and expands amid myriad possibilities the way a living breathing person in a Walser story can suddenly become merely a pencil caricature on a café napkin (and vice versa). Musil wrote of his own working method:

There are writers who are obsessed with one theme. They feel: this one or none at all; it's like love at first sight. The relationship of R[obert] M[usil] to his themes is a hesitant one. He has many at once and keeps them after the hours of first love are over, or even if there never were any such hours. He exchanges parts of them arbitrarily. Many half-developed themes wander and never surface in any book.¹³

-
12. Translated & included by Burton Pike in the *Nachlaß* section of *The Man without Qualities, Vol. II* (New York: Knopf, 1995) 1770.
13. KA: *Lesetexte. Band 14: Gedichte, Aphorismen, Selbstkommentare. Selbstkommentare aus dem Nachlass. Zum Roman Parerga und Paralipomena 1921–1937. Vermächtnis.*

So perhaps these small prose pieces can be considered occasional paramours to the great life-time love of the novel. The lover-author is still Robert Musil, with all of his neuroses, genius, obsessions, skills and fantasies, but without the devotion, frustration, profundity, ambivalent tenderness and habitual irritation of a long-term romance. In German an adulterous affair is called a *Seitensprung* — a side spring — which, perhaps, is not much different than a thought flight.

III. TRANSLATION CHALLENGES

Translating Robert Musil can be difficult for a number of reasons, all related to his original cast of mind. The first challenge is in allowing for his tendency to use unexpected words in unexpected combinations and to mix attitudes & qualities that would normally be considered to be in opposition if not even oxymoronic. So much communication consists in surmising *beforehand* what someone will say, inasmuch as people so often speak tautologically. With Musil we must always be on our guard against assuming or expecting anything. The writing and thought are devoid of clichés, and a translator must ever labor to resist choosing conventional phrases for original words and their syntheses. Within

these pages, a motherly woman slices open a fish in her hand; torment is part of the pleasure of a day; an arrested man thinks his sentence is too short; domestic objects are sitting “in slippers, making faces” (40); a house burning down is an “insignificant occurrence” (52–53); an older woman’s wrinkles are compared to the beautiful filigree work of a grand cathedral. We are always being asked to see conventional objects or situations in wholly new ways.

Another challenge for a translator is Musil’s constitutional resistance to positioning himself securely on any specific side — a practice he may have learned from Nietzsche and which he praised in Polgar. Even when, as is often the case, he is criticizing or ridiculing some idea, some person, some situation, he is still often able to find something positive or useful or praiseworthy in what he is attacking. And while sometimes this positive valuation is meant ironically, sometimes it is not. About his resistance to taking definitive positions, in *Robert Musil: Literature and Politics*, Klaus Amann writes: “Musil’s judgments are logical consequences of his [...] unbiased exploration of positions, stances, and situations. They are markers, stations, partial solutions of an ongoing, dynamic process of thinking.”¹⁴



14. Klaus Amann, *Robert Musil: Literatur und Politik* (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007) 31.

Amann then quotes a diary entry of Musil's explaining this speculative method of his:

In the way that a bad person is a more daring speculator when he uses someone else's money than he is when spending his own, I want to follow my thinking out beyond the border of those things that, whatever the circumstances, I could justify; that is what I call "essay," "trial" (*D* 310-II).

Finally, Amann notes that

Musil, in keeping with what he himself characterized as an 'intelligence that moves in different directions that contradict each other' (*D* 485), was rarely content with a position once it had been formulated. His impetus is doubt and his sword is the question mark, and that means constant revision & beginning anew.¹⁵

Musil's resistance to any fixed standpoint as well as his subtle irony is a challenge for a translator and the reader alike. Sometimes he will present an idea so far-fetched as to initially obstruct understanding. The reader (as the translator had before) will think that there must be a word missing, because he cannot possibly mean *that*. But if we unmoor ourselves from expected & conventional



15. Amann, *Literatur und Politik*, 32.

ways of thinking (in fact, only if we do so), we find something new. Thus, in “Moral Institutions” (88–92), we are told that *not* being prosecuted for a crime is worse than being prosecuted, because a prosecution at least confers a public character on a person, which is better than existing in moral limbo. Or in “An Example” (102–104), we are assured that if a questionable idea were to be manifested in reality it might in fact be favorable, since envisioned reforms always turn out much differently than was intended; and in one of the “Susanna Letters” (10–14), we are told that morality does more harm in the world than immorality. And these paradoxes compel us to resist the uncritical acceptance of commonplaces, assumptions, or facile solutions to complex problems.

Another translation challenge is Musil’s specific attention to language & word usage. While in one gloss he writes that “a good writer will always understand how to write so that one could rearrange all of his words and even replace them with others, without changing the meaning” (130), this moment of reprieve for a lazy (but shocked) translator is immediately pulled out from under her feet by the ironic rejoinder: “this makes observation easy and corresponds to the modern principle of producing replacement parts that are readily available everywhere” (130). With Musil, every word is deliberate, and in some cases, of course, there is no correspondingly appropriate English choice. On the other hand, English often offers more word choices than German, & where

Musil thus sometimes is forced to repeat the same word within a few sentences, to keep slavishly to the narrower German possibilities can seem flat in English where we expect more variety. Of course, in instances where a repeated word seemed to me significant for the rhythm or meaning of a sentence, I have labored to maintain Musil's usage.

Where Musil's prose is remarkably buoyant in the original German, moving in a light and effervescent tempo over vast expanses of thought and reference, to reproduce this precarious balance between rhythm, lucidity, precision, and literary fluidity in English has naturally required some changes in syntax (particularly regarding sentence length) & word choice. What must be avoided at all costs in translating Musil is a mindless use of those "replacement parts that are readily available everywhere" — standardization — of language, metaphor, or syntax. Puns, of course, are problematic for all translators, and Musil's writing is no exception. I have tried wherever possible to create corresponding formulations, and where I could find no reasonable approximation in English, I have settled on a note explaining the richness lost in translation.

Translation of the unfinished texts posed its own problems, including the deciphering of abbreviations, gaps, repetitions, variations, and the possibility that Musil had not yet arrived at the right word or had inadvertently used the wrong word in a text that would have

been corrected in a later revision. I have tried to move as gingerly as possible amid the unfinished possibilities, leaving most variations and repetitions, and choosing to present the reader with the rare opportunity of seeing Musil in the process of thinking and arranging, in reaching and fumbling for and alighting upon the right word. But in some cases I have removed a phrase or short paragraph that seemed too unfruitfully repetitive or too irrelevant to the piece, in which cases I have inserted ellipses in brackets and added an occasional note explaining what was deleted. In the case of abbreviations, I have tried to provide careful hypotheses where it was possible, but not to overreach in cases of uncertainty. In one instance (the very last piece in this volume, "Goethe Year"), I have added a few stanzas of a Goethe poem where Musil had only written the first line, assuming that he either would have taken the time to write it all out in the final version, or that his readers would be more familiar with the remainder than English-speakers today. Notes are likewise provided throughout to provide context that may have been lost over time and distance. But I have restrained myself as much as I could from adding too much scholarly commentary in the interest of the literary experience. May it be as fresh as possible. May it allow minds to open and be receptive to flying thoughts.

—Genese Grill, New Year's Day, 2015
Burlington, Vermont

I.

STORIES



SUSANNA'S LETTER



My Dear — I absolutely recommend that young men who have the looks for it bandage up one of their eyes; even in love less is more. On our last journey a man with only one eye sat across from me; the other was covered by a black bandage. I assure you, it is melancholy, this black-covered, dashing eye, withdrawn from the world; you can tell yourself ten times over that this man probably just poked his eye with his dirty fingers, but your fantasy doesn't want to believe that it is just a catarrh. You can also try to convince yourself as much as you want (if this one-eyed state really *did* have a poetic cause), that the poetry of having one eye, from Wotan to Wagner, is merely the kitsch of our brothers' dueling. Or that it is a handy excuse for husbands who, as soon as they attain the majestic years & begin to get comfortable, commonly point to Odin's example, whose wisdom was won at the expense of sensuality. It won't help you at all; the dark eye plays Chopin upon you.

You are more learned than I am: I think something like this is called a minus variant. It is a defect when looked at rationally, but it is arousing. That's how it was with me. The invention of the monocle certainly stems from this one-eyed business.

From this I gather what kind the pleasures of our times are: while the black-bandaged eye enhances the free one and renders it pictorially mysterious — one immediately searches for the other one — the “armored” eye smites its twin from the field. In fact I can’t remember the eye color of a single one of our monocle-wearing acquaintances. And this is probably just the way they want it: glittering, dazzling, stabbing, but not allowing anyone to stab back. They have turned a spiritual attraction into a ridiculous intimidation technique. But I was able to discover the eye-color of my stranger right away. If it is true that a coarse log calls for a coarse axe, then, judging by the “sharpness” of this axe, our female fantasies today must really be first-rate German oaks.

The healthy eye of my stranger lay half in the shadow of his fur coat, hanging down from above. It appeared in response to a small movement whenever it wanted to look at me, which happened often enough. But as soon as I looked up, it disappeared just as adroitly. And the black oval of the bandage caught my look like a shield, while the receding enemy took aim from out of the jungle of the fur. On train rides that are not so long, this is quite a droll game. We both remained, as is only proper, fully earnest throughout. I know exactly what I look like. Not so young anymore, as you will admit. My chin was once energetic, and my neck straight. Today there is a light layer of fat over both, like a softly nestling scarf. Sometimes in the mirror this has an attraction for me,

somewhat like the feeling of heavy winter garments. Or like longer clothes with high buttoned collars, under which the body can still just be sensed, aroused to the faintest state of excitement. The sort of excitement that arises from all kinds of uncertainty. I also love it that my hips, in contrast to my height, have just reached the extreme of width that is still beautiful, that the spindle of my thigh is still spun somewhat high, but not as high as it once was, and that I can no longer place a silk thread in the tender recess between my breasts and abdomen while standing up without having it fall down, as I once could. I think to myself, this is how an acrobat must feel on the tightrope in the lowest, most swaying middle. It is all downward going from here on out, but every step becomes calmer and more secure. Still, I can easily imagine that a man twenty years younger than I would shudder at me, like Joseph once did, if I were to forget myself & act like Potiphar[’s wife] with him. Even my brownish skin must add to this effect, since it has begun to darken in the place where my neck rests upon my breast, and can no longer bear the pale powder that my “brightened” hair demands. But my eyes still shine darkly within their incense burners, and between them my blonde nose stands out, with all the allure of contrast. To do justice to my eyes it should really turn nobly upwards, but it juts straight out into the air instead. It is not because I have no illusions about friendship that I describe all this to you so objectively, but rather because I am convinced

that it is not such a terrible thing; there are only two mistakes that one should not make: either not notice it, or become blind out of disgust. Then at least something good will come out of it. My husband must have seen every detail of my body by now, and he loves me anyway; he loves me as I am. Sometimes that makes him unbearable to me. For it takes all my power from me. I should say, it takes all the fantasizing out of my body. Then I am like a finished book, one that has already been declared to be very beautiful; for, the fact that a book is beautiful is no consolation for its having already been read.

And now I am reminded that I still owe you an answer to your question: It is naturally all the same to me *what* I read. I need the first fifty pages, perhaps, to get immersed in a book, and during that time I am still sensitive to the greater or lesser skill of the author. But after the first fifty pages I simply burn with excitement that I still have three hundred unknown pages before me, or even just three; it doesn't matter, just as long as I still see one page ahead. The book doesn't even have to be suspenseful; rain drops drumming on the window pane are less edifying but much more suggestive than Beethoven. Incidentally, I do not mean to present myself as a model reader here, but when I am on the last page I see every writer as a betrayer. Also in a man, the most important thing is that he allows us to be *possible* to the highest degree — as long as he is not fulfilled by us. Because I am convinced — though you must not tell anyone, for

I cannot prove it — that even Napoleon would have been very disappointed as a young man if someone had prophesied that he would someday be just the king of the French & not king of the world, pope, the first man to fly, etc. Yes, that his decline began in his first moment of self-satisfaction. What did we learn in our natural history lessons? Nature wastes millions of seeds, just so that a single goal can be reached.¹ Thus monogamy is really a debased form of fornication, against nature.

A person who observes with only one eye has a long look; it moves along like a fingertip over the face and the body. I sensed a powerful curiosity — not to touch me, that would have been an indiscretion, which the well-bred stranger would not have allowed himself — but to carefully explore me. One moment he was here, the next there; sometimes his indiscretion was unbelievably indiscrete; the prettiness of it was that one experienced the intellectual effort involved. I opened or closed my fur and my silk shawl, revealed parts, propped up my arm or let it fall in my lap. I imagine I challenged the stranger quite a bit in his attempt to make a picture of the whole from outlines and details. And I can only assume that he created me in the most skillful fashion, while we both had no preconceived idea of what the ultimate conclusion would be. Do you remember having read in Nietzsche: “Everything good makes me fruitful; that is the only form of gratefulness that I know”? That is a wonderful sentence — for women who want no children.

From time to time 'Manni' asked me if he should pass me another book or some sweets or a bottle of something: an abyss lay between us. On the other side of this abyss I found myself with the stranger. But see, we were coming closer to our destination, and my husband became agitated with preparations for our arrival. He opened all the little suitcases, shut them, put them away, took them out, put them aside, et cetera; the suburbs flew by. And here comes the reason why I am writing to you today at all. Suddenly I thought to myself, what will the eye of the stranger say to all these openings revealed to him by my husband in such a naïve and tactless manner? But as I looked up I realized that the eye was no longer looking at us, but flew rather back and forth in the most worried way amid all the luggage of its master. And then I noticed for the first time that I myself had been occupied for quite a while with nothing but my little golden pocket mirror, powder puff, & the rest of that "cat's toilette" that has become so unconscious with us. I had, in fact, totally forgotten the stranger.

And this is really quite a remarkable ending. No one was waiting for me and I was making myself up for no one, while the concrete, the real man across from me, who already had had his hand on the latch, could only think me silly for it. Or I had burned the dove in the pan on the stove, because sparrows were sitting on the roof. Not even for that reason, but just for one common sparrow, who in his commonality was only a fiction.

I really had to think this over. And as I did, an old but very fitting example came to me. After all, it is really quite similar to the men's game of the armaments industry, which carries on without any particular planned war, but just as a common custom; at most an incident occurs once in a while. Men are much more like us than we think.

THE FAIRYTALE OF THE TAILOR

I.



I don't believe that he was a tailor. He stood before the judge and said:

"I want to be in jail; jail is where I feel best of all now.

My mother has died, I have fallen out with my friends; alas yes, & I treated my mother not at all as I should have.

What is life worth?! But not everyone can commit suicide. Have mercy on me!

Have mercy on me, Your Honor, and lock me up forever! I would be happy about it! In jail I could work as a tailor & would no longer need to go out into the world."

But the judge did not understand him, and was satisfied with a one-week imprisonment.

But the condemned man appealed the punishment on the grounds that it was insufficient.

Insufficient punishment can only be appealed by the State's Attorney, the judge told him.

But the State's Attorney did not care to appeal.

II.

I believe it was soon after this that I rolled a large bomb across the Ring of November 12th.⁷ It was larger than myself. I had worked on it my whole life. I wanted to blow my epoch up into the air with it. A guard stopped me and looked at the bomb. I said: I must explode my epoch into the air with it, because they don't understand me. Officer, these are my works. At that moment the bomb even seemed to me to be as large as those giant rolls of paper that are piled up outside the newspaper printers. "Oh, you are from the newspaper..." said the officer tenderly, "You don't need a pass."

III.

My bomb rolled with a wonderful swerve through the archway under the Parliament ramp, into the great hall, where the many guards always sit when a revolution is threatened. I was allowed to light it, but it went out, because people were talking above me. When I cried out: "This will be a bomb twenty years after my death!" all the guards attacked me. I had an instrument — I think it is called a chest drill; it is a borer, which one holds against one's chest and works with a hand crank; one bores holes with it into iron. I defended myself with it.

I put it between the second & third button of a guard and cranked it. He became paler and paler. But the others tried to grab my arms, and though they were not immediately able to hold them fast, they became more and more entangled, which eventually kept me from continuing.

This is how I was arrested.

IV.

“Your Honor!” I said.

“Your Honor, I have studied a great deal and practiced, because I wanted to become a writer and to know my epoch, not only — ” I defended myself shamelessly, but the judge already knew that, smiled, & asked:

“Did you make money?”

“Never!” I exclaimed happily, “For that is forbidden!”

Then the first chairman looked the second chairman in the face, the lawyer looked at the lawless lawyer,⁸ the State’s Attorney looked at the court reporter, and all of them laughed. “I demand expert counsel!” called the defense attorney triumphantly.

“You are being charged because you make no money,” said the judge.

V.

Since then I have been in prison.

He lacks money glands, is what the expert counsel said; because of this he lives without a moral compass and is immediately upset if someone treats him with disrespect; in addition, he suffers from thought flight. He cannot remember what others have told him a hundred times already; instead he is always looking for new ideas. And so on. The opinions of the literary experts were even worse. On the whole I am an inferior person who simply should not escape punishment.

But since it has come to this, I live in a fairy tale of orderliness. No one scolds me for unseemly behavior; on the contrary, among the other prisoners I stand out like a precious exception. My intelligence is superior. As a writer I am an authority, and am even allowed to write letters for the guards. Everyone praises me. I used to be an inferior person in the world of those who follow the rules of life correctly. Here, in the world of people who are incorrect, I am, according to the *consensus omnium*, a moral and intellectual genius. And I do nothing for money, only for praise & self-praise. I work as a tailor again. Magical essence of work, my soul is a needle; it flies in and out hour after hour, all day, it buzzes like a bee, and there is as little in my head as if I were laying in the grass and the bees were humming.

VI.

But if someone were to prove to me that none of this is true, and that I am not a tailor who was once inferior and that I do not live in a prison: then I would ask the President of the Republic for an honorary place in a madhouse.

It is nice there too. I would be fully up to the expectations, & no one would be surprised that I do what I do for its own sake. Yes, on the contrary, there they would even clear all obstacles out of my way.

MORAL INSTITUTIONS



The citizen is born with eyes, ears, a mouth, and a nose; in the age of majority he gains yet another organ, *a word of mouth*, or a reputation.¹⁸ This organ is neither small nor large, neither beautiful nor ugly, but it is under surveillance by the police. And while one can do a good deal with one's regular mouth — pleasant and unpleasant things — one can do nothing at all with one's word of mouth. One has no power over it; that is the dangerous thing about it. Very few citizens suspect that their secret private life is more dangerous than a notorious criminal act, wherein one knows what one wants, how much one can be punished for it, and what the thing is called.

A not very rare case familiar to us all is the case of adultery. He who has not yet committed it, certainly has at least heard of it, for all the world is filled with jokes and comedies about it. But one can say, thank God, that people commit adultery much less than they talk about it, since four people can only commit two adulteries. One commits them quietly; but once in a while it happens that one party makes some noise, and in this case it is usually the party that is actually not supposed to know about it, and this party can make a

denunciation, and, according to the laws of almost all civilized nations, the adulterers will be punished. When nations were not yet civilized, the punishment sometimes consisted of death; today it consists of maybe fourteen days arrest. This is not so much when one considers that the premeditated and successful effort needed to smash a window receives generally the same amount of punishment and is less pleasurable. Probably the law would like to be stricter even today, but marriage is a so-called holy entity (like, for example, art), and so the nation never knows how much it is worth.

What really sharpens the punishment then consists in something else, namely, in the *word of mouth* that is opened by such occasions; it is in just these kinds of situations that it emerges as a force that radically alters people. A case like this usually begins with a woman, grown somewhat strong-willed around the waist (with outraged tongue, flaming bosom, broken heart, and a corrupted sense of shame; in other words, doubtlessly already so terribly injured physically that she has a right to public support), dragging the "demonic woman" who has stolen her husband, the "seducer," in front of the judge, where the "snake" innocently defends herself on the grounds that everything that happened was only platonic. She can really say this innocently, since only the smallest number of women study Plato before they enter into a relationship with a man, and they understand by platonic merely a not-yet-entered-upon level

of the unplatonic, requiring no particular study. At this point, however, the judge bids the organ of law & order open up the word of mouth concerning "the defendant's character," revealing evidence culled from the moral establishment; and the outcome for the defendant's character is, in all cases, annihilating. The former demon who was shrouded in mystery transforms herself into a citizen with a birth certificate and a residency permit, and she who just now was the beloved is revealed to be a "former cabaret actress." Yes, I knew of such a case, and it proceeded to a trial, even though there was no evidence, apparently only because the former cabaret actress had become the "owner of a coffeehouse," and had, after selling the coffeehouse, "pursued no orderly activities," but instead went on "errant adventures in establishments of pleasure" and especially was "on the lookout for well-situated gentlemen," whom she is said to have received in her apartment "even in the evenings." She was no orphan in need of protection; but did she deserve the dreadful verdict leveled by the moral institution in its annihilating report, concluding as it did with the full weight of an abused public agency, that despite everything it did *not* possess the authority at this time to take action against Mrs. X?

Here the foundations of personal morality collapse underneath us. Because such a thing can happen to anyone: no one is immune, however far he may stray, to the possibility that the moral establishment will have *no*

authority to take action against him. Who among us has not once wanted to be an actor? And who would pursue an occupation if he were lucky enough to sell a coffeehouse? Who among us has not sometimes been on the lookout for errant adventures in houses of pleasure? Maybe even have received well-situated women by night? And if he is not a rascal, even well-situated men will have gone in and out of his apartment by the bright light of day, and thus he, or the moral institution, falls under suspicion of inverted feelings! One naturally believes that one oneself is a normal and possibly up-standing person, but therein precisely lies the mistake. One has only not yet given the moral establishment "the authority" to judge one. Lacking this, everyone is apparently on the same level. Man is only a gambler, whom fate lets win for a while, only to take everything away from him one day. For the eye of the law is watching you. You don't even know where its office is, and you can't deceive it. One day you will be slandered and never recognize yourself again.

This is why private life is the most dangerous thing that there is. It would be cruel if we did not suggest at least one protection against this danger. It consists in acquiring a public character as soon as possible, even if it is a humble one. For the eye of the law recognizes a public character, because it is itself of a public nature; and according to the old wisdom, the eye could not recognize light if it were not itself made of light matter.

Every civil servant has his own personnel folder, and if there is nothing specific about his personal character in it, at least he has his official character. But the most favorable documentary testimony about a private character consists in his not having a prior record and there not being anything else of a negative nature that can be alleged against him. And since, naturally, that amounts to the same thing as saying that up until now he has understood how to avoid the persecutions of the authorities through considerable guile, every private person can see for himself that, until he is captured, the state-controlled authority can see nothing more in a private person than a not-yet-captured criminal. The only possible exceptions to this are notorious wealth or a personal recommendation.

We have thought a good deal about the causes. They might be a consequence of original sin, for in the end it is this that is responsible for the fact that so many people are born without an official character. Things will improve as the peoples of Europe progress even further toward increased bureaucracy.

SPEED IS WITCHERY



It is always good to use words as one should, that is, without thinking about it. One can easily go on for ten sentences before a word appears that needs to be thought about. This is doubtless a freewheeling kind of style that has about it an air of speeding traffic over a long distance. And it seems that the intellectual tasks of the day can only be mastered with its assistance. But if one pays attention to niggling details, one will go falling into a hole in language. Language no longer ambles along like it did in the days of our ancestors.

Consider for example the phrase, "head over heels"; what an important and much used phrase in a time that depends so much on tempo! How many people use this phrase in a rush without considering how many difficulties it creates for speed? For to catapult head over heels toward somewhere would be to generate such a frantic acceleration that your body would seem to be wheeling over your feet, & your feet over your head; speed grabs you by the cuffs of your pants; the law of inertia presses down on your head, and you are torn out of yourself like a rabbit out of its hide. But when was a person ever in such a mad rush? God yes, as a child, when one ran

with unsteady legs. As a boy when one rode one's bike down a steep hill. Maybe as a horseman when one didn't really know how it would end. At a paltry speed of ten to twenty miles per hour! If a car or a train wanted to drive head over heels they would have to creep!

Head over heels does not express a speediness then, but rather a relationship between the quickness & the danger of the conveyance, or between the quickness and the excitement of extreme exertion. The streamers have to fly, the eyes have to lather, and the flanks must cramp. But then even a snail rushes along head over heels, in an utterly accelerated snail tempo, madcap, in peril. Secondary observations are once again always the decisive ones. It is said that a small car speeds faster than a large wagon, and the more worn down the rails are, the faster a train speeds. Even romping is a matter of habituation. There are neighbors who think it means carefully gliding along through life as if on waxed floors.

One looks around in language for more solid expressions. How would it sound, for example, if one said: "He stuck the dagger in her heart head over heels?" Even the most daring novelist wouldn't bring that over the lips of his quill. He doesn't know why. But he makes the dagger thrust like lightning. Quick like a thought would not quite be the correct speed for it. But a lover is with his beloved as quick as a thought and never suddenly like lightning. These are mysteries.

A general always advances in forced marches. Someone who has finally been found falls into your arms, but flies to your breast. A supervisor who comes too late blusters about; his office employee, on the other hand, enters breathless; the speed of movement has, for each of them, the opposite effect on their breath. Perhaps it also should be mentioned that one always comes flying, but is gone in a flash.

One can see that these are difficult problems. But the worst of it is that modern life is filled with new velocities for which we have no expressions. Remarkably, speeds are the most conservative expressions that exist. Despite the train, the airplane, revolutions per minute, slow motion, their outermost limitation is the same today as it was in the Stone Age; nothing in language has gotten any faster than a thought or lightning, or any slower than a snail. That is a devilish situation for a time period that has no time and that believes itself called upon to give the world a new speediness; the apples of alacrity are dangling in front of us, but we cannot seem to open our mouths.

But maybe the future will be totally different. Classically experienced speeds still do exist today, but only in places where one would least expect them: with farmers in the country. There lightning still flies through the air, the passing car blasts through the chickens, and there are paths where one can fall flat on one's face for rushing. In the city, the only speed one still senses is that of the

connection that has to be made, the haste of disembarking and the uncertainty about getting somewhere at the right time. Without the blessings of neurasthenia, we would have already lost this kind of speed too, since in the worst case scenario, the person in a hurry, instead of wheezing and perspiring vapors, relinquishes a dollar and a half for a cab that will do this for him. And the higher one rises in the realms of power, the quieter it gets. A turbine factory with fifty thousand volts of horsepower hums almost silently, and the most monstrous speeds of technology are still only a gentle rocking. Life becomes more prosaic & practical the larger it gets. A boxing match between two professionals makes a lot less noise than a street fight between two amateurs, and an explosion is not as dramatic as a knifing. The great new intensities have something that our feelings cannot grasp, like rays of light for which an eye does not yet exist. But it will be some time yet before we really say relaxing-train instead of express, and only use the phrase head over heels when we want to describe or depict something like the evening stillness, when far & wide nothing stirs, and the rare quiet rushes over us like an ocean.

TALKING STEEL



“Blech reden” (talking steel), an idiom meaning talking nonsense, is an ingeniously invented German phrase. It contains: the shimmering that is not gold; its thoroughly unpleasant sound; its boldness; something hammered out. If one were to say “writing steel,” how many contemporary publications could be explained! But the use of this phrase is on the decline. Soon it will go the way of “eterne” and “troth.” Later generations of writers will say in their commemorative speeches: “Our forefathers wrote steel,” & an unbelievable shiver of veneration will come over the audience.

Why can't language hold on to such perfect constructions? When one finds a flattering word for anything that is hateful, one calls such dying the birth of the language. But why does language still live? It has become twice as long-winded as it was a few centuries ago, without correspondingly increasing its expressive ability. We leave out the articles, we leave out the verbs, we leave out the meanings; we step on its head in the front and on its tail in the back, but it is no use, language always gets longer. We are certain that it is becoming uglier, without being able to alter the fact. We complain about it, but obviously still persist in it. If anything can be called a dog's life it is the life of language!

I don't know too much about it, but people have occupied themselves seriously and scientifically with the question, and perhaps the results of these studies could be called evolutionary laws. Whenever one does not follow rules in other cases, one is imprisoned; but when one breaks a standard rule of language, one is honored as a founder of an evolutionary law; that is the difference, and it is not negligible. I recently attended a dog show, and I noticed a number of contestants who rather astonishingly fit the conception I have had my whole life of the word "mutt." In Austria we call a dog like this, who looks like a greyhound in the front and a dachshund in the back, like a bull dog on the right and a terrier on the left, a "promenade mixture." I asked around; they were in fact promenade mixtures; but their owners told me with pride that their breed had been settled a few dog generations ago, and since then they are called, if I am not mistaken, Austrian blends, have won many prizes, and look like a carefully normalized chaos. The human race is also this way evolutionarily speaking, as is the German language. Legal language, the language of the newspapers, of students, of crooks, of neighboring peoples, of the Catholic Church and the Roman Empire have, for better or for worse, left their traces; and if one does not want to object to the better, then why not at least object to the worse? Unfortunately, the well-known laws of evolution tell us that man restrains the worst least of all. But even language habits are habits;

and why is it that we develop bad habits with particular fondness? Language flows from out of the mouths of people and then back in, and moves from its point of egress back once again to the heart & nerves.

Because our fondness for bad habits is proof of a certain degree of respect for the contributions of mankind. One adopts such habits because by doing so one gains the floor. Because one impresses. Because they are in fashion. Because one sees and hears them every day. Because they are comfortable, and because one doesn't like to think about things oneself. But one probably adopts them most of all precisely because they are not good. We have a very humble suspicion when it comes to what is good: we have developed the idea that heaven is disembodied, alcohol-free, for non-smokers, and infinitely far away from us. We can only be partially certain that we have not acted artificially when we have behaved very badly. We suffer under the incomprehensibility of having once named something that we do not want to do, the good; and we do not feel ourselves called to proceed any further toward it than is absolutely necessary. It is very difficult to explain why we feel more secure when we don't lift ourselves up too high; we even say that the lie has short legs, in order to justify the fact that we love it!

In any case, it is true that in both writing and speaking we feel a strong aversion to the moral doctrine of grammar. But one especially ought to mention here that

we do not even know how we might begin to put up a real resistance against this failing, nor why we should even do so. We need our language like the millipede needs its feet, which it should never think of for even a moment, if it is not to collapse on the spot. Happily, the meaning of words remains hidden from us. We all speak like the leader of the congregation, who says: "If we gaze upon this basis," or: "We will not allow the horizon upon which we stand to be ruptured!" One understands him well enough, even if he doesn't know what he is saying. How he manages that is his own problem, and the grammarians probably have no idea either. Apparently, the fundamental phenomenon of language consists in someone wanting to make someone notice something that he knows or feels quickly; to this end, there exists the most complicated system of cranks & levers that has ever made a person nervous; it is as puzzling as a piano, but if someone bangs on it with his fist, we know immediately more or less what he means, without even having to check where he was aiming.

So, one should not believe that something has to be correctly said to be correctly understood; and therein lies the mystery of a living language. It is horrid when one is forced, contrariwise, to be correct; and only bad writers make their reader pay attention to every one of their words. The reader notices immediately that in eighty out of a hundred cases he doesn't have the slightest idea why this particular word has been used,

and he would be right to find such a mode of careful expression confusing. Especially cumbersome are the little words & the choice of their positions. But a good writer will always understand how to write so that one could rearrange all of his words and even replace them with others, without changing the meaning; this makes observation easy and corresponds to the modern principle of producing replacement parts that are readily available everywhere.

3.

LITERARY
FRAGMENTS



P. A. & THE DANCER²⁶



A lady in the fourth row could not find a way to end her private conversation. A young gentleman behind her leaned forward and backward impatiently, and for a change of pace from left to right as well. But the dancer, who read aloud from "P. A.'s" books, had already spoken the word noble twelve times and the word exceptional eight times, when the lady thought of one more important thing to say and then finally became silent. After that there was a general moment of silence; then another inattentive mood rose slowly to the surface. Even the young man, who had listened with an amiable expression, became annoyed. She cannot recite, he thought. Then: she honors Peter Altenberg with ceremonial, formal German like a serving maid who has a fancy lover. Like a serving maid? — like a modest, good little serving girl, P. A. would say. Oh well. But then she danced. And she certainly did not perform a *Critique of Pure Reason* with her legs or the footnotes to Diel's *Den Fragmentis Veterorum Stoicorum* & her thighs did not elucidate the darkest spiritual uncertainties as Duncan's do. Instead, she danced more cabaret; she had a splendid costume, dulcet movements, & beautiful legs. Her legs sometimes appeared

from behind her garments as the legs of performers appear in the opening underneath the curtain of a circus tent. Heart thumping. A fleeting scent. Loosened hair, green velvet, gold trim. But really the scent was the most powerful part, the scent. When one opened the trunk with mama's and sisters' winter clothes, the same scent arose along with the darkness that bedazzled one's eyes. One had to run away, lie down in it, steal something; one wanted to be a little stable boy or to go after this smell that receded into irreality like a growling gorilla with swinging arms. Only then could one make out the well-known friendly frills and skirts, perspiration shields and fur pieces.

Then the man's thoughts acquired a philosophical tumescence. Longing? What was it like? Sometimes I have longed for a glass of water, but when I really longed deep down for a beloved, I didn't want a real one. I did not suddenly see a new goal; I saw no goal at all, but I was saturated by a stronger, more masterful, foreign kind of expectation, like a room so radiant that one believes something must enter it. One feels a wonderfulness of receptivity, toward no real thing that exists, no real thing that one could receive.... The dancer slowly beckoned his memories into his limbs, like a hot lamp softly humming. The one with the scent and the thumping heart came from a circus in the city of Steyr in Upper Austria. Back then he was a little fellow and could not grasp that such wandering people could lead a regular family life;

and when the town dignitaries returned the greeting of the principals on the street and even remained standing with them, he was thrilled by their incomprehension. But in the meantime he had bored through to the unimaginable; in the back, in the make-shift walls of the circus, he had secretly cut a hole, and only when it let him see into the stable & not the dressing room did his courage fail him and he hadn't dared to make a second one. But then he rooted out a cave in the city woods and actually sat inside it, thought about the marvelously beautiful Blanche, who was below in the city at that time with loosened hair, in green velvet on her white horse, practicing jumps for the evening; and he fiercely gripped a deer antler in his pocket, ready for anything that might come.

But the next memory was from a restaurant called Casino in a medium-sized city. It was part of the cabaret, had little rooms decorated in white and gold, with red carpets. Habitues, regulars, took their dinners there, quiet, friendly, on their way out. But the fact that they stayed there to the last, gently and courtly, even taking the time to pause for a tender smile at their escorts in the doorway, was what drew him every week to this little Casino where he spent all his pocket money on a fine dinner that he devoured all by himself. How is it done? I want you: singer, dancer, trapeze artist... You already know how & what for. But listen, I don't mean to make any mere declarations of love; I don't want to throw

myself away; I know how you are; I want to have you... with as little euphemism as possible, for you are wonderfully beautiful, dark... But don't think for a moment that I don't know how you are to be attained: one pays for a dinner, promises a jewel and says: *allons* — *allons* one says and already you know. — For an elite connoisseur, this is the only way that your beauty becomes the glorious abyss that it is. But how is it possible for one to smile tenderly without suddenly crying out from being in love & without begging you, despite everything, to just stay sweet...?

But not one of them understood him. They sat together, spoke of agents and venues, or read the ads in the trade papers. "A front man who can perform good somersaults sought." "Alto needed at 12 Sisters..." It is a profession, an honest profession. And if one accepts an invitation once in a while, why shouldn't one be really gay for once? That every night one has to say or do something indecent on the stage..., really, what do you have against it?... What can you be thinking? The people fly to such things as to sugar! Little man, even if somebody blames us, what do you want from us anyhow...?!

Then the young man's thoughts strayed again. As long as the widow is not thrown on the pyre, there are graduated differences. Whether one is the life partner of a new man every night, or for three, five, fifteen years? Or just being able to consider that it could be nice? And ourselves? When Kamilla A. dies or betrays us, we come

down with peritonitis from heartache, and when Kamilla B. comes along, we are masters of shameless forgetfulness once again and in fact are actually truly pure and untouched. [With Kamilla M. we finally have arrived, and note only the mysticism of the experience; allow ourselves from then on to have our nails painted pink and our body hair removed in the Roman style; and we powder ourselves under the arms — all from an uneasy feeling of going astray and not being able to turn back anymore.]²⁷

When the dancer read something aloud again, the young man's earlier inconclusive thoughts about P.A. became very vivid. It occurred to him: P.A. was a great writer. But we must speak of a phenomenon that becomes increasingly clearer in this writer who has gradually been left behind: the more that he retreats from us, becomes less nuanced, more stereotyped, the more sharp his contour becomes, surrounded by a bright halo, like people in front of an evening sky. If we turn around, we see him like that on a distant chain of hills, walking back & forth, always here and there over the same distance, with an almost incomprehensible lack of weariness, but distinguished by that bright, bright halo. His heights are called the hills of goodness & are nineteen hundred and eight years closer, in any case, than the last ones of the same name. He will never leave them again, & manages a small apothecary there: Grillon's laxative

to induce a soft, exhilarating stool; decoctions from the tree of life for little girls who have gotten into trouble; flowers for melancholics; little, primitive hourglasses for the all-too frolicsome ones. He heals the soul with a hundred genuflections and the body with encouragements; he calls this awakening the life energies. He is at his best when he is laughed at. If a girl says to him: "Be nice, Peter; the Baron wants to come to see Paula tonight; sleep for just this once in the servant's room," then Peter, like the wise, dear elephant, like the earnest, considerate tapir, follows the wonderfully beautiful, noble girl, and lays himself down on the servant's bed. "If it was a help to you," he says the next day to Paula. But if another one says, "Get lost, Peter! You're a dishrag, not a man!" — he gathers up his soft organs, lifts up his eyes to her once more, and leaves. Leaves and soon stumbles again over his soul's intestines, drags them along, hears laughter, gathers them up into himself again with a patient gesture, and continues on. Continues nobly, sad & ridiculous, legendary, and with a face quite similar to our own, ... a Christ with a pince-nez of horn.

This occurred to the young man about the remarkable and beloved P.A. while he wandered through his writings. Why? He didn't know. It would have been much more tender if he had not had all of that other business weighing on him. For which reason he finally became terribly out of sorts, and devoted himself, somewhat sadly, to the little dancer all the more.

But now, not only because she danced wonderfully, but also because she read so poorly and made P.A. small with her anxious efforts. A languorous longing rose in the air. This longing, he felt, is like the half-illuminated circus when one comes too early for the show. Blanche will appear, Blanche will smile, Blanche will accept the invitation of the Herr District Commissioner. She will be laid down at night in the great empty circus, where only a gas-lit star burns; and when one opens the door she will smell enchanted, like the clothes in mama's chest. And even at home, when he looked at the room in which he sat in the mirror and found it a bit unreal, he said to himself: one ought to follow that trail more often... feelings that have never become real, sudden, reckless flashes.... What was that like back then... and even an hour ago? One ought not forget such things immediately... Then he thought of how he had seen Blanche one more time; it was the only kiss that she had ever given him, on the way to the train station in Leoben; he had been fifteen years old; Blanche was already somewhat gaunt in the face. "We are going away tomorrow, away from Europe," she said, "to Spain..."

WAR DIARY OF A FLEA

PREFACE



Such faithful companions as we are to mankind — our claim to this title is much greater than that of the dog, since on the whole humans have many more fleas than they have dogs, even if only because multiple fleas alight on each dog — and as significant as our contributions to the development of humanity have been, since the fear of us has added so much to their cleanliness, and the use of soap is well known to be a measure of civilization: despite all of this, humans have spread many imprecise ideas about us. They even know nothing about our life expectancy. [...] ²⁹

I know that my race does not occupy a comfortable position in the age of hygiene. — The poetry of fleas is utterly old fashioned. — But as long as books are written about fleas & dogs... Moreover, nobody will deny that we are extremely bellicose and brave. We may lay claim to our place in the age of militarism as much as in the age of sports. Supplement: I was taking my summer vacation with a Tirolean farmer... on foreign ground. Parasite of blood. What a symbol!

And I believe that most people think of us as seasonal animals, like mosquitos. Indeed, the mortality rate for us fleas is horrifically high, but only because we are subjected to the most gruesome persecution & rarely die a natural death. But I can assert, and regard the contrary evidence of science without concern, that the natural life span of a flea is not really so short at all. In 1914 I was already a flea in the full ripeness of my intellectual capacities, and today I am writing my memoirs; my memory is excellent and I feel as of yet none of the bitterness of aging which Casanova felt while writing his.

A second prejudice has to do with our irritating nature. Here I must admit that there are of course wholly ordinary fleas; yes, that perhaps the majority of us deserve the scathing judgment which people are always ready to wield against us. In my opinion, however, these characteristics are only a result of our long history of cohabitation with mankind. We are hard-nosed, athletically skilled, death-defying, not to be shaken off; once we have set our minds to something, we sacrifice the blood of other creatures, and multiply in great numbers since we treasure love & family highly; these are characteristics of the strong man, which, however, he never grants others the right to possess.

If, nevertheless, I speak of a prejudice, I really mean that one must differentiate between fleas just as much as one must do so between people. Those caught by man are the intrusive fleas, while the intellectual, sensitive, educated, delicate fleas elude his acquaintance — aside

from which, it would be an unjust requirement if one demanded of fleas that in their case alone the highly refined creatures among them would make up the majority. One will make the acquaintance of such a flea in me, and I can thus dispense with a description except for one preliminary remark: a fine flea puts great value on cohabitating with an important human. He searches for a long time until he finds the one who attracts him; and then he is not easily parted from his companion in whose intellectual & physical destiny he takes a lively interest. He strives to spare him all possible unpleasantness in their shared household, and nourishes himself therefore from people — or animals — with whom they come in contact, & goes on hunting expeditions from which he returns as quickly as possible. In this he has — I must mention this so that what comes later will be understood — a talent for orientation like a migratory bird. And only in emergencies does he assault the gentleman or lady in question. Once in the course of many months the city dweller notices with annoyance — in the solitude of rural nature it happens much more frequently — that in his car, on the streetcar, in the train, in a crowd, or through the cursed dogs who turn the house into a pig sty, he has been visited by a flea: of course, it is commonly the case that this is the vulgar flea (Latin: *pulex irritans*); but sometimes the human has no idea that it is the same extremely discreet spiritual flea who has lived with him for years.

It is indeed true that we are born in filth. But not a few upwardly mobile people are proud of precisely that in themselves. And in general, the human process of giving birth, as well as much else about and within human life, is not exactly the cleanest. It is not true that we prefer badly groomed humans. Ordinary fleas probably tend toward this just as often as ordinary people do. The fine flea loves clean skin and aromatic linen. During my life I have frequently mingled in the highest circles of society. The only thing that gives me license to bite is my intellectual superiority, a kind of fury toward successful people. Never have I hurt a genius.

A fine flea naturally understands the language of humans. It is well known that the opposite is never the case. Understandably, since persecution spurs the intelligence on. That is also the reason why a cultural flea has never yet been caught. Outbursts of angry words betray the murderous intent to him and give him the chance to hide himself in time. That which has been caught between human fingers has always been only a common flea who had not learned the language. I will not conceal the fact that the death of such crude creatures leaves me cold. On the contrary, the more of them that are killed, the better! I have no nationalistic feelings!

It is very unpleasant for him that he is a flea, although also a great writer... Later conversations with the sword, with the fly.

Beginning: Rome and Porto d'Anzio. Pension Kaiser & Wacker. In those days I had my perspective: on top of Madame Parmentier's knee.

Difficult existence because of the shamelessness of the Italian fleas. Conversations. The beautiful Ottavina. The good houseboy. In Porto d'Anzio. The aircraft-lieutenant and my gentleman as rivals.

Moonlit night in a remote part of the beach. Madame Parmentier sits; Madame Parmentier even allows her skirts to be raised and her knees to be admired. There, a sound. Quickly they stash everything suspicious. The lieutenant. Simultaneous pistol shots by the sea.

The next day, the first serious reports. Everyone still optimistic. My master earnest. Madame Parmentier is of no more interest to him. It is time for me to leave my post if I don't want to remain behind. My master seems to be in love with a Professor from Württemberg.

Departure. Arrival in Berlin. As after Sylt. Long stay in a station. The regiment passing through (as on Sylt). Difficulty proceeding. Graveyard earnestness in Berlin. The crush at the Austrian consulate. The Mobilization. Great times for fleas. Our historic preference for straw. We must wait for answers. The mystical. Quartermaster Stein & the victories in Belgium. Kerr, Bei, etc.³⁰

He makes his way to his steady master only after detours. Shortly before the moment when he is wounded. Just then upset about the Austrian weapons and their insufficient reach, and Austrian politics as the cause.

Has an impulse to flee, which is, however, overwhelmed by the push forward. Receives the blow — lets out a small sound. Satisfied about being wounded. Then fear while lying there. Also describe something of the satisfaction a spiritual person enjoys in the distinction of bravery, although he is honest with himself. Story of the battalion fund. Excursion to Landtmann and history of the altar door.³¹ Then these half dangers, which are like dangerous swamps, waiting, uncertain, strangely attractive. The resonating shots here and there in the mountains (throwing stones, little grey)³² belong here, warped danger. — The experiences with Hradezny³³ & Vidale³⁴ (he was named something like Rhadetzky and was shot through his backside).

[...] ³⁵

“Flea” (War Diary and Life Story of a ...) (Experiences and Thoughts.) The figure of the waiter at the Army High Command. (Waiter from the Thalhof). He manages everything in his discreet, independent way for everyone and enjoys their trust. The flea has chosen him as a permanent post, but nourishes himself as much as possible on orderlies and unpopular persons. Only rarely, as a special delicacy, does he resort to a favorite. For he knows that he is unpopular, a vermin, a parasite. He has come far enough to see it himself. He bears the burden of the history of his people. Although his ancient,

widely educated race is capable of wondrous achievements. In sentimental hours it sickens him that he is a nomad. But when it comes to blood and soil, he has a heroic connection to blood. He is an expert in blood. It saddens him that he is a bother to everyone. He hates the lice, the untalented parasites, who spread during the war. He is aware that his people are being exterminated: he is an individualist. Melancholy: ironic agreement that "progress" is bound up with a war against his people. Mussolini ousts the fleas from Italy. Even their old domicile in Turkey is contested. In his youth he was in an institute and perched himself upon an orderly or on a maid; he knows the current dictators from their days as students.

He himself laments in the introduction that the hero of his memoirs is a flea. But every time has its memoirs, and he is a lonely individualist. (I am a German flea. I have a deep relationship to German blood. And I am a flea in your ear.)

4.

UNPUBLISHED
GLOSSES



PHILOSOPHY OF A SHOE FACTORY



I have the propaganda insert of a daily paper to thank for the suggestions I share here; it was as thick and large as a folio and concerned itself with nothing but the development of the technology, the organization, the charity services, and the economic, political, and moral foundations of a shoe factory. It is the largest shoe factory in the world. It fabricates — . It serves — needs of the world. It employs — workers. It nourishes — people. It is no small thing. Some people would say that such reading is more valuable than a novel. I can't quite contradict them. But since I love novels, I would first like to look at the shoe factory from a literary stand point.

WE STANDARDIZE

For older readers, who grew up before we were standardized, an explanation is required: in industrial terms, standardization means that everything that can be made uniformly just as well as it can be made differently is made in the same unified way by all factories. That has

great advantages, clears away a completely pointless disorder, cheapens and makes life a pleasure. If one wants to change the ink ribbon of a typewriter, one no longer has to search for a brand of typewriter equipment, for all typewriters will have ribbons of the same width and length; and if one loses the rubber on a pedal of one's bicycle, one will no longer find 400 different kinds of pedal rubber advertised at the bicycle shop, among which precisely the one you want is missing, the one that you have in an isolated exemplar on the second pedal. A great number of things are already being standardized — screws, fittings, apertures, armatures, construction parts for pipelines, hospital supplies and laboratory apparatus, tools, luggage — and a great deal more. There are corporations bearing noble names like Fanok and Dechema,⁶⁷ and we stand at the beginning of a great spiritual movement, which the Renaissance cannot rival.

It should thus be permissible to make a few preliminary predictions about a time when the standardization movement will refer not only to products, but to people, too. There can be no question that the standardized person will have many advantages when compared to the unstandardized; but despite the fact that great attempts to attain this goal are being undertaken, needless obstacles still stand in its path. Let us start by asking ourselves: what will the standardized person look like? He will be interchangeable. Since today all beautiful people are thin here, but fat in the orient, the accommo-

dation of nature to the average diameter can be assured. The same thing can be said of the standardization of specific degrees of height, which the ready-to-wear industry will require of parents; the Japanese already breed large oily wrestling types alongside the dry-squat jujitsu types by means of special diets. Man will change through his clothes every quarter of a year, but will always look the same; that has almost already been attained today. The need for luxury can easily be stereotyped by proscribed levels of workmanship, just like the tax rate; *é* in a very refined society one's rank can be symbolized (satisfactorily) by a price tag that reveals that one paid three times as much for one's suit, even though it is the same suit.

These are simple problems. But are not the good person, the moral, the normal, the useful person, aren't the ideal patriot, the ideal disciplined party member, the perfect citizen, already standardized people? Visions of the future are herewith opened up for all standardizing institutions. Just what they have always done, they will now do with the aid and the unquestioned authority of science and technology. The current of the times is moving in a direction that serves their purposes; the last vestiges of the individual are polished away. Love, this ancient forest of eccentricity, will become an utter embarrassment. Who today can still say "you, only you," with a good conscience? Everyone knows that the correct formulation is "you, you typical one."

THE AGE OF THE AUTHORS



(The Golden Age.) There is a legend that there was once an age of the arts. Or is that only a painting from the time of Mackart? Maybe some other people can remember it better: I can only see a naked person blowing into a conch shell — a string strung between two oxen horns, that is the lyre; lions and panthers walk over the grass and are careful not to trample one of the giant flowers that gaze up at the people there; the general impression is of something decidedly before the age of textiles.

Wonderful irony that we have come to call the long-ing for a gold-less age the golden age. Probably in pre-historic times the king, when the fest was in full swing, presented the singer — who, just like our writers today, went on reading tours — with a golden goblet or a clasþ from his robe, and the singer thanked him by inventing the pre-prehistoric age, when all kings and gods were singers themselves. For, when one imagines the golden age of art in detail, one comes to the conclusion that all people & animals in those days must have had money. They carry themselves with an unspoken sense of unconcern about nourishment or acquisition; they doubtless possess everything that they wish for, and have no

other task besides expressing their lovely satisfaction in artistic creations. The golden age was an age of amateurs without professionals; if the poet had insisted that he were master of the world — even if it was only a legendary, ancient world — they would have given him poison to drink. He would only have himself to depend on, if he were to utter his pipe dream. And if today, a few thousand years later, a few writers in our bourgeois age wanted to make up a balance sheet, it would turn out that they still believe in the possibility of a golden age, and of exactly the same sort, wherein the owners become poets but the poets never become owners. As they reduce the legendary to the possible, they call it culture or nation or humanity. According to them, the textile industry dealer shouldn't only make worsted yarn, but should also be an enthusiast, a supporter, and a student of the arts.



COLOPHON

THOUGHT FLIGHTS

was typeset in InDesign CC.

The text & page numbers are set in *Adobe Jenson Pro*.

The titles are set in *P22 Arts & Crafts*.

Book design & typesetting: Alessandro Segalini

Cover design: Contra Mundum Press

Image credit: Koloman Moser

THOUGHT FLIGHTS

is published by Contra Mundum Press.

Its printer has received Chain of Custody certification from:

The Forest Stewardship Council,

The Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification,

& The Sustainable Forestry Initiative.



Contra Mundum Press New York · London · Melbourne

CONTRA MUNDUM PRESS

Dedicated to the value & the indispensable importance of the individual voice, to works that test the boundaries of thought & experience.

The primary aim of Contra Mundum is to publish translations of writers who in their use of form and style are *à rebours*, or who deviate significantly from more programmatic & spurious forms of experimentation. Such writing attests to the volatile nature of modernism. Our preference is for works that have not yet been translated into English, are out of print, or are poorly translated, for writers whose thinking & aesthetics are in opposition to timely or mainstream currents of thought, value systems, or moralities. We also reprint obscure and out-of-print works we consider significant but which have been forgotten, neglected, or overshadowed.

There are many works of fundamental significance to *Weltliteratur* (& *Weltkultur*) that still remain in relative oblivion, works that alter and disrupt standard circuits of thought — these warrant being encountered by the world at large. It is our aim to render them more visible.

For the complete list of forthcoming publications, please visit our website. To be added to our mailing list, send your name and email address to: info@contramundum.net



Contra Mundum Press

P.O. Box 1326

New York, NY 10276

USA

OTHER CONTRA MUNDUM PRESS TITLES

Gilgamesh

Ghérasim Luca, *Self-Shadowing Prey*

Rainer J. Hanshe, *The Abdication*

Walter Jackson Bate, *Negative Capability*

Miklós Szentkuthy, *Marginalia on Casanova*

Fernando Pessoa, *Philosophical Essays*

Elio Petri, *Writings on Cinema & Life*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Greek Music Drama*

Richard Foreman, *Plays with Films*

Louis-Auguste Blanqui, *Eternity by the Stars*

Miklós Szentkuthy, *Towards the One & Only Metaphor*

Josef Winkler, *When the Time Comes*

William Wordsworth, *Fragments*

Josef Winkler, *Natura Morta*

Fernando Pessoa, *The Transformation Book*

Emilio Villa, *The Selected Poetry of Emilio Villa*

Robert Kelly, *A Voice Full of Cities*

Pier Paolo Pasolini, *The Divine Mimesis*

Miklós Szentkuthy, *Prae, Vol. 1*

Federico Fellini, *Making a Film*

SOME FORTHCOMING TITLES

Sándor Tar, *Our Street*

Joseph Winkler, *The Graveyard of Bitter Oranges*

Ferit Edgü, *No One*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Genese Grill is a writer, artist, and German scholar living in Burlington, Vermont. She is the author of *The World as Metaphor in Robert Musil's The Man without Qualities: Possibility as Reality* (Camden House, 2012) and the American representative of The International Robert Musil Society.





Robert Musil's *Thought Flights* vividly evokes the secrets, challenges, and mundanities of interwar life in cosmopolitan Vienna & Berlin.

The texts presented here have been selected by translator Genese Grill from Musil's *Nachlaß* & collected for the first time under the title *Thought Flights*. They include material originally published in journals, newspapers, and magazines — but not included in Musil's *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author* — as well as literary fragments and heretofore unpublished texts. Despite the temporal, geographical, and cultural distance between Musil's world and ours, our own time and troubles are all too recognizable in Musil's portrayals of the “age of money,” of simulation, and of standardization. *Thought Flights* is a lament of contemporary complacency, optimism, and homogenization as well as a celebration of living words & original thought by one of the great Modernists of the 20th century.

As an astonishing master of metaphor & self-described “monsieur le vivisecteur,” Musil explores the psyches and lives of himself and his contemporaries with illuminating insight. The lucid, striking prose of his stories and vignettes, and the wise & witty commentary of his glosses, show Musil's response to innovations in technology, art, & politics, and his efforts to enact a strategy for both illuminating and ameliorating the crisis of language that haunted his contemporaries. Moving effortlessly from discussion of fashion to Kant's categorical imperative, *le vivisecteur* writes with humor, lyricism, & fervor in an open genre availing itself of poetic prose, philosophical essay, fictional narrative, and feuilletonistic lightness. Through unlikely combinations and metaphoric syntheses, Musil brings “beauty and excitement” into the world, and when things that are usually separate unite, thoughts “fly.”

With this publication, the now growing English-language corpus of the author of *The Confusions of Young Törless*, *Five Women*, and *The Man without Qualities* is expanded further. Other volumes of Musil's writings will be forthcoming from Contra Mundum Press over the next decade.

