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EXISTENCE AS ESSAY: NIETZSCHE, MUSIL, AND CONRAD

City University of New York

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EXISTENCE AS ESSAY: NIETZSCHE, MUSIL, AND CONRAD

by

THOMAS HARRISON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in Comparative Literature in
partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York.

1984

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

EXISTENCE AS ESSAY: NIETZSCHE, MUSIL, AND CONRAD

by

Thomas Harrison

Advisers: Professor Lillian Feder

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This study considers the work of Robert Musil and Joseph Conrad to be a logical development of thoughts explicitly or implicitly addressed by Friedrich Nietzsche. The idea of a development must be sharply distinguished from that of influences and affinities; it is rather a question of original and complementary treatments of the same issues: the indefinite nature of reality, man's role as interpreter of the world, as forger of his destiny within the stringent limits of fate, the impossibility of "being oneself," and the need to define morality anew. Within the context of these issues, Musil, Conrad, and Nietzsche illumine each other's writings often--rethinking each other's logic, furthering individual points, or stating explicitly what the work of the others leaves unspoken.

The fundamental theme which emerges from this reading of Nietzsche, Musil, and Conrad is that existence is

equivalent to an essay--an attempt to attain a goal (both moral and ontological), a continuous "trial" and "being on the way" toward an end which cannot be achieved. This essay is at once a metaphysic, an ethic, and an aesthetic: a mode of living and writing in which man appropriates the process of endless interpretation to which he is already destined. This process remains open precisely through man's determination to end it, through his endeavor to overcome fictitious values and attain "authentic" ones. To live life as an essay does not mean to posit values but, as Nietzsche writes, to transvaluate them. Thus the only Übermensch that is possible is one who is thoroughly and consciously human, accepting his finitude and servitude to fate, and embracing the strife between reality and possibility, fact and desire, individual powerlessness and the will to power. To be an artist of life, as Nietzsche and Musil deliberately demand and Conrad's protagonists become forced to recognize, is to confront one's fragmentation and discover one's unity within it.

Acknowledgments

Deep thanks go to Professors Lillian Feder, Burton Pike, and Allen Mandelbaum for their guidance, affection, and critical readings throughout the writing of this dissertation. The hidden presence of this study is Professor Elfie Karner-Raymond, who first helped me to pursue some of these issues as an undergraduate at Sarah Lawrence College.

Eine neue Gattung von Philosophen kommt herauf: ich wage es, sie auf einen nicht ungefährlichen Namen zu taufen. So wie ich sie errate, so wie sie sich erraten lassen-- denn es gehört zu ihrer Art, irgendworin Rätsel bleiben zu wollen--, möchten diese Philosophen der Zukunft ein Recht, vielleicht auch ein Unrecht darauf haben, als Versucher bezeichnet zu werden. Dieser Name selbst ist zuletzt nur ein Versuch, und, wenn man will, eine Versuchung.

Nietzsche, Jenseits von Gut und Böse, #42

List of Abbreviations

When possible, I have given dual references to citations from Musil and Nietzsche: one of the original German text and the second to a standard translation. The second reference is usually not to page numbers but to the numbers of the smallest unit of the text: aphorism in Nietzsche and chapter in Musil (e.g.: BGE, #12 = Beyond Good and Evil, aphorism no. 12).

The English translations, especially those of Musil, have sometimes been revised. For material from Nietzsche's Nachlass, I have referred to Vol. 3 of Schlechta's Nietzsche, Werke in drei Bänden and to the English translation of the traditional The Will to Power (and very occasionally to the older Grossoktavausgabe). Colli and Montinari's Kritische Studienausgabe is not yet insufficiently indexed for the Nachlass material.

- BGE Beyond Good and Evil (in BWN; see below).
- BT The Birth of Tragedy (in BWN).
- BWN Basic Writings of Nietzsche. Trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1968. Includes Beyond Good and Evil, The Birth of Tragedy, The Case of Wagner, Ecce Homo, and On the Genealogy of Morals.
- EH Ecce Homo (in BWN).
- G Friedrich Nietzsche. Grossoktavausgabe. 20 vols. Leipzig: R. Kröner, 1905 ff.

- GM On the Genealogy of Morals (in BWN)
- GS The Gay Science. Trans. Walter Kaufmann.
New York: Vintage Books, 1974.
- GW Robert Musil. Gesammelte Werke in neun
Bänden. Ed Adolph Frisé. Reinbek bei
Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978.
- KSA Nietzsche. Sämtliche Werke: Kritische
Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden. Ed. Giorgio
Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Munich:
Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980.
- LJ Lord Jim. Ed. Thomas Moser. New York:
Norton, 1968.
- MWQ The Man Without Qualities. Trans. Eithne
Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser. 3 vols. London:
Secker & Warburg, 1953 ff.
- Nietzsche Martin Heidegger. Nietzsche. Volume I: The
Will to Power as Art. Ed. David Farrell
Krell. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979.
- PC The Portable Conrad. Ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel.
New York: Viking Press, 1969. Includes
"Il Conde," "Heart of Darkness," "The
Lagoon," "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'"
"An Outpost of Progress," "The Secret
Sharer," and selections from Conrad's other
writings.
- PN The Portable Nietzsche. Trans. and ed. Walter
Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1954.
Includes The Antichrist, Nietzsche Contra
Wagner, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and
Twilight of the Idols.
- SA The Secret Agent. Garden City: Doubleday
Anchor Books, 1953.
- Schlechta Nietzsche. Werke in drei Bänden. Ed. Karl
Schlechta. Munich: Karl Hanser, 1969.
Vol. III.
- TI Twilight of the Idols (in PN).
- WP The Will to Power. Trans. Walter Kaufmann
and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage
Books, 1968.

- YT Young Törless. Trans. Eithne Wilkins and
 Ernst Kaiser. London: Panther Books,
 1971.
- Z Thus Spoke Zarathustra. 4 vols. (in PN).

Contents

Chapter	Page
Introduction	1
One Friedrich Nietzsche	17
The Nature of the Problems	22
Being in Time	28
Man's Ruin (Untergang)	42
Fate	52
Life as a Whole: The Endurance of Tragedy	56
Tragic Affirmation and the Transvaluation of Values	65
The Aesthetic Attempt	77
Two Robert Musil	84
The Undefined of Reality	87
The Dissolution of the Self	132
Ulrich's Ambition	159
The Essay	167
The Literary Essayism of <u>The Man Without Qualities</u>	177
Three Joseph Conrad	190
Conrad's Circle	193
The Unmasking of Truth	198
Taking Shelter	203
Seeking the Infrastructure	212
The Lie of Self-Knowledge	218
Truth as Untruth	222
Embracing One's Fate	227
The Dream of Self	235
The Failure of Transcendence	239
The Need for the Other	244
Trial	253
Conclusion	261
Bibliography	267

Introduction

This study is based on a twofold presupposition: that the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, Robert Musil, and Joseph Conrad addresses many of the same issues, and that these same issues are understood better when considered in light of their treatment by the other two writers. The issues are always larger than any individual treatment of them. This is particularly so in the case of Nietzsche, the theoretical center of this study. Were he a systematic philosopher like Kant, Plato, or Hegel, reading other writers' work in light of his thought would be a fairly routine matter. Nietzsche, however, thought in shorthand, laconically, fleetingly, indirectly, exploiting the credulity and prejudice of his readers. He was deliberately provocative for a heuristic purpose: to stimulate thought. He never intended to settle matters, only to open them up for discussion. He demanded that artists and philosophers take up and develop his suggestions. This study, accordingly, does Nietzsche the service of not taking his philosophy as "the last word." It views his thoughts as existing in a state of potentiality, as leaps that have hardly landed. In my reading, Musil and Conrad complete

Nietzsche. They respond to his thinking--not subserviently or polemically, but critically, articulating its implications as well as its shortcomings.

This study, then, is concerned with the mutual illumination shed by three writers in the context of a single kind of logic. By understanding the ramifications of Nietzsche's ideas, we become sensitized to the unspoken dimensions which are such an essential part of his philosophy. At the same time, by reading Musil and Conrad in light of Nietzsche we get a better grasp on the thematic significance of their work. We can situate it in relation to the theoretical questions of their times and in relation to the broader intellectual tradition of the West to which Nietzsche himself was responding. Great works of art always make philosophical statements (some--like those of Musil and Conrad--more explicitly than others), and these statements become clear only when these works are referred to the context of ideas, debates, and discussions to which they belong. In Musil's and Conrad's case, it is not Schopenhauer, Freud, Mach, or Heidegger who is most representative of this context, but Nietzsche.

Is the opposite also the case? That is, are Conrad and Musil also the best possible literary counters for Nietzsche's work? The truth of the matter is that better and worse counters can be determined only as a function of

the logic that governs the particular study. If the central question is "artistic will," then Henry James may be the best mate for Nietzsche. If one is interested in Nietzsche's reflections on European decadence, then Thomas Mann, Stefan George, Gottfried Benn, and many others are his natural sons; if a theory of vitalism, then André Gide and André Malraux; if power, then D. H. Lawrence; if aestheticism, then Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater; if a call for the Übermensch, then D'Annunzio and perhaps the futurists.

This study, on the other hand, is not interested in shared literary mechanics or figures of thought, in what themes a writer took over from another, in when and how he was influenced, in what common conceptual structures two writers base themselves on. If anything, it is interested in why their work should need such structures, what aim those structures serve. Why, for instance, would Thomas Mann want to cultivate a distinction as banal as the one Nietzsche draws between the rational northern European and the passionate southerner? Are the concepts and the purpose they serve in this case equally trivial? Nietzsche expected his ideas to be taken over by later writers--but was anxious at the prospect. He was afraid his delicate structures would crumble, or be turned into fortresses, or be used for illicit purposes, as they paradoxically had to be.

If Nietzsche's legacy consists in a "mind-set," a tendency to think in "polar oppositions" (Dionysos and Apollo, health and sickness), or new metaphysical urges (such as Lawrence's will to power and Malraux's "appeal to life"), then something un-Nietzschean is happening to Nietzsche. He becomes a new source of dogma, a new idol to replace the ones that have fallen, providing metaphysical foundations for the generation that follows him, thirsting for belief. Nietzsche was not a metaphysician; his work resists any effort at transformation into a compendium of tidy themes. In this sense, his proper counters are writers who withstand the impulse to literalize his ideas, who strive to overcome the hollowness of all conceptual distinctions and polar oppositions. Ultimately, a writer is Nietzschean not because of what he believes (such as the difference between masters and slaves) but because of why and how he believes it.

Why and how do Musil and Conrad believe? The question first is whether they believe at all, or are not rather in search of belief. This search for belief is what makes them come together with Nietzsche on a deeper level than others who search Nietzsche himself for the dogma of belief. This too is what relates Musil and Conrad to Nietzsche in a dialogical way: While D'Annunzio, Gide, and others hear a specific theme in Nietzsche's work (which then hooks up with

one of their central concerns), Conrad and Musil hear what Nietzsche is trying to "get at" with his various points. They hear, and engage in dialogue with, a thinker involved in a project--who appeals for moral integrity, calls for a rigorous examination of reality, demands that man put his freedom to work on developing his resources. Nietzsche's project may be described on four levels: the ground, or the problem addressed, the method, the goal, and the conclusion. The ground involves a radical skepticism concerning the value and cogency of the most traditional interpretations of the process of living. The method entails a conscientious uprooting of cultural, moral, and psychological fallacies. The goal is to be able to take charge of life with new moral confidence and certainty. The conclusion is that the goal is impossible and that the method is everything.

Nietzsche's central problem is nihilism--the paralysis of the will which follows from the realization that no principle is true and no action contains any intrinsic value. Not only are all beliefs suspect, so are the languages which furnish their logic: morality, religion, metaphysics, reason, science, and grammar itself. Nietzsche was hardly the first to recognize the failure of the human understanding. He represents the culmination of a spirit of enlightenment which has its forefather in Socrates and

important collaborators in Montaigne and Hume. He also intersects other nineteenth century phenomena: the individualism of Kierkegaard, Emersonian transcendentalism, William James's understanding of moral relativity and the defectiveness of language, Dostoevski's attack on reason and the social sciences, the positivistic dismissal of any truth not verifiable by concrete fact. All these developments contribute to what Nietzsche calls the condition of nihilism at the end of the nineteenth century. The difference between Nietzsche and these other figures is that he summarizes their insights, drawing these threads together into a description of a historical epoch. Hence, when we think of the modern critique of language, morality, and reason, we refer to Nietzsche as the definitive thinker. Just as Plato set the metaphysical bases for two thousand years of Western history, Nietzsche supplies a new ground. But this new ground is a negative one, positing artifice, deception, discontinuity, and chaos at the bottom of all stability. This ground underlies twentieth century art in general; but it is particularly visible in the work of Conrad and Musil.

With Dostoevski, Camus and Sartre, with Rilke, Yeats and Stevens, Musil and Conrad stand out among modern writers in being fully conscious of this new, negative ground. This consciousness marks the beginning of their method: They

thematize nihilism. As Musil joins Nietzsche in attacking the logic of seemingly cogent truths, Conrad dramatizes their breakdown. Moral intentions encounter situations man cannot master, individuals grapple with their lack of self-knowledge, convictions break under the slightest pressure, postures of enlightenment are founded in darkness. In Conrad as in Musil and Nietzsche, apparently solid grounds for action mask an Abgrund. This intuition causes an additional step in the method of these writers.

Nietzsche, Conrad, and Musil neither cling to traditional values nor brush them aside. They unmask them, exposing them as prejudices held out of unavowed reasons. They test man's truths, analyzing the mechanism that makes them work and discovering the deformative processes that govern their logic. While the fragmentation of knowledge and the incoherence of moral systems are often simply accepted by twentieth century artists, in Nietzsche, Musil, and Conrad these facts stimulate critical inquiry. These writers research the indeterminacy of the understanding, try to make coherence again possible. Their writing is inherently experimental, raising new questions rather than proposing answers. Instead of trying to reflect experience as it already appears to be (naturalism, Thomas Mann), or to instruct an audience, or to express the opinions of an author, their work engages in open interpretation. And yet,

this open interpretation must be carefully distinguished from other experimental developments in modern literature.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, a number of aesthetic movements arise which seem to show features similar to the work of Musil and Conrad: cubism, expressionism, simultanéisme, imagism, futurism, surrealism, and others. Given Nietzsche's attack on systematic understandings and unilateral points of view, on reason and grammar, it might even seem that the expressive audacity of these movements makes their work more Nietzschean than that of Musil and Conrad. But deductions based on technique alone may be misleading. These avant-gardes play out Nietzschean iconoclasm literally--on the artwork itself, not (necessarily) on the world the artwork attempts to interpret. Discontinuity, fragmentation, multiplicity of perspectives, openness and the quest for new language--these radically new elements of style may serve many different purposes.

For example, the multiple time schemes and plurality of discursive codes which inform Conrad's most sophisticated narratives seems to be carried even further by the work of James Joyce. The latter could be seen as a development of tendencies that show their beginnings in Conrad. But it seems to me that such a conclusion would be mistaken. Joyce's heterogeneity of discourse serves both a naturalistic

and an experimental aim: to represent the processes of consciousness as they seem to occur prior to being translated into a homogenous grammatical code, and to explore the immanent possibilities of that code by deconstructing and reconstructing it. With Conrad, on the other hand, disparate narrative voices have nothing to do with the desire to approximate the natural languages of the mind. His heterogeneity marshals different instances of the most ordinary hermeneutical processes--reflection, memory and analysis--governed by standard linguistic and mental conventions, the only thing that changes from one voice to another being the facts and values which shape the "reading." The multiplicity of minds that try to make sense of Lord Jim's character and to piece his story together are attempting to fathom an enigma, to understand an event that eludes comprehension. In the same way, the shifting time sequences of Lord Jim seem to share little with simultanéisme but this reshuffling of time.

If Conrad and Musil are in a sense logicians of illusion (unlike Kafka and Strindberg, to take two other more or less random examples, who expose illusions but do not attempt to explain the mechanism that governs them), what they aim to discover through their analyses is a method of living. At a time when Kant's aesthetics of disinterestedness, mediated by Schopenhauer, had led to a general

acceptance of the principle of l'art pour l'art (which is the unspoken condition for such twentieth century movements as imagism, cubism, pure poetry, and so on), Nietzsche proposed the radical thesis that all art serves a moral purpose. Musil and Conrad welcome this thesis. Their art attempts to produce a moral vision, to answer the question of how to live. This purpose, or goal, of their work is what Nietzsche would say keeps them from being decadent.

"Facing a world of 'modern ideas' that would banish everyone into a corner," writes Nietzsche in Beyond Good and Evil (#212), "a philosopher . . . would be compelled to find the greatness of man, the concept of 'greatness', precisely in his range and multiplicity, in his wholeness in manifoldness [Ganzheit im Vielen]. He would even determine value and rank in accordance with how many things one could bear and take upon himself, how far one could extend his responsibility." The world of modern ideas is one in which, as Musil puts it, man has become an expert in particulars and incompetent with reference to the whole. The multiplicity in which Nietzsche wishes man would find his wholeness is marked by the disintegration of values and encompassing beliefs. Nietzsche's modern men do not want to be bothered about whether they believe or not; they operate pragmatically. Morals are a matter of convention. How far can man extend his responsibility in such a

situation? Can he still be responsible at all? This is the question Nietzsche poses to his time as a challenge.

Musil and Conrad take up this challenge. They recognize that it is not enough to acknowledge the disintegration of cultural norms and criteria of truth, to expose and play out the fracture of belief in art. One must answer for the fact, take issue with the problem, strive to overcome nihilism. Put in another way, Nietzsche, Conrad, and Musil do not endorse a world of relative values; in the relative they seek the absolute. They look for the continuity of discontinuity, the necessity of what seems arbitrary.

The refutation of fictions, according to this Nietzschean scheme, is to allow for the possibility of a potentially new, more comprehensive, more realistic ethic. Critics of ideology, Conrad, Musil, and Nietzsche would like to discover morality beyond good and evil, that is, beyond the constrictions of ideology. The problem, however, is that no new morality can be advanced which would not immediately collapse into another ideology. This is the new knowledge which produces these writers' restless suspension between forms of interpretation in which they no longer believe and a hypothetical new vision of life which is required and yet impossible to achieve. These three writers lucidly face a condition which Heidegger describes as "the No-more of the

gods that have fled and the Not-yet of the god that is coming." The place they inhabit is a tragic nowhere. It results from the tragic recognition (in the Greeks as in Shakespeare and in moderns like Pirandello) that each of man's truths is an untruth and every certainty a delusion.

The task of the post-nihilistic artist, according to Nietzsche, is to make this tragic knowledge the basis for an ethic--neither to deny tragic experience nor to remain trapped in the predicament of crumbling belief, but to confer positive value on such disintegration. None of these writers is content with dramatizing the fragility of belief; they all want to determine what life may be suited to it. Nietzsche and Musil consider tragedy behind them; Conrad does dramatize tragic breakdowns, but only to measure man's response to chaos. His fiction is not about the "destructive element" per se, but about man's efforts to stay afloat in it. A tragic sense of the lack of grounds for belief is thus to yield a deliberate choice. The idea is to live in accordance with knowledge, to find an ethical method which corresponds to the ambiguous, ungrounded, and strife-ridden condition of reality. It is a matter of recalling the lesson of the Greeks at the end of an epoch of nihilism--of building a positive vision out of negative insights.

How does one base one's life on a lack of bases, turn futile experience into an ethical program? There is no

satisfying answer to such questions. The project which engages Nietzsche, Musil, and Conrad has no conclusion. They are moralists without a morality. In fact, if any moral program were possible, it would be one predicated upon the failure of all moral programs. It would be deliberately and self-consciously tentative. It would be merely a means to a hypothetical end. Nietzsche, accordingly, does not try to advance a new morality of values; he tries to create "preparatory men" ready to devote themselves to such a morality should it someday become possible. The (groundless) ethical principles characterizing such men would thus involve honesty, intellectual courage, passion, discipline, and willfulness. They would be men of integrity while believing in nothing, men of character with no character to speak of. Musil's "man without qualities" presents the fullest description of this tentative, preparatory man--which Nietzsche envisions as the successor to romantic pessimism and Conrad begins to prefigure with his uprooted and self-divided protagonists.

All method and no matter, such individuals are still not empty shells. If Musil stresses their active passivity in the present and Conrad their imprisonment in the past, Nietzsche stresses their productive bearing toward the future. They are essayists, continuously attempting to master their lives and finding their raison d'être in this

attempt. The inconclusiveness of their striving towards a goal they cannot see, its agonistic process, its venturesomeness and being-on-the-way to truth constitutes its proper conclusion: To live life as a deliberate contest and essay is to appropriate one's destiny, to become what one already is. The haphazard state of existence becomes consciously willed, made one's choice, elevated from fact to value. The untruth masked by religion, idealism, and rationalism is accepted as truth, and the tension of existence is lived in its richness.

The contours of this essayistic project necessarily differ from writer to writer. Nietzsche is intoxicated by the tension: "What doesn't kill me makes me stronger." His desire to affirm experience is so intense that we tend to forget that the fate he extols is not, as he claims, perfect. We forget that dismemberment is the basis not only for the Übermensch but also for Dionysian integrity and amor fati. Musil approaches the project with high level-headedness and positivistic precision. His wish for transcendence is as great as Nietzsche's but more firmly under control. He is self-consciously hypothetical. Conrad desists from theorizing the suspension characteristic of essayistic living. He simply puts his characters on trial, making them be themselves in the attempt to be themselves.

It follows from these differences that the logic ascribable to each writer will either be put into contrast or reinforced by that of the other two. This is particularly true of Nietzsche's understanding of individual destiny and of the transvaluation of values, which, when confronted with Conrad's vulnerable heroes and multiple interpretations, and with Musil's man without qualities and functional relativism, takes on connotations it would not seem to have if considered on its own. Such mutually determining interrelations are the essence of this study. As suggested earlier, questions of literary influence in themselves are extrinsic to these interrelations. Musil read Nietzsche avidly throughout his life and approved of most of what he read; Conrad read little of Nietzsche and reacted negatively. Either way, it makes little difference to the logic immanent to the work of these writers.

Finally, a word about the methodology of this confrontation of one philosopher with two novelists. Does the divide between philosophy and fiction pose a problem to such a comparison? The different aesthetic decisions made by each writer obviously help shape his logic and must be dealt with accordingly. Yet the problem is not as great as it might be with a different set of writers. As is generally recognized by contemporary critics, the distinction between philosophy and fiction tends to dissolve in

Nietzsche's work. ("There exists in my case the possibility of many styles--altogether the most manifold art of style any man has ever had at his disposal," he claims in Ecce Homo.) His philosophy does not even exist except in and through these various styles. Strictly speaking, Conrad and Musil are not philosophers (except perhaps in Richard Rorty's sense of the term; see note 7, p. 19), not even in the way in which Nietzsche is a philosopher. Nor, however, are they simply novelists. They work consciously and deliberately on the border between philosophy and fiction. The "inner truth," the "Inconceivable," the "true essence of life"--these are the types of terms that Conrad uses to account for the subject of his writing. Musil, who received a doctorate in philosophy, is more reflective even than Conrad. These novelists and Nietzsche meet half way. The work of all three belies the usual distinctions between philosophy and literature, concept and image, literal and figurative language, truth and illusion. The "betweenness" of this work requires an interpretive approach which can also stay "between." Hence I try to read Nietzsche as a poet and Musil and Conrad as thinkers. I look for the theoretical implications of the novels, and the literary statements of Nietzsche's philosophy. Limiting itself to partial perspectives, the study that follows is thus an essay at more within the bounds of less.

Chapter One

Friedrich Nietzsche

Wenn man keinen Grund hat, so muss man
einen suchen!

--Robert Musil

On January 4, 1888, just one year before his work broke off with his mental illness, Friedrich Nietzsche write a postcard to his friend Franz Overbeck declaring of his last work, "We are still in the 'overture' to my philosophy."¹ What had Nietzsche done in the three thousand pages he had published up to On the Genealogy of Morals? Undoubtedly, he had cleared the stage, sweeping away some of the most "venerable hypotheses" of Western philosophy. But cleared the stage for what? What does Nietzsche mean by "my philosophy" on this postcard? Whatever it is--and it is probably a reinterpretation of the world as will to power--we do not have it.² We have only the work to which

¹ Cited in Ronald Hayman, Nietzsche: A Critical Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 314.

² The most valuable and monumental effort to interpret Nietzsche's "philosophy" is that of Martin Heidegger, who in his two-volume Nietzsche (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1961) reads Nietzsche as a metaphysician of will to power. This remains the best study of Nietzsche, even if its central thesis about life as power (based more on Nietzsche's posthumous notes than on his published writings) is questionable

he refers as the overture to his philosophy. But is this work itself not philosophy? Not in the traditional sense of the word, that is, a discovery of truths which directly or indirectly furnish the basis for a future morality.³

Certainly, Nietzsche proposed new interpretations, new visions of reality, new moral directives to replace those he had shown to be hollow. Dionysus, the ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen (the eternal recurrence of the same), the Übermensch, and the will to power are the names of some of Nietzsche's new ideas. Strictly speaking, however, these concepts are not philosophical, but paraphilosophical: They do not say the nature of the world (and the morality that goes with it) as much as they offer ways of getting around its unsayable nature.⁴ Dionysus, the Übermensch,

and does not take sufficient account of the range of Nietzsche's thought and the ways in which Nietzsche hedges against metaphysical interpretations of his work. As for the question of Nietzsche's Nachlass, it seems to me that R. J. Hollingdale is right in considering that since Nietzsche selected his published material from these notes, the fact "that the Nachlass is reject material is the first datum for its assessment." Whenever possible, priority should be given to what Nietzsche himself saw through the press, and this is the principle I have followed.

³ The most prominent of Nietzsche's sparse references to philosophy as a legislation of values is BGE, #211. See also pp. 77-79 of this study.

⁴ The "scientific" nature of the eternal recurrence has been easily refuted by contemporary philosophers. Walter Kaufmann considers it a suprahistorical theory intended to serve the purpose of moral affirmation (Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist, New York, 1966).

and the eternal recurrence are new "myths," new fictions, heuristic formulas rather than metaphysical propositions.⁵ The will to power, too, is only a hypothesis (Nietzsche calls it ein Versuch), a supposition about how the world would look if "defined and determined according to its 'intelligible character' [die Welt auf ihren 'intelligiblen Charakter' hin bestimmt und bezeichnet]." ⁶

Another way of putting this would be to say that Nietzsche's is a philosophy which undermines its claim to Philosophy.⁷ By doing so, it engages in a new philosophy, one which is at once "beyond" and an overture to Philosophy

Bernard Magnus speaks for most contemporary critics when he interprets Übermenschlichkeit as "a second-order diagnostic principle . . . which is consistent with a wide range of directly conflicting first-order traits" ("Perfectibility and Attitude in Nietzsche's Übermensch," Review of Metaphysics, XXXVI, 3, March 1983, 633-661).

⁵ On the need to read Nietzsche figuratively rather than literally, see Sarah Kofman, Nietzsche et la métaphore (Paris: Payot, 1972), and on this principle applied to interpretations of Dionysus and the eternal recurrence, see Pierre Klossowski, Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux (Paris: Mercure de France, 1969) and Bernard Pautrat, Versions du soleil: figures et système de Nietzsche (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971). See also Bernard Magnus, Nietzsche's Existential Imperative (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

⁶ KSA, 5, 55/BGE, #36.

⁷ I borrow the distinction from Richard Rorty, Consequences of Pragmatism (pp. xiv-xv), where "Philosophy" means following Plato's and Kant's lead in "asking questions about the nature of certain normative notions (e.g., 'truth,' 'rationality,' 'goodness') in the hope of better obeying such norms." Naturally, what Rorty understands by

proper. My intention is to follow the itinerary of Nietzsche's thought which leads to such a conclusion, to describe its preludic movement ever forward, its "essay" to attain a goal which is out of philosophy's reach (and the delusory hope of Philosophy). The essence of Nietzsche's thought lies in its continuously climbing upon steps (seeming, it is true, to dance its way up them) on the way to an end which is tragically precluded by its own premises. Upon each of Nietzsche's steps (or stated doctrines) subsequent writers find landings to explore. Musil and Conrad continue the process of climbing.

To understand Nietzsche's philosophy as a ceaseless overture and succession of steps, we must recognize its starting point in nihilistic paralysis. Nietzsche's philosophical strategies consist in a battle with the futility of any strategy to interpret or appropriate the world. "He that speaks here," Nietzsche writes in the preface to the projected but never written Will to Power--a philosopher "who has found his advantage in standing aside and outside, in patience, in procrastination, in staying behind . . . who looks back when relating what will come"--is "the

"philosophy" ("Blake is as much a philosopher as Fichte, Henry Adams more of a philosopher than Frege") is not necessarily the same as what Nietzsche might have understood by it.

first perfect nihilist of Europe." He has lived through all of nihilism "to the end" and has left it "behind, below, outside himself."⁸ My argument is that Nietzsche turns this fate of standing "aside" and "outside" any possibility of meaningful existence--through thought as well as action--into an artistic method which gives that meaning back. He finds his advantage in conditions of potential despair. Thus he is a "perfect (vollkommener)" nihilist, accomplishing the most extreme disintegration of thought and life, but also reinterpreting that disintegration as the basis for integrity. He perfects the imperfection of existence. The issue, then, is Nietzsche's transformation of a tragic condition of strife and striving into an aesthetic style, his rescue of purpose from purposelessness. Musil and Conrad perform a similar overcoming of nihilism from within. By tracing Nietzsche's intellectual itinerary, I aim to provide a theoretical framework for many of Musil's and Conrad's own steps and also a paradigm for the general character of their work--in which moral, intellectual, and

⁸ "Der hier das Wort nimmt . . . ein Philosoph und Einsiedler aus Instinct, der seinen Vorteil im Abseits, im Ausserhalb, in der Geduld, in der Verzögerung, in der Zurückgebliebenheit fand; als ein Wage- und Versucher-Geist, der sich schon in jedes Labyrinth der Zukunft einmal verirrt hat [ist] der erste vollkommene Nihilist Europas, der aber den Nihilismus selbst schon in sich zu Ende gelebt hat,--der ihn hinter sich, unter sich, ausser sich hat" (Schlechta, III, 634/WP, Preface #3).

existential inconclusiveness becomes a deliberate conclusion.

The Nature of the Problems

Assuming, then, that Nietzsche is a nihilist, in what does his nihilism consist? Essentially in the rejection of some of the oldest and deepest "truths" of Western culture: the metaphysical distinction between appearance and reality, the moral difference between "good" and "evil," the belief in intellectual enlightenment and the political progress it is supposed to produce. The particular topics of Nietzsche's massive attempt at a transvaluation of values (even those which are treated similarly by Musil and Conrad, such as the ethic of pity, criminal strength, the decadence of liberal European culture, and intellectual integrity, among others) are not as important here as the overall picture. Global principles for living and understanding have lost their convincing power, yet have yielded no others. Indeed, if one takes nihilism seriously, they cannot yield any others, for all principles are equally meaningless. This turns man's life into a situation of non-coincidence: He finds himself with existence but no essence, appearance but no reality, language but no truth; or, conversely, with an essence without a form, with an internal truth but no language by which to express it. One could see the problem at work on four different, but closely related levels, in

ways which Nietzsche's work usually thematizes, but sometimes says only by leaving unsaid: truth, language, time, and self.

"If truth was victorious for once, then ask yourself in good mistrust: 'What strong error fought for it?'"⁹ Nietzsche is not performing a facile reversal, by which error is interpreted as more effective than truth. He is obliterating the very distinction between truth and error. Every truth is initially an error for the system of interpretation it comes to change, or "correct," and becomes again an error when another "error" supplants it. The question is not truth vs. error but viable vs. unviable perspectives. Some are internally consistent with others and form a coherent system, some are excluded. Breaking the prevailing logic, these excluded "errors" eventually form cornerstones for systems offering different criteria for truth.¹⁰

Nietzsche's most original contribution to the question of truth, however, concerns neither its relativity nor its changing paradigms. It is rather his insight into man's need for such error. "Truth is the kind of

⁹ "Und wenn da einmal Wahrheit zum Siege kam, so fragt euch mit gutem Misstrauen: 'welch starker Irrthum hat für sie gekämpft?'" (KSA, 4, 361/Zarathustra, IV, "On the Higher Men").

¹⁰ Most recently, this theory has been developed by T. S. Kuhn, Michel Foucault, and Richard Rorty.

error without which a certain species of life could not live. The value for life is ultimately decisive."¹¹ This need for truth is not merely moral, it is also metaphysical. To be human means to discriminate. Man must judge, discern identities, and posit values in order to live. What his criteria may be is another matter; the point is he must have some.

To make a "true" judgment one needs a code by which to express it. This code must be internally self-consistent as well as consistent with the reality to which it refers. This consistency, however, is an idle fancy, for the relation between words and things is entirely arbitrary, a random association. Thus Nietzsche, like Heidegger and Wittgenstein, reduces truth to language: "So what is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms-- in short an aggregate of human relationships which, poetically and rhetorically heightened, became transposed and elaborated, and which, after protracted popular usage, poses as fixed, canonical, obligatory: truths are illusions whose illusoriness is overlooked."¹² Concepts are

¹¹ "Wahrheit ist die Art von Irrtum, ohne welche eine bestimmte Art von lebendigen Wesen nicht leben konnte. Der Wert für das Leben entscheidet zuletzt" (Schlechta, III, "844/WP, #493).

¹² Was ist also Wahrheit? Ein bewegliches Heer von Metaphern, Metonymien, Anthropomorphismen kurz eine Summe

"plank structures and timberwork [Gebalk und Bretterwerk]" (KSA, 1, 88); words are "bridges" crossing the space that separates things, joining what is distant in a bond it is difficult to break free from. Even if continually modified language holds things captive in a metaphysical system, so that Nietzsche may say, "I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar [Ich fürchte, wir werden Gott nicht los, weil wir noch an die Grammatik glauben]" (KSA, 6, 78).¹³ Language programs consciousness and furnishes the presuppositions of reason: "It is this [the metaphysics of language] which sees everywhere deed and doer: this which believes in will as cause in general, this which believes in the 'I,' in the I as being, in the I as substance, and which projects its belief in the I-substance on to all things--only thus does it create the concept 'thing,'"¹⁴

von menschlichen Relationen, die, poetisch und rhetorisch gesteigert, übertragen, geschmückt wurden, und die nach langem Gebrauche einem Volke fest canonisch und verbindlich dünken: die Wahrheiten sind Illusionen, von denen man vergessen hat, dass sie welche sind" (KSA, 1, 880-81).

¹³ Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein: "A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (Philosophical Investigations, #115).

¹⁴ "Das sieht überall Thäter und Thun: das glaubt an Willen als Ursache überhaupt: das glaubt an's 'Ich', an's Ich als Sein, an's Ich als substanz und projicirt den Glauben an die Ich-Substanz auf alle Dinge--er schafft erst damit den Begriff 'Ding'" (KSA, 6, 77/TI, "Reason in Philosophy," #5).

Equivalences, analogies, continuities, and essences-- with these, language creates a fabricated world which is the only one we can know, "a surface- and sign-world [eine Oberflächen- und Zeichenwelt]" (KSA, 3,593/GS, #354). Man is trapped in a solipsistic circle of interpretation by which he first posits the a prioris of reality and then, forgetting what he has done (since every concept is a forgotten metaphor), goes off in search of a prioris, as if they could be different from what he has already posited. "How could we ever explain anything! We operate only with things that do not exist, with lines, planes, bodies, atoms, divisible time spans, divisible spaces-- how should explanations be at all possible when we first turn everything into an image, into our image!"¹⁵ Language reduces unique things to familiar dimensions; so that "given the best will in the world to understand ourselves as individually as possible, 'to know ourselves,' each of us will always succeed in becoming conscious of what is not-individual in him, his

¹⁵ "Wie könnten wir auch erklären! Wir operieren mit lauter Dingen, die es nicht giebt, mit Linien, Flächen, Körpern, Atomen, theilbaren Zeiten, theilbaren Räumen--, wie soll Erklärung auch nur möglich sein, wenn wir Alles erst zum Bilde machen, zu unserem Bilde!" (KSA, 3, 473/GS, #112).

'averageness' [sein Durchschnittliches]."16

This flattering of perspectives and making familiar everything that is strange and questionable in existence is precisely what Nietzsche aims to undo with his philosophy. He wants to make the familiar uncanny again, as does Conrad with his unresolved narratives and Musil with his conceptual paradoxes.¹⁷ This we shall see more of later. For now it is enough to note Nietzsche's conclusion: "We simply lack any organ for knowledge, for 'truth' [Wir haben eben kein Organ für das Erkennen, für die 'Wahrheit']" (KSA, 3, 593/ibid.).

What does this imply for the destiny of the philosopher, for him whose task it is to pursue and communicate meaning? What does it imply for the conduct of existence

¹⁶ "Jeder von uns, beim besten Willen, sich selbst so individuell wie möglich zu verstehen, 'sich selbst zu kennen,' doch immer nur gerade dans Nicht-Individuelle an sich zum Bewusstsein bringen wird, sein 'Durchschnittliches'" (KSA, 3, 592/GS, #354).

¹⁷ Thus, although Lord Jim is "one of us," he behaves in a way that no one can understand. With its fragmented time sequences, the narrative of Lord Jim hardly lets on to what actually happened that night on board the Patna. Many narrators try to understand Jim, but none of them resolves the issues; each identifies with this "difference" of Jim and the uncanny possibilities that attend the most ordinary situations. The same pattern occurs in the "Heart of Darkness," in which Conrad's first goal, it seems, is to suggest that the jungle is intrinsic to London, a seemingly secure and familiar place. Musil's main paradox, of course, is the idea of a man without qualities, but one thinks also of his concept of active passivity and of the unity of precision and soul.

and Nietzsche's famous project of becoming what is, for which he writes virtually a manual in Ecce Homo? These are the questions which I would like to begin to address. Since Nietzsche himself has indicated how we must go beyond the apparent "truth," we now must look not only at what he said --his statements of "truth"-- but especially at the unspoken truth which underlies, and often belies, these same statements.

Being in Time

Beyond Good and Evil is Nietzsche's most concerted effort at direct, "predicative" philosophy. It proposes theories and a program for the future: a master morality to replace a slavish Christianity, an ethic of nobility, a vision of life as will to power, an appeal for a transvaluation of all values. All this is expressed without any difficulty of articulation and in almost too confident a tone. This is the book's intention, and that is why its first reviewer, J. V. Widmann, cautioned readers that it contained dynamite. But the real explosion explodes the text.

At paragraph #277, eighteen before the end of the book, Nietzsche's American translator, Walter Kaufmann, appends a note to the effect that "this section may signal the approaching end of the book." It seems to Kaufmann that "the immediately following sections, being less continuous than the preceding, may also have been placed here from a sense

of 'where else?'" (BWN, 413). Here is the paragraph which seems clearly to allude to the close of Nietzsche's book:

--Tough luck! The same old story! When one has finished building one's house, one realizes that in the process one has unexpectedly learned something that one needed to know very badly--before one began building. The eternally distasteful [ewige leidige] "Too late!"--The melancholy of everything finished! . . . (KSA, 5, 228-29)

Kaufmann's insight about the placement of the aphorism is offset by his naive account of the reason why it is so placed. In addition, his "Where else?" theory has an insidious consequence: it discourages us from taking the conclusion of Beyond Good and Evil seriously. It implies that these last eighteen paragraphs are not essential to the work, that they could just as well have been left out. What does paragraph #277, which Nietzsche seems to have had nowhere else to place, actually say? It says that now that he has finished writing the book, he has learned something which he should have known before he began. After having finished building his house--which, like a philosophical system, cannot be properly erected without that missing piece of knowledge--he realizes that now he knows something too late, and that his work remains of necessity incomplete.

The concluding paragraphs of Beyond Good and Evil (starting not with the one that arouses Kaufmann's attention, but with #269), are not "less continuous" than the preceding; they are deliberately antiphonal to what precedes

and form one of the most coherent parts of the book. They speak over and over of the philosopher's need to disguise himself and his thoughts, the impossibility of timely action, the feeling of nausea toward men and self, the salve of oblivion, the mistrust of knowledge, and the remoteness of truth. They are expressions of pain, desire, and frustration.

Paragraph #289 draws at least one conclusion from the oblique data of this book's conclusion:

In the writings of a hermit . . . in his strongest words, even in his cry, there vibrates still a new and more dangerous kind of silence--of burying something in silence [eine neue und gefährlichere Art des Schweigens, Verschweigens] The hermit does not believe that any philosopher . . . ever expressed his real and ultimate opinions in books: does one not write books precisely to conceal what one harbors [um zu verbergen, was man bei sich birgt] ? Indeed, he will doubt whether a philosopher could have "ultimate and real" opinions, whether behind every one of his caves there is not, must not be, another deeper cave--a more comprehensive, stranger, richer world beyond the surface, an abysmally deep ground behind every ground, under every attempt to furnish "grounds" [ein Abgrund hinter jedem Grunde, unter jeder "Begründung"] . Every philosophy is a foreground philosophy [Vordegmonds-Philosophie] Every philosophy also conceals a philosophy; every opinion is also a hideout [ein Versteck], every word also a mask (KSA, 5, 233-34).

Up to now we have reflected on Nietzsche's awareness of the recalcitrance of truth. This paragraph, along with the ending of the book to which it belongs, clarifies the implications of such an awareness for a philosopher's practice. What this paragraph suggests is that Nietzsche's

writings do not represent his true opinions, that they are sign-words hiding the real matter he has to say, that he cannot say what he has to say directly, that the philosopher's integrity forbids him to have final opinions, that if his texts do contain truth, it must be sought in what they do not say but only suggest. While there is always an abyss behind any ground, Nietzsche claims that in the writings of a hermit, there is a new type of burying in silence. What is the Abgrund that Nietzsche in particular hides? It is a disgust at his own existence and his historical time, a sense that all things recur in a futile circle, and a knowledge of the nihilistic implications of his refutation of truth. The "wanderer" (like the hermit, another persona for Nietzsche) has returned from this Abgrund eleven paragraphs earlier "with a lip that conceals its disgust, with a hand that now reaches only slowly" (#278). A stranger leads him, like an aging Oedipus, to a spot to recuperate, and asks him what his heart desires. "'Another mask!'" answers the wanderer, "'A second mask!'" The overt meaning of this parable would seem to be that the wanderer needs a disguise to spare him from the eleemosynary indiscretion of other people; but the deeper suggestion is that he needs a mask to protect himself from his own vision, just as his lip conceals its disgust. The second mask will cover the horror of what he has seen, like the veil of Maya or a healing and redemptive vision. Nietzsche's

Vordergrunds-Philosophie is such a mask. It develops its "truths," its prescriptions, its confident analyses, and future projects in order to hide its knowledge of the Abgrund.

How does the unsaid temporal theme of these concluding pages contribute to a picture of such an Abgrund? We are familiar from Nietzsche's earliest work on, with his sense of himself as one who engages in "Untimely Meditations" (Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen, 1873). He is "ahead of his time." He foretells events that have not yet reached the ears of men. "My time," as he writes in Ecce Homo, "has not yet come, some are born posthumously [Ich selber bin noch nicht an der Zeit, Einige werden posthum geboren]" (KSA, 6, 298). Thus Spoke Zarathustra is the work of a man who lives with "one foot beyond life." "We build our nest in the tree Future [Auf dem Baume Zukunft bauen wir unser Nest]" (KSA, 6, 277). Beyond Good and Evil, too, is carefully framed as an anticipatory work. Its subtitle reads Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future [Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft].

Here, however, at the end of the work, Nietzsche is concerned not with being too early but with being too late, with discovering only after the fact what he needed to know before. The philosopher is described as "one who waits" (#274); he must stand outside of time, for his subject is time at large: the present, the past, and the

future, history as a whole. We recall Nietzsche's self-description at the beginning of The Will to Power as a "hermit [Einsiedler] by instinct, who has found his advantage in standing aside and outside, in patience, in procrastination, in staying behind . . . a spirit of daring and experiment [ein Wage- und Versucher-Geist] that has already lost its way once in every labyrinth of the future . . . a soothsayer bird-spirit who looks back when relating what will come." Yet occasionally, "the call that awakens . . . comes too late" (ibid.). As the very last paragraph of Beyond Good and Evil confesses, the philosopher understands experience only once experience has passed away:

Alas, what are you after all, my written and painted thoughts! It was not long ago that you were still so colorful, young, and malicious, full of thorns and secret spices--you made me sneeze and laugh--and now? You have already taken off your novelty. . . . What thing do we copy, writing and painting, we mandarins with Chinese brushes, we immortalizers of things that can be written--what are the only things we are able to paint? Alas, only what is on the verge of withering and losing its fragrance! Alas, always only storms that are passing, exhausted, and feelings that are autumnal and yellow! Alas, always only birds that grew weary of flying and flew astray and now can be caught by hand--by our hand! We immortalize what cannot live and fly much longer--only weary and mellow things!¹⁸

18 "Ach, was seid ihr doch, ihr meine geschriebenen und gemalten Gedanken! Es ist nicht lange her, da wart ihr noch so bunt, jung und boshalft, voller Stacheln und geheimer Würzen, dass ihr mich niesen und lachen machtet--und jetzt? Schon habt ihr eure Neuheit ausgezogen. . . . Welche Sachen schreiben und malen wir denn ab, wir Mandarinen mit

This is a most paradoxical ending to a work that aspires to the future. How can Nietzsche expect to engender a philosophy when his words express only what is already exhausted, feelings that are "autumnal and mellow"? Instead of proposing a vigorous vision of the future, he is writing an elegy for young, colorful, and malicious thoughts, which cannot be "given life" until they are near their own death. In Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche associates philosophers with deaf-mutes [Taub-stumme] and lays down a principle for them: "Whatever we have words for, that we have already got beyond [Wofür wir Worte haben, darüber sind wir auch schon hinaus]" (KSA, 6, 128).

The very last word of this book which was presumably written ahead of its time increases the paradox. Titled "Nachgesang" (after-song), it is not a prose paragraph but a lyric poem. Is this an attempt to say more than can be said in the gravedigging language of prose? Possibly, but the poem only continues the fatalistic complaints of the preceding prose. If it is called "Nachgesang" it is not merely because it is sung after the work has been finished

chinesischem Pinsel, wir Verewiger der Dinge, welche sich schreiben lassen, was vermögen wir denn allein abzumalen? Ach, immer nur Das, was eben welk werden will und anfängt, sich zu verriecken! Ach, immer nur abziehende und erschöpfte Gewitter und gelbe späte Gefühle! Ach, immer nur Vögel, die sich müde flogen und verflogen und sich nun mit der Hand haschen lassen,--mit unserer Hand! Wir verewigen, was nicht mehr lange leben und fliegen kann, müde und mürbe Dinge allein! (KSA, 5, 240/BGE, #296).

but because singing, too, occurs after loss--is, in other words, an elegy.¹⁹ The poem centers on the persona's response to time: his "restless happiness in standing and scouting and waiting" [unruhig Glück im Stehn und Spähn und Warten]." He is awaiting his friends, a bond by which to overcome his isolation. At the noon of life (Lebens Mittag, which is also Zarathustra's symbol for the perfect existence of the Übermensch), the poet appeals for temporal fruition: "Kommt! 'S ist Zeit! 'S ist Zeit!" But the friends delay. When they do arrive, it is too late to find the man they were looking for and (presumably) too early to recognize what he has become:²⁰

--There you are, friends!--But, alas, I am not he
 whom you wanted to visit?
 You hesitate, are amazed . . .
 I--I am not it any longer? Hand, gait, face--changed?
 And what I am, to you friends--I am not it?

I became another? And self-estranged?
 Broken away from myself?

--Da seid ihr, Freunde!--Weh, doch ich bin's nicht,
 Zu dem ihr wolltet?
 Ihr zögert, staunt . . .
 Ich--bin's nicht mehr? Vertauscht Hand, Schritt, Gesicht?
 Und was ich bin, euch Freunden--bin ich's nicht?

¹⁹ "Singing," Nietzsche writes in Zarathustra, "is for the convalescent," for those recovering from an illness. "The healthy can speak [Singen . . . is für Genesende; der Gesunde mag reden] (KSA, 4, 257/Z, III, "The Convalescent").

²⁰ In this poem Nietzsche is doubtless alluding to his recent disillusionment and rupture with his friends Paul Rée and Lou Salomé. See Hayman, pp. 244-86.

Ein Anderer ward ich? Und mir selber fremd?
 Mir selber entsprungen?
 (KSA, 5, 241).

While the poet's friends are, in apparent continuity in time, the poet's self does not correspond to what it has always been (Was ich bin . . . binich's nicht). It has changed into another, become strange to itself.

The problem for the philosopher seems to be how to realize his existence in the present. "Genius," Nietzsche reflects a few sections earlier, "is perhaps not so rare after all--but the five hundred hands it requires to tyrannize the kairos, 'the right time,' to seize chance by its forelock" (KSA, 5, 228/BGE, #274). Talent, good will, and creativity are everywhere; but the truth is that "it requires strokes of luck and much that is incalculable for a higher man . . . to get around to action in time [dass ein höherer Mensch . . . noch zur rechten Zeit zum Handeln kommt]" (KSA, 5, 227). Could it be, Nietzsche wonders, "that in the realm of genius [des Genie's], 'Raphael without hands,' taking this phrase in the widest possible sense, is perhaps not the exception but the rule?" (KSA, 5, 228). That is, the man of spirit does not have the hands to seize the right time, to synchronize his action to the requirements of the moment. Unlike other men, who flow in a frictionless harmony with their historical surroundings, the genius suffers a metaphysical disjunction

between time and action, between actuality and possibility, between concrete history and freedom, between fact and value, between becoming and being. He is too late for actual history and too early for the alternative possibilities of his vision. Thus Nietzsche speaks of the "whole inner hopelessness of the higher man, this eternal 'too late,'" for all such men "are and perhaps must be men of fleeting moments [Menschen der Augenblicke]"--moments which they can never make theirs (KSA, 5, 224/BGE, #269).

Beyond Good and Evil, the work of one such man, is squeezed into that impossible moment between future and past. It has no present, its present consists in its disjunction from time. While this "prelude" is written for the sake of philosophy to be eventually achieved, once the book has been finished, Nietzsche sings of having been too late to seize the time that was his. In his aftersong Nietzsche appeals to the present he has been cheated out of.

To succeed in finding his time (or actualizing the work of art), the genius must appropriate the metaphysical disjunction and make it productive. He might match his time by not being a part of it, thus matching his artwork to the mismatch of action and time. The disjunction of experience, as W. B. Yeats has it, originates an artistic vision of the unity of being. If, with five hundred hands, the artist

does finally achieve some perfect match between time and action, it is because in his work the existential impossibility of matching one's time in action has made itself clear.

Nevertheless, one might speculate that the real import of these oblique references to time at the end of Beyond Good and Evil is that Nietzsche is outgrowing the forms of life and of expression faster than they come to him. He is too rich in becoming to submit to the language of being. If he is at all, he is as a continuous act of metamorphosis, a becoming other to himself at every moment. He has appropriated becoming. For all the pain that it involves, this disjunction between what he is and is not could be understood as a perfect coincidence between selfhood and the ceaseless flux of existence. In that respect Beyond Good and Evil, aiming as it does to move "beyond" the formal limitations the metaphysical tradition has placed on life, could not have a more suitable ending than "Nachgesang." Yet what Nietzsche emphasizes is that this ideal is based on a more real defeat: on a tragic exile from the linear stability of everyday life, on a lack of bonds with present reality, on an inability to express or to know oneself. If the philosopher imagines that he encounters Dionysus in the penultimate section of the book (and becomes "richer in himself, newer to himself than before") the transformation

occurs by virtue of his being "broken open, blown at, and sounded out by a thawing wind," being made "more unsure, tenderer, more fragile" than any man before him. His fate is that of one who "from childhood has always been on his way and in foreign parts [immer unterwegs and in der Fremde]" (ibid.). Immer unterwegs means never achieving his destination. In der Fremde means that wherever he is, he remains severed from the outside world. He is destined to remain a wanderer, temporally as well as spatially.

Hence the Nietzschean self never attains full presence. It exists only insofar as it exists, as Heidegger puts it --stands out from its space and time. As depicted by the "Nachgesang," this existence is a "Stehn und Spähn und Warten": a standing which is an out-standing and awaiting, and a being on the lookout. It is a call, a silent yet deafening appeal for "the friend," an exotic affinity and link. "Kommt! 'S ist Zeit!" The insistence of this affirmation bespeaks the fact that the time has not yet come. And this unrealized moment is typical of all becoming.

Thus, the self which Nietzsche characterizes as seer, poet, philosopher, and wanderer does not coincide with his essence in concrete life. To become what one is, as Nietzsche puts it in Ecce Homo, seems to be excluded in principle. The individual remains buried in a cave, unable

to take form in language, suffering his finitude. A spectator of history, he is a participant who plays no part.

This is the logic which is underneath Nietzsche's overt claims in Beyond Good and Evil. As we shall see later Robert Musil spells out the next step: A man who wants to be "himself" would have to relinquish the very possibility of possessing "qualities." Those characteristics which seem to lend stability to his nature, to fix it and give it a shape, only restrict and confine it. Man, like existence, is essentially fluid, elastic, and capable of anything. Language, as we have seen, is complicitous with a metaphysics of being, involving false continuities, clear-cut differences, and rational relations. How could the individual not outgrow and be betrayed by it? But, as we see in Nietzsche's case, and even more clearly in Musil, to reject the constrictions of form is also not to be able to express oneself. If Heraclitus is right, then one cannot step into the stream even once.

The point of Nietzsche's palinode at the ending of Beyond Good and Evil is that it furnishes a negative metaphysics undermining the positive vision of the text. All philosophical conception, however constructive it may appear, springs from a negative ground. The philosopher is a deaf-mute, an exile, heroical attempting what cannot be achieved. Blindness, oblivion, deception, wrong timing,

lies, dark glasses, and delusions accompany each of his higher efforts. More particularly, especially in relation to Musil and Conrad, Nietzsche's project of selfhood seems to carry the seeds of its own undoing. The whole presupposition of Nietzsche's critique of inauthentic modes of being, i.e., his stipulation that authentic individuality is possible by transcending traditional morality (or by legislating one's own values), becomes suddenly suspect. Conrad's heroes attempt to be themselves, but they do not know what this means. They seem to have a satisfactory ground for action, but fate uncovers an Abgrund behind it. They cling to a form of life to find it wrested away from them and their innermost essence called into question. The man without qualities takes a year off to discover an answer to this problem. He ends up sitting it out, in active passivity. Both Conrad and Musil stress the importance of willing but are not sure what makes up the content of that will.

If the idea of "willing oneself" is to be retained as a central principle in Nietzsche's philosophy, it must be carefully redefined. His idea of becoming what one is must be predicated upon the impossibility of being what one is. It, like the other principles of his philosophy, is founded in nihilism.

Man's Ruin (Untergang)

It would seem that those who read the Übermensch as a heroic, autonomous, masterful, and perfectly realized individual have had it wrong all along--that Nietzsche himself has it wrong when he encourages such a notion.

Autonomy? Self-realization? Where is that self or law which would be realized if everything is becoming?

When once the truth is grasped that one's own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown . . . then there remains nothing but the surrender to one's impulses, the fidelity to passing emotions which is perhaps a nearer approach to truth than any other philosophy of life. And why not? If we are "ever becoming--never being," then I would be a fool if I tried to become this thing rather than that; for I know I never will be anything (PC, 733).

This is Conrad, in a letter to R. B. Cunningham Graham. Nietzsche's understanding of existential complexity simply does not allow for a simple, masterful man at one with his qualities and life. A man without qualities is more consistent with Nietzsche's views than the traditional idea of the Übermensch as a self-transcendent blond beast. Thus Spoke Zarathustra, the central, indeed, almost only, text on the Übermensch idea, must be read as attentively as Beyond Good and Evil.

Zarathustra is the story of a prophet's attempt to teach men the Übermensch as "the meaning of the earth." A self-governed hermit and precursor to the Übermensch,

Zarathustra comes down from the mountains to impart his wisdom to men "like a bee that has gathered too much honey." The question is whether he does so, or himself learns that self-transcendence is impossible.

Zarathustra's prologue makes it clear that to lift man higher, he and his wisdom must perish, untergehen, which literally means go under--come down from his heights to men, but also down to the depths of intellectual despair. "Man is something that must be overcome," he announces. This "overcoming" is very ambiguous: It also means that man must meet his ruin. Zarathustra teaches such ruin, even if he is not aware of to what extent.

"I must go under [untergehen]. . . . Zarathustra wants to become man again" (KSA, 4, 12/PN, 122). Revolutionary though his task may be (for, unlike other religious leaders who teach an ideal world and a transcendent system of values, the modern Zarathustra wishes to teach man the earth and finite existence), this prophet, too, must sacrificing his godliness to become a man. "Thus I wish to die so that you friends will love the earth more for my sake." Zarathustra comes down to the faithless level of his nihilistic contemporaries. His Untergang consists in learning man's suffering, weakness, and disgust at living. Zarathustra does not teach men as much as he learns from them, and what he learns is the futility of his own ideals.

He does not become an Übermensch or show his contemporaries how to do so.

The principle at work in Zarathustra's Untergang is that "it is out of the deepest depth that what is high comes to its height (KSA, 4, 195/PN, 266). Zarathustra loves those who, like him, "do not know how to live except by perishing [untergehen]." These are they "who cross over." Cross over to where? Is there not an implicit "other world" or other state of affairs underlying Zarathustra's logic? "I love," he continues, "the great despisers, because they are the great reverers and arrows of longing for the other shore. I love those who do not first seek behind the stars for a reason to perish [untergehen] and be a sacrifice, but who sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth may some day become the overman's. . . . I love him who is abashed when the dice fall to make his fortune . . . for he wants to perish [Zu Grunde gehen]" (KSA, 4, 17/PN, 127). If self-overcoming has any meaning, it is predicated upon suicide.

In what does Zarathustra's own suicide consist? In large part, as in Beyond Good and Evil, it is a suicide induced by knowledge, by a disgust. What factors contribute to this disgust? Man's lack of moral determination, his inability to will, is the first of them. Yet what becomes clear to Zarathustra is that lack of will is not simply

moral weakness. It is a metaphysical by-product of time. The givenness of things as they are, and of the nihilistic setting of the present world, makes the notion of willing an absurd one. Zarathustra admits, he resents the world he has gone down to. This resentment forces him to project his will beyond it: "The now and the past on earth--alas, my friends that is what I find most unendurable; and I should not know how to live if I were not also a seer of that which must come" (KSA, 4, 179/PN, 250-51). This confession amounts to a denial of life. It means that Zarathustra's will is in exile; it cannot endure the present, nor endure that it cannot change it. Nietzsche is aware of the problem: "Willing liberates; but what is it that puts even the liberator himself in fetters? 'It was' --that is the name of the will's gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, it is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards; and that it cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy" (KSA, 4, 179-80/PN, 251). Zarathustra's goal is to will backwards, but, alas, not even a god can do it (as Albert Magnus said, paraphrasing Aristotle). Whatever was, and is, cannot be recreated, and if willing (forward) is a reaction to the present and past, as Zarathustra suggests, then man's future too is in fetters. Having

descended to men to teach them the power of their will, Zarathustra learns the will's impotence.

That man is imprisoned in time becomes even clearer in light of Zarathustra's central doctrine, which he has barely the strength to pronounce, much less to embrace: the eternal recurrence of everything exactly as it is without any change. The most shattering and nihilistic of truths, the eternal return allows no belief in progress and no justification for moral behavior. The task of affirming the ineluctability of this circle is too great for Zarathustra. "What do you matter!" his most quiet hour asks him, "Speak your word and break!" (KSA, 4, 188/PN, 258). Zarathustra dreams that it might be possible to affirm the state of the world without breaking. He has a vision of a man biting the head off the serpent of nausea which has crawled into his throat and then laughing "as one changed." The reader expects it to be an allegory for Zarathustra's own convalescence from his nausea, but it is not: "My longing for this laughter gnaws at me; oh, how do I bear to go on living!" (KSA, 4, 202/PN, 272). "Who is it who must yet come one day?" Zarathustra asks. At present the Übermensch is still "the nameless one, for whom only future songs will find names" (ibid.).

Exiled from his present and his past to a hypothetical future which he can barely envisage, Zarathustra experiences

his existence as a state of suspension. "Here I sit and wait, surrounded by old tablets that are broken and new tablets half covered with writing. When will my hour come?" (KSA, 4, 246/PN, 308). The work that Zarathustra has set out to do is destined to remain unfinished. "Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman [between past and future, nature and spirit], a rope over an abyss [einem Abgrunde]. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way [auf-dem-Weg], a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping" (KSA, 4, 161/PN, 126). This is the "on-the-way" of present existence. Zarathustra lives it out by trying, but failing, to achieve the goal of his self-sacrifice: making men learn the meaning of the Übermensch.

Nietzsche wrote each of the four parts of Zarathustra independently, presumably intending to end the work with each. This makes it all the more significant that in each part Zarathustra retreats without having accomplished his mission. In Book IV Zarathustra's defeat is most evident. Having been faced with the need to swallow his nausea and to affirm the eternal recurrence in Book III, he now meets his greatest challenge--to overcome his compassion for the higher men of his time, for nihilism itself. Compassion (Mitleid) is indeed the word: each of these higher men echoes Zarathustra's own teachings. The nihilistic edifice they form is built on the cornerstones of Nietzsche's own

philosophy. In fact, elsewhere in his writings, Nietzsche calls some of these higher men's poems "Zarathustra's Songs."²¹ To be able to affirm the world, Zarathustra must first refute these nihilists. He does not. Nor does he succeed in elevating them to anything close to his idea of the Übermensch. If they take their first steps toward convalescence, learning "to laugh at themselves," Zarathustra recognizes that "it is not my laughter that they have learned . . . the ear that listens for me . . . is lacking in their limbs" (KSA, 4, 405/PN, 437). Nevertheless, in the final chapter of the book, a deus ex machina convinces Zarathustra that he has achieved his task of finding followers. He sees a vision that signals that the famous hour of the Übermensch is arriving: a laughing lion and a flock of doves. "The sign is at hand . . . my children are near, my children." All of Zarathustra's hardship now seems irrelevant to him. "'My suffering and my pity for suffering-- what does it matter? Am I concerned with happiness? I am concerned with my work. . . . This is my morning, my day

²¹ In particular, some of the poems of the higher men appear in Dionysos-Dithyramben. Elizabeth Förster Nietzsche's edition of Nietzsche's Gedichte und Sprüche, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1898), contains the following epigraph to Dionysos-Dithyramben (which, according to Colli and Montinari, Nietzsche ultimately discarded): "Dies sind die Lieder Zarathustra's, welche er sich selber zusang, dass er seine letzte Einsamkeit ertrüge" (p. 134).

is breaking; rise now, rise, thou great noon!" (KSA, 4, 406-08/PN, 428-39). However, as in the "Aftersong" of Beyond Good and Evil, this noon is merely heralded, invoked, an event to follow the morning. Zarathustra's children "are near" but not yet there. (Kaufmann saw well in translating das Zeichen kommt as "the sign is at hand," alluding to Yeats's "The Second Coming.") Ironically, Zarathustra's resolution to be concerned only with his work--to turn man into an Übermensch--sends him back to the beginning of his wanderings, a soliloquist seeking to be heard.

Thus, Zarathustra's double, the wanderer and shadow of Book IV, who through his free spiritedness has not discovered any truths to replace the ones he has abandoned, represents Zarathustra's ultimate destiny. "I am a wanderer," he says,

always on my way. . . . O earth, thou hast become too round for me! . . . With you [Zarathustra] I broke whatever my heart revered; I overthrew all boundary stones and images. . . . With you I unlearned faith in words and values and great names. . . . Too often, verily, did I follow close on the heels of truth: so she kicked me in the face. . . . What is left to me now? A . . . restless will; flutter-wings; a broken backbone. Trying thus to find my home --O Zarathustra, do you know it?--trying this was my trial; it consumes me. 'Where is--my home?' I ask and search and have searched for it, but I have not found it. O eternal Everywhere, O eternal Nowhere, O eternal In Vain!'²²

²² "Ein Wanderer bin ich . . . immer unterwegs. . . . Oh Erde, du wardst mir zu rund! [Cf. p. 72 of this

This eternal Nowhere is the "home" that Zarathustra recognizes as his own. If the Übermensch represents the fiction of man finding his home, it is a fiction which grows out of this longing of homelessness. Nietzsche understands this errant longing as poetry; and Zarathustra, too, is a poet.

"This--the suitor of truth?" one of his companions mocks:

No! Only fool! Only poet!
 Only speaking colorfully,
 Only screaming colorfully out of fool's masks,
 Climbing around on mendacious word-bridges,
 On colorful rainbows,
 Between false heavens
 And false earths,
 Roaming, hovering--
Only fool! Only poet!

That I be banished
From all truth,
Only fool!
Only poet!²³

study] . . . Mit dir zerbrach ich, was je mein Herz verehrte, alle Grenzsteine und Bilder warf ich um. . . . Mit dir verlernte ich den Glauben an Worte und Werthe und grosse Namen. . . . Zu oft, wahrlich, folgte ich der Wahrheit dicht auf dem Fusse: da trat sie mir vor den Kopf. . . . Was blieb mir noch zurück? . . . ein unstäter Wille; Flatter-Flügel; ein zerbrochenes Rückgrat. Diess Suchen nach meinem heim: oh Zarathustra, weisst du wohl, diess Suchen war meine Heimsuchung, es frisst mich auf. 'Wo ist--mein Heim?' Dar-nach frage und suche und suchte ich, das fand ich nicht. Oh ewiges Überall, oh ewiges Nirgendwo, oh ewiges--Umsonst!'" (KSA, 4, 339-41/PN, 385-86).

23 "Das--der Wahrheit Freier?
 Nein! Nur Narr! Nur Dichter!
 Nur Bunt redend,
 Aus Narren-Larven bunt herausschreiend,

The poem, which was especially dear to Musil, is one of those which appears in Nietzsche's own voice in the Dionysus Dithyrambs. The poet's specialty (modelled, as Zarathustra explains, on old ladies' longing for love) is to create gods and ideal fictions beyond this world. The Übermensch, too, belongs to these fictions. On a realm of clouds "we place our motley bastards and call them gods and overmen [Übermenschen]. For they are just light enough for these chairs--all these gods and overmen. Ah, how weary I am of all the imperfection [des Unzulänglichen] which must at all costs become event [Ereigniss]! Ah, how weary I am of poets!" (KSA, 4, 164-65/PN, 240). Nietzsche is alluding to the conclusion of Faust II ("Das Unzulängliche, / Hier wird's Ereignis"), but not sparing himself from the accusation of idealism he directs to Goethe. Thus he denounces those who wish to change the nature of things, calling them "overthrow- and scum-devils [Auswurf- und Umsturz-Teufeln]" (KSA, 4, 168/PN, 243). The more one seeks to overthrow idols the more surely they rise up again.²⁴

Herumsteigend auf lügnerischen Wort-Brücken,
Auf bunten Regenbogen
Zwischen falschen Himmeln
Und falschen Erden,
Herumschweifend, herumschwebend,--
Nur Narr! Nur Dichter! (KSA, 4, 372/PN, 410).

²⁴ Thus, ironically, the most iconoclastic of philosophers, who becomes even more so after Zarathustra, advises the church, the state, and all other weary enemies he

Thus, while the advent of this fiction the Übermensch was to have represented the occurrence of a "great noon," Zarathustra brings himself to admit, "I have outgrown belief in 'great events' ['grosse Ereignisse']" (ibid.). In his case, too, it is imperfection (das Unzulänglich) which is trying to become an event. This event, if achieved, is, as suggested earlier, art: the imperfect reinterpreted as perfect. But Zarathustra, like Nietzsche and also Conrad and Musil, wishes to achieve such an art in life. All are interested in man's actual existence, not in what ideal visions he may engender from despair. They want to perfect life's imperfection in the act of living. Can this be done? It can be attempted. Zarathustra leaves us with the understanding that any success in living (any Übermenschlichkeit) can occur only in the process of this attempt. A serious attempt must begin with an acknowledgment of its limits.

Fate

As a man, Zarathustra must accept his fate as an "arrow of longing," as a bridge over an abyss. In the same way, the author of Beyond Good and Evil may offer universal visions of Western culture, but they are all restricted by

wishes to overthrow, "let yourself be overthrown--so that you may return to life, and virtue return to you" (KSA, 4, 169/PN, 244). For them, too, untergehen is a means to health.

his personal finitude, frustration, and blindness. Nietzsche, at the time of these two works, had not yet developed his formula of how to become what one is: amor fati. Yet fatalism is at the bottom of both works, indeed, at the bottom of all of his work from Zarathustra on. Fate usually connotes unalterable and uncanny experience. Events do not conform to a rational plan, neither that of a man or of an all-seeing god. Things occur with an inscrutable necessity. The connotation of fate is negative, for experience remains unjustified.

What is the picture of fate that can be constructed on the basis of these two works? On one level, it involves the historical time in which the individual lives. By his own characterization, Nietzsche's time represents the tail end of a nihilistic progression of Western morality, which, from Socrates to Schopenhauer, has devalued the world of human existence. On a deeper level, however, fate involves some basic ontological characteristics of existence itself.

The first characteristic entails a split between self and world. The individual's will stands over and against the world, willing only from a standpoint of difference. As we have seen in Nietzsche's depictions of the philosopher, the wanderer, and the hermit, the destiny of the Nietzschean self is to be ever in der Fremde, its will doomed to frustration. The world is other than the individual wishes and he can do nothing about it.

The finitude of existence is also temporal. A prisoner of time, the wandering self is at odds with its present, and views its past as "a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident." Chance is at play. Unable to will backwards, the self thus stores its hope in the future. But Nietzsche, like Camus, withdraws the possibility even of hope. Not only is historical experience random and uncontrollable, but it recurs in each of its details eternally. Nothing has a goal, or a logic, or a means of improvement. If one tried to characterize such life, one would have to call it a condition of ceaseless strife and of will to power: "a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself . . . enclosed by 'nothingness' as by a boundary . . . a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back . . . without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, . . . unless a ring feels good will toward itself."²⁵

²⁵ "Diese Welt: ein ungeheuer von Kraft, ohne Anfang, ohne Ende, eine feste, eiserne Grösse von Kraft, welche nicht grösser, nicht kleiner wird, die sich nicht verbraucht, sondern nur verwandelt . . . wom 'Nichts' umschlossen als von seiner Grenze . . . ein Meer in sich selber stürmender und flutender Kräfte, ewig sich wandelnd, ewig zurücklaufend . . . ohne Ziel, wenn nicht im Glück des Kreises ein Ziel liegt, ohne Willen, wenn nicht ein Ring zu sich selbst guten Willen hat" (Schlechta, III, 916-17/WP, #1067).

This discontinuity of self and world, of self and time, of world and world (as a conflict of forces) also reaches into the self, destroying any hope to achieve inner integrity. "Man must be overcome," writes Nietzsche. What, one might ask, is this "man" which must be overcome? Whatever it is, it is clear that it too belongs with the historical world and the infinite finitude of time (the eternal recurrence) as an element of man's fate and an antagonist of his will. It is his "self" as it is before he sets out to mold it. But who is the he? Neither ego/mind/reason nor id/body/passion. Nietzsche's psychology resists those polarities. They belong to an indivisible one, a one, however, that is informed by ceaseless tension.²⁶ As he writes in his notes, Nietzsche conceives of "the subject as multiplicity" (Schlechta, III, 473/WP, #490), like life itself. To judge again from his self-representations, self-overcoming seems to be a teleological process that can never reach a definitive telos.

All these discontinuities of fate are made worse by the blindness of human consciousness. Having traditionally aspired to dominate nature and to discover continuity consciousness discovers now that it is an instrument of

²⁶ For an alternative reading of Nietzsche's psychology, see Lillian Feder's discussion of "On the Despisers of the Body," in Zarathustra and her reading of Norman O. Brown et al. in light of Nietzsche (Madness in Literature, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 203-47.

falsification. Every imperative such as "Know thyself" becomes a naïveté.

We shall find that many of these characterizations of fate strike familiar chords in the work of Musil and Conrad. Musil calls such fate necessity, or actuality, depicting it as a complex system of political, social, and psychological forces into which man is thrown. Conrad structures his fictions on imponderable and chance occurrences, dramatizing the internal divisions they induce in man. All three conceive of man's destiny as a struggle with ananke, as an essay within the bounds of the unchangeable.

Life as a Whole: The Endurance of Tragedy

Up to now I have emphasized the negative dimensions of Nietzsche's thought: the sense of blindness and futility that accompanies his positive visions. In that respect I have looked at the "problems" of his work rather its attempted "solutions." After all, by his own assessment, Nietzsche is a philosopher who has lived through nihilism "to the end, leaving it behind, outside of himself." He is the laughing and dancing artist of thought, an affirmative spirit, a parodist of world history who finds his cheer, as Giles Deleuze says, "beyond all the codes of past, present, and future."²⁷ Yet one risks trivializing Nietzsche's

²⁷ "Nomad Thought," The New Nietzsche, ed. David B. Allison (New York: Delta Books, 1977), p. 142.

ethic of affirmation if one does not recognize the extent to which it is imbedded in his ongoing participation in nihilism. Nietzsche may have been the first perfect nihilist of Europe, but he never left nihilism behind him; he found his joy in struggling to overcome it. We must recognize that "such happiness," as he writes of Epicurus, "could only be invented by a man who was suffering continually" (KSA, 3,411/GS, #45). Nietzsche's philosophy consisted in a transfiguration of pain, an existential act, not in a theory he found waiting for him, as it is the case with much neo-Nietzscheanism today. "We are not thinking frogs, nor objectifying and registering mechanisms with their innards removed: constantly, we have to give birth to our thoughts out of our pain and, like mothers, endow them with all we have of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate, and catastrophe."²⁸ It is for this reason that I have focused on the elegiac, palinodic conclusion of Beyond Good and Evil and on Untergang as a fateful basis for an Übermensch. Nietzsche's thought grows out of agony. We cannot understand how Nietzsche transfigures pain (or what it is transfigured into) unless we recognize his

²⁸ "Wir sind keine denkenden Frösche, keine Objektivir- und Registrir-Apparate mit kalt gestellten Eingeweiden,-- wir müssen beständig unsre Gedanken aus unsrem Schmerz gebären und mütterlich ihnen Alles mitgeben, was wir von Blut, Herz, Feuer, Lust, Leidenschaft, Qual, Gewissen, Schicksal, Verhängniss in uns haben" (KSA, 3, 349/GS, Preface, #3).

intention to maximize the agony and thereby offer man the greatest challenges he may ever have met: Can man endure to live without truth? Bereaved of his highest values, can he still forge himself a purpose? In short, can he continue to will?

In a certain sense, Nietzsche reduces all these questions to one: how does one cope with suffering? One can either take shelter or try to weather it. The first alternative relies upon protective strategies, foremost of which is a morality that divides life into good and evil. "Evil" accounts for those experiences which cause one pain. Thus, Christianity, Nietzsche's primary case study, devises a system of regulations to hold social and political oppressors in check, bidding them love their neighbors. Morality functions by denying part of life, by trying to eradicate those experiences which cause hardship. At the extreme, when the oppressor is nothing less than the nature of things, or fate, then morality promotes ascetism and promises "the good" in an afterworld. Thus, as it subjects experience to its own idea, to the tyrannical domination of its own will to power, morality leads ultimately to nihilism--the denial of the intrinsic worth of things.

The same impulse for security underlies "disinterested" endeavors to discover the order of the world, particularly through rational means. The "will to truth" that motivates philosophers tries to reduce the complexity of existence

to a pattern which can be described. As admirable as this will to truth may be in its drive to penetrate misleading appearances, so contemptible is its demand for certainty. "What in us really wants 'truth'? . . . why not rather untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance?"²⁹ Again, it is insecurity which falsifies the nature of things, trying to coerce and dominate whatever refuses to yield.

Nietzsche's demand, on the other hand, in direct opposition to the dividing, systematizing, and gainsaying of life performed by reason and morality, is for "life whole and not denied or in part" (Schlechta, III, 773/WP, #1052). How does one approach life whole and not in part? First, by recognizing that systems of valuation do not take life whole, that they impose their own order upon it. To take life whole means to suspect all shoulds, woulds, and coulds as trying to hide something. It means to abandon the ideal and return to the real. "All idealization makes life poorer. To beautify it is to take away its character of complexity--it is to destroy it. Leave that to the moralists," one of Conrad's anarchists tells another (SA, 46). To return to the real means deliberately destroying the ideal. Indeed, Nietzsche makes it clear that if a person's will to truth is great enough, it will finally undermine

²⁹ "Was in uns will eigentlich 'zur Wahrheit'? . . . warum nicht lieber Unwahrheit? Und Ungewissheit? Selbst Unwissenheit?" (KSA, 5, 15/BGE, #1)

any articulated value, showing its inconsistency both with the experience it attempts to explain and with its own claims to methodological soundness. This, for example, is what Musil does when he reflects on the built-in ambiguity of every moral imperative, as in the simple and well-known one, "thou shalt not kill":

One can see at the first glance that it is neither a truth nor a subjectivism [eine Subjectivität]. We know that in many respects we keep to it strictly; in other respects certain very numerous but precisely defined exceptions are admitted. But in a very large number of cases of a third kind, as for instance in the imagination, in our desires, in the drama, or in the enjoyment of newspaper reports, we roam in a quite unregulated manner between abhorrence and allurements (GW, 1, 254/MWQ, ch. 62).

The problem is usually solved, Musil remarks, by simply calling what is neither a truth nor a matter of opinion a "requirement." For his part, Conrad, shows that when put to the test every seemingly sound value or interpretation, such as pity or bravery, collapses into its opposite.

For Nietzsche, deconstructing "cogent" beliefs is a matter of integrity. To be intellectually honest is to be a destroyer: to seek out those spots where the spirit takes refuge and lay them waste. Nietzsche drags closet nihilists into the open, making them confess that they predicate "truth" because they cannot accept life as it appears to be. "Error (belief in the ideal) is not blindness, error is

cowardice."³⁰ As Conrad had it, man clings to belief to ward off despair, to shield his vision from some "place of decay," to repress and bury things in silence. We have seen Nietzsche taking part in this same syndrome of self-deception --but lucidly, acknowledging the predicament and playing it out in his writing. At the turn of the nineteenth century, to have intellectual integrity means to thematize the nihilistic condition of man's fate.

"How much truth does a spirit endure, how much truth does it dare? More and more that became for me the real measure of value."³¹ We are approaching the point of the strongest connection between Nietzsche and his two successors. If error is a matter of cowardice, then daring is an extension of endurance: one dares to endure what one already knows. Endurance and daring are progressive responses to the recognition of the untruth of truth, and correspond to Nietzsche's allegory about the spirit which becomes a camel and then a lion.

To adopt the affirmative stance of the child--"a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel . . . a sacred 'Yes'"--the spirit must first become a camel--a radical

³⁰ "Irrthum (--der Glaube an's Ideal--) ist nicht Blindheit, Irrthum ist Feigheit" (KSA, 6, 259/BWN, 674).

skeptic--and then a lion--a rebel against authority. The camel, to borrow W. B. Yeats's phrase, assumes "the most difficult of tasks not impossible": that of doubting its firmest beliefs. "A popular error!" writes Nietzsche, "that of having the courage for one's convictions. Rather it is a matter of having the courage to attack one's convictions." "What does it mean, after all, to have integrity [rechtschaffen sein] in matters of the spirit? That one is severe against one's heart, that one despises 'beautiful sentiments,' that one makes of every yes and no a matter of conscience" (KSA, 6, 230/PN, 632).

Here one thinks of Conrad. "Out of his struggle with 'illusion,'" writes Morton Dauwen Zabel, "he made the basic principle of his craft" (PC, Introduction, p. 8). Always suspicious of "the debasing touch of insincerity" (PC, 712), Conrad confesses that his novelistic aim was the "conscientious rendering of truth in thought and action" (PC, 711-12). Believing that every writer "must begin by creating for himself a world . . . in which he can honestly believe" (PC, 714), he says: "There's neither inspiration nor hope in my work. It's more hard labour for life" (PC, 748). The inevitable consequence: "I have often suffered in connection with my work from a sense of unreality, from intellectual doubt of the ground I stood upon" (PC, 740). While considering Fidelity man's highest virtue,

he recounted uncanny ruptures of human bonds; a conservative aristocrat, he showed aristocracy cracking under the force of anarchy; while defending self-restraint, he portrayed the passions as uncontrollable. the camel, too, is seeking truth, but the truth that underlies appearance.

In its loneliest desert, this beast of burden meets the dragon of its last conviction and needs the strength of a lion to fight it. the dragon embodies the imperative "Thou shalt!" Regardless of its provenance (sociological and political theories no less than God), this dragon pre-empts individual choice. Can man liberate himself from even his most tenacious prejudice, from what is neither a truth nor a subjective desire, and yet an absolute article of faith? To give up the "Thou shalt!" would be to become a walking nihilist, a Svidrigailov, a man capable of carrying out his filthiest fantasies in full justification. By posing this final challenge to the spirit of integrity, Nietzsche asks whether one can take disbelief to its ultimate consequences.

This final no is the gesture which the closet nihilist is unable to make: the admission that man is stranded, with no authority above him and no duty beneath him. He is free to create his destiny. Musil declares this no, quietly, almost without speaking it. "My novel," he tells an interviewer in 1928, "aims to provide material for . . . a new morality [mein Roman möchte Material zu einer . . . neuen

Moral geben] " (GW, 7, 942). If Conrad seems reluctant to develop a lion's paw, the appearance is founded in his intellectual pudeur and modest sense of mission: he is a "novelist," not a philosopher or inventor of new moral programs. "My task . . . is . . . to make you hear, to make you feel . . . to make you see" (PC, 708). Still, what his art makes us see is that the bourgeois-Christian morality, like every other, has lost its imperative status.

While the unconscious nihilist suppresses his lack of belief, the conscious nihilist admits it. His no is the expression of an authentic yes, an acknowledgment of his fate. He recognizes morality and reason as reductive efforts to dominate life, chopping it up, selecting choice parts and blending them to accord with an ideal. Hence the only real life-deniers, are those without the courage to accept the nihilistic doctrine: that all is permitted, that nothing is higher or lower, and nothing "redeemed" in any way. Thus understood, nihilism amounts to a tragic affirmation. It affirms that which resists man's will to simplicity, which destroys his schemes and ideal hopes. Nietzsche thus ends up positing "the measure of unbelief [Un glauben], of permitted 'freedom of the spirit' as an expression of an increase in power. 'Nihilism' an ideal of the highest degree of powerfulness of the spirit, the over-richest life " (Schlechta, III, 557/WP, #14). While

Nietzsche associates the unconscious nihilism described above with the world-weary spirit of Christianity, the symbol for conscious nihilism is the tragic pessimism of Greek culture -- "a pessimism of strength" (KSA, 1, 12/BWN, 17). "The tragic man affirms even the harshest suffering" (WP, #1052). He wants life whole.

Is there not a loyalty to experience in this push towards the confines of nihilism? Is this destruction of faith not the expression of some deeper faith of an amor fati, as Nietzsche calls it? Conrad speaks for Musil and Nietzsche when he writes, "I have approached the object of my task, things human, in a spirit of piety" (PC, 745). Respect for these things human, for their irreducible complexity, is what lies at the basis of these three writers' battle against "truth." Nietzsche, presumably the philosopher of "will to power," wants nothing more than to destroy man's compulsion to tyrannize over his own experience. He wants the opposite: "a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection, with the same things, the same logic and illogic of entanglements" (WP, #1041).

Tragic Affirmation and the Transvaluation of Values

In a posthumous note Nietzsche sums up this progress towards a perfection of nihilism under the title "My Innovations":

Further development of pessimism: intellectual pessimism; critique of morality, disintegration of the last consolation. Knowledge of the signs of decay. . . .

1. My endeavor to oppose a decay and increasing weakness of personality. I sought a new center.

2. Impossibility of this endeavor recognized.

3. Thereupon I advanced further down the road of disintegration--where I found new sources of strength for individuals. . . . I perceived that the state of disintegration, in which individuals can perfect themselves as never before--is an image and isolated example of existence in general. (Schlechta, III, 911/WP, #417).

Once nihilism has become fully self-conscious of itself and no more warrants are seen for "truth," then comes the turning to tragic affirmation. "Everything is permitted" means that everything is again possible, in perpetual and endless transformation. If God is dead, countless new gods can be invented. Nihilism restores the world to man, furnishing the basis for unconstricted human potential. "The world has become 'infinite' for us all over," writes Nietzsche, "inasmuch as we cannot reject the possibility that it may include infinite interpretations [dass sie unendliche Interpretationen in sich schliesst]" (KSA, 3, 627/GS, #374).

This new infinity of interpretations is unlike any that man has known before, making it such that whoever is born after the death of God "will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto" (KSA, 3,481/GS, #125).

Now it becomes clear that what Nietzsche objected to in rational and moral approaches to reality was not merely

the genealogical ground of their interpretations (weakness of will) and teleological purpose (control of life), but also the aesthetic value of these interpretations. A world of "truth"?--"What? Do we really want to permit existence to be degraded for us like this--reduced to a mere exercise for a calculator and an indoor diversion for mathematicians?" A scientific interpretation of the world would be "one of the most stupid of all possible interpretations . . . meaning that it would be one of the poorest in meaning [sinnärmsten]" (KSA, 3, 625-261/GS, # 373). The rejection of such systems would be justified even on purely aesthetic grounds. Nietzsche's "moral imperative": "Above all, one should not wish to divest existence of its rich ambiguity [Man soll das Dasein vor allem nicht seines vieldeutigen Charakters entkleiden wollen]" (ibid.). Again, to find a model for this appreciation of a plurivocal world, Nietzsche has to go back to pre-Christian days:

Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial--out of profundity. And is not this precisely what we are again coming back to, we daredevils of the spirit who have climbed the highest and most dangerous peak of present thought and looked around from up there--we who have looked down from there? Are we not, precisely in this respect, Greeks? Adorers of forms, of tones, of

words? And therefore--artists?³²

Nietzsche, by this reckoning, is a philosopher turned artist. Paradoxically, the tragic journey through the whole range of "untruth" revealed in nihilism yields a new conception of truth, which requires one to become an artist. We can see Nietzsche's own writing playing out this process: The first step involves venturing beyond every "truth"--even one's own--to see what it is trying to hide. Pain "compels us philosophers to descend into our ultimate depths and to put aside all trust, everything good-natured, everything that would interpose a veil, that is mild, that is medium--things in which formerly we may have found our humanity." But once at the bottom, such philosophers as Nietzsche has in mind reject that compulsion "to unveil, uncover, and put into a bright light whatever is kept concealed for good reasons. . . . We no longer believe that

³² "Oh diese Griechen! Sie verstanden sich darauf, zu leben: dazu thut Noth, tapfer bei der Oberfläche, der Falte, der Haut stehen zu bleiben, den Schein anzubeten, an Formen, an Töne, an Worte, an den ganzen Olymp des Scheins zu glauben! Diese Griechen waren oberflächlich--aus Tiefe! Und kommen wir nicht eben darauf zurück, wir Wagehalse des Geistes, die wir die höchste und gefährlichste Spitze des gegenwärtigen Gedankens erklettert und uns von da aus umgesehn haben, die wir von da aus hinabgesehn haben? Sind wir nicht eben darin--Griechen? Anbeter der Formen, der Töne, der Worte? Eben darum--Künstler? (KSA, 3,352/ GS, Preface, #4).

truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn.³³ This paradox is of the essence of Nietzsche's work. It is the "essay" in which one searches for truth only to discover it cannot be attained--thereby obtaining a truth which is neither on the surface nor in the depths, but a connection between them. Truth is neither the veils which cover truth nor the truth so covered, but the interplay between them. To know that one cannot penetrate the veils nor accept them as true, and to attempt to express the truth of this paradox is to perform a transvaluation of all values [Umwertung alle Werte].

In his later philosophy Nietzsche conceives of his philosophical task as that of engaging in a transvaluation of traditional Platonic-Christian values. By Umwertung he seems to mean turning these values on their head--defining the real world as the apparent world, being as becoming, virtue as amorality (virtù), love of one's neighbor as fear, "evil" as more useful than "good." This,

³³ "Erst der grosse Schmerz . . . zwingt uns Philosophen, in unsre letzte Tiefe zu steigen und alles Vertrauen, alles Gutmüthige, Verschleiernde, Milde, Mittlere, wohinein wir vielleicht vordem unsre Menschlichkeit gesetzt haben, von uns zu thun. . . . Und was unsere Zukunft betrifft: man wird uns schwerlich wieder auf den Pfaden jener ägyptischen Jünglinge finden, welche Nachts Tempel unsicher machen, Bildsäulen umarmen und durchaus Alles, was mit guten Gründen verdeckt gehalten wird, entschleiern, aufdecken, in helles Licht stellen wollen. . . . Wir glauben nicht mehr daran, dass Wahrheit noch Wahrheit bleibt, wenn man ihr die Schleier abzieht" (KSA, 3, 350-52/GS, Preface, #3-4, emphasis added).

on the surface, is what transvaluation means: replacing the Christian values with a new, more "natural" set. Nietzsche's professed intention, then, is to create a new epoch of higher paganism (making human history a story of B.N. and A.N.). But a transvaluation cannot mean that if the new, post-nihilistic infinity of interpretations is precisely what constitutes the justification of life ("art, and not morality, is . . . the truly metaphysical activity of man . . . the existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon," KSA, 1, 17/BWN, 227). A new system of values would be subject to most of the same objections that Nietzsche raised against the systems of the past: its "truths" belied by subjective prejudices, its "will to dictate" springing from weakness and resentment, its idealizations an imprisonment of meaning. If we accept the premises of Nietzsche's philosophy, we cannot accept his new morality. A transvaluation must mean more than a revaluation, a replacement of values with their opposites. Opposites, as Nietzsche teaches, do not really exist, and each value is only one among countless perspectives. The transvaluation called for by Nietzsche's philosophy is one which redefines not values but the act of evaluation. This new act of evaluation must traverse the difference between values, making them creative, conditional, and plurivocal.

Without mentioning the word Umwertung, Nietzsche gives us an idea of this process in the preface of The Gay Science: "Only great pain is the ultimate liberator of the spirit, being the teacher of the great suspicion [des grossen Verdachtes] that turns every U into an X, a real, genuine X, that is the penultimate letter before the last one." Nietzsche does not mean simply deceiving someone (passing off a U for an X = giving five instead of ten). Rather, the tangible quantity U is turned into "a real, genuine X"--that is, an unknown quantity and (if the word "genuine" is significant), an unknowable quantity. Experiencing the pain of seeking the truth, the philosopher begins to suspect that every phenomenon is interpretable in infinite ways, that every determinate reading is only a mask over indeterminate possibilities, that every apparent value is an offshoot of an unending process of evaluation. X is the penultimate letter before the last one: this means that the transvaluation in question does not end with a revaluation of U as X. U may be turned first into an X, then into a Y, then into a Z, and perhaps even begin again with A. Interpretation is always "antepenultimate," always on the verge of a conclusion, always almost truth, always essayistic.

To engage in this infinite interpretation is what it means to be an artistic philosopher in a post-nihilistic,

transvaluative mode. Nietzsche suggests as much in one of the "navigational" aphorisms of The Gay Science:

Embark! [Auf die Schiffe!] Consider how every individual is affected by an overall philosophical justification [eine philosophische Gesamt-Rechtfertigung] of his way of living and thinking: he experiences it as a sun that shines especially for him and bestows warmth, blessings, and fertility on him; it makes him independent of praise and blame, self-sufficient, rich, liberal with happiness and good will; incessantly it refashions evil into good, leads all energies to bloom and ripen. . . . In the end one exclaims: How I wish that many such new suns were yet to be created! Those who are evil or unhappy and the exceptional human being [der Ausnahme-Mensch]--all these should also have their philosophy, their good right, their sunshine! . . . What these people need is not confession, conjuring of souls, and forgiveness of sins; what is needful is a new justice [Gerechtigkeit]! And a new watchword [Losung]. And new philosophers. The moral earth, too, has its antipodes. The antipodes, too, have the right to exist. There is yet another world to be discovered--and more than one. Embark, philosophers! (KSA, 3, 529-30/ GS, #289).

This new justice, more tolerant even than the Christian morality of tolerance, accepts the right to be of whatever is. It confers positive value on the multiplicity of experience. The moral world is not flat, like a coin with two sides. It is round. To do it justice, interpretation must revolve endlessly upon infinite axes, changing perspectives, traversing distances, without sitting on a basis or coming to rest. This new justice would be a wheel of

pluralistic meaning, conferring value on the antipode of each of its legislated values. This justice, for which a new "watchword," a new language, and new philosophers are needed, would consist in a world of values, and even more than one. This new justice would occur in a self-renewing hermeneutics.

Does Nietzsche provide any models for this type of activity? We could, he says, learn much from artists:

Moving away from things until there is a good deal that one no longer sees and there is much that our eye has to add if we are still to see them at all--or seeing things around a corner and as cut out and framed--or placing them so that they partially conceal each other and grant us only glimpses of architectural perspectives [das sie sich theilweise verstellen und nur perspectivische Durchblicke gestatten]--or looking at them through tinted glass or in the light of the sunset--or giving them a surface and skin that is not fully transparent. (KSA, 3, 538/GS, 299).

But Nietzsche is being metaphorical. How does he actually perform a transvaluation of values? He looks at what lies behind systems of values, examines their causes, rethinks their logic, adds to and subtracts from them, submits them to psychological and historical perspectives, considers whether their opposites are not just as valid. He transvaluates values by considering them as perspectives within a potential plurality of perspectives. Instead of giving an event some definitive meaning, he tries to appreciate its multiple functions in various contexts. Things

unconditional, static, and unequivocal are understood to be mobile and plurivocal.

The aphorism quoted above continues: "All this we should learn from artists while being wiser than they are in other matters. For with them this subtle power usually comes to an end where art ends and life begins; we, on the other hand, want to be the poets of our life, and first in the smallest and most everyday matters" (ibid.). What, one wonders, would a man who applied this pluralistic, transvaluative process to his life be like? Here is a possible description:

He always knows what to do; he can gaze into a woman's eyes; he can reflect on everything efficiently at any given moment; he can box. He is talented, strong-willed, unprejudiced. . . . When he is sad, he is up to something. When he is moved by something, he will reject it. Every bad action will seem good to him in some connection or other. And it will always be only a possible context that will decide what he thinks of a thing. Nothing is stable for him. Everything is fluctuating [Verwandlungsfähig], a part of a whole, among innumerable wholes that presumably belong to a super-whole, about which, however, he doesn't know the slightest thing. So every one of his answers is a part-answer, every one of his feelings only a point of view [eine Ansicht], and whatever a thing is, it doesn't matter to him what it is, it's only some accompanying 'way in which it is,' some addition or other [Zutat], that matters to him. (GW, 1, 65/MWQ, 1, ch. 17).

The person described in Musil's "man without qualities."

In a letter to Adolph Frisé, Musil characterizes him

further: he is a man who "does everything in his power to unite in himself many of the best elements of his time which have never been synthesized."³⁴

Now, the question arises, doesn't this transvaluative approach to life just aim at another system? Isn't it a Romantic endeavor to articulate a Lebenssystem in which oneness would inform multiplicity, and disparate perspectives and forms of living would be synthesized into a whole? An aesthetics of transvaluation is neither a Romantic aesthetics of organic unity nor a modernistic aesthetics of fragmentation. It is a process which lies between them. To see how, we must understand the implications of Nietzsche's demand that one be a poet of life, or Musil's idea of "living after the manner of art" (MWQ, 2, ch. 77). The goal of such a project would seem to be to make one's life as perfect as a work of art. Each detail would be necessary, nothing superfluous, everything part of an overall plan. To live "like a character in a book," as Musil puts it, would mean to make each of one's experiences essential, leaving out of one's life "all the upholstery of fatty tissue that . . . makes reality look round and plump" (GW, 2, 573/MWQ, 2, ch. 114).

³⁴ ". . . ein Mann, der Möglichst viele der besten, aber nirgends zur Synthese gelangten Zeitelemente in sich vereint" (cited in the Times Literary Supplement, October 1, 1982, p. 1052).

However, while Musil makes it clear that nothing less than a system would be required to achieve that fullness of life which Nietzsche associates with Dionysus, he also makes it obvious that such a system cannot be constructed.³⁵ His man without qualities does not establish coherence among his attributes. He contains them all within him, but does not integrate them into a system. Indeed, it seems logically impossible to do so. The only point of living after the manner of art, or of cultivating the "rich ambiguity of existence," as Nietzsche puts it, would be to permit man to achieve his highest potential; however, this

³⁵ Nietzsche's understanding of Dionysus is extremely complex and inconsistent. In The Birth of Tragedy Dionysus stands for the aesthetic dream-state and the intoxicating sense of primordial unity, which, when balanced by the imagistic lucidity and intellectual restraint of Apollo, produces Greek tragedy. Later in his work (especially in the posthumous notes he did not include in his work), Dionysus seems almost to become a metaphysical principle pure and simple, a life-force eternally destroying all permanence in creative becoming. Nevertheless, underneath the discrepancies, we must remember that Dionysus remains an aesthetic principle, that is, a means of appropriating becoming. Dionysus represents the achievement of human freedom through a "joyous and trusting fatalism" (KSA, 6, 152/PN, 554), a rebirth within dismemberment. Such an appropriation of the fullness of life's possibilities requires strict and severe discipline, and thus Walter Kaufmann is right to claim that the later Dionysus necessarily incorporates Apollinian restraint. In two key descriptions of the Dionysian aesthetic Nietzsche offers Goethe as an example. Goethe "took as much as possible upon him, over himself, into himself. What he wanted was totality; he fought the mutual extraneousness of reason, senses, feeling, and will . . . he disciplined himself to wholeness, he created himself" (ibid. Cf. also GS, #370, where "Dionysian" is the opposite of "Romantic").

potential is too fluctuant to be realized in a work or a system. A work of art is static, perfected, a free dictation of the way things could be; life, on the other hand, is subject to time, essentially imperfect, becoming, inventing its possibilities as it goes along in defiance of plan. If anything, the model which accords with the intentions of Nietzsche and Musil is not that of the artwork, but that of creating an artwork--selecting, experimenting, laying plans, manipulating expressions, changing one's mind, erasing and starting all over, trying new combinations, all as part of a project to perfect a work. To live after the manner of art or, what amounts to the same thing, to transvaluate values, would mean to work toward a synthesis but never complete it, to live out one's life not like a system but like an essay.³⁶

The Aesthetic Attempt

The new artists and "philosophers of the future," as Nietzsche refers to the spirits who attempt a higher integrity of experience than man has ever known so far, must have three characteristics. They must be skeptics, critics, and "men of experiments [Menschen der Experimente]" (KSA, 5, 142/BGE, #210). Essentially, all these traits are aspects

³⁶ On Musil's idea of the essay as a metaphor for life, see MWQ 1, ch. 62 and the following chapter of this study.

of a single ethic: venturesomness. The "skepticism of audacious manliness" (as witnessed in Nietzsche's effort to pursue nihilism to its logical limits) involves a "tough will to undertake dangerous journeys of exploration and spiritualized North Pole expeditions under desolate and dangerous skies" (KSA, 5, 141/BGE, #210). "Artists of destruction and dissolution," such healthy skeptics are already critics. The aim of this skeptical and critical labor, however, is "men of experiments." "These philosophers of the future may have a right . . . to be called attempters" (Versucher, which also means "seducers" or "tempters"). (KSA, 5, 59/BGE, #42). They attempt to determine "the Whither and For What of man . . . with a creative hand they reach for the future . . . their 'knowing' is creating, their creating is legislation, their will to truth is--will to power" (KSA, 5, 145/BGE, #211). Here it seems again that Nietzsche is falling back to a Romantic ideal of the poet-philosopher as legislator of values, as the mediator of man's metaphysical and historical truths. But he quickly corrects himself: "Are there such philosophers today? Have there ever been such philosophers yet? Must there not be such philosophers?" Nietzsche's ideal, his hypothesis, and appeal is only a tentative formulation--a Versuch and Ver-suchung (attempt and temptation to his readers). These "legislators" are actually more like "furtherers of man

[Förderer des Menschen]" and "cultivators" (Züchter, see BGE, #210-213 and 262). They are concerned with enhancing man, not with telling him what to do. In this sense they are "preparatory human beings [Vorbereitende Menschen]" who "live dangerously" and send their ships "into uncharted seas" (KSA, 3, 526/GS, #283). What they prepare for is another, higher age, which itself prepares for another yet higher (Nietzsche deliberately defers the telos). And what kind of age is it that they prepare for? An age "that will carry heroism into the search for knowledge" (ibid.)--that is, an age as experimental as the ones that precede it. Is Nietzsche moving in place? Is the Versuch destined to remain a Versuch? Is this perhaps his point?

It is now clear why the philosopher is "of necessity a man of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow" (KSA, 5, 145/BGE, #212). The goal of his experiment is always just beyond the range of his vision. Indeed, his real telos is the striving beyond every telos. He can invent no morality except what Musil calls "the morality of the next step": "What one does is never the decisive thing--it's always only whatever one does next. . . . But what matters after the next step? Obviously the one that follows after that. And after the nth the nth-plus-one step? Anyone living on that pattern would have to live without ends or decisions, in fact without any reality at all. . . . The truth is we

have no proper method of dealing with this perpetually moving series'" (GW, 3, 735-36/MWQ, 3, ch. 10). In light of this passage, we remember how, notwithstanding Nietzsche's appeals for the fullness of life's possibilities and for a poetry of life, he sees his existence as lacking a present, as occupying "an eternal Nowhere," as always being "on the way." His is a life of disorder and longing. "'Actually,'" Ulrich concludes, considering the perpetually moving series, "'we oughtn't to demand actions from one another but first create their preconditions [In Wahrheit hätten wir nicht Taten von einander zu fordern, sondern ihre Voraussetzungen erst zu schaffen]'" (GW, 3, 741/ibid.).

The search for these preconditions, which is precisely what Nietzsche's philosophy is about, constitutes the discovery of life's potential. The art of "living in the present" would thus involve researching and attempting to justify the smallest and most everyday matters. "We others who thirst after reason are determined to scrutinize our experiences as severely as a scientific experiment [Versuch]--hour after hour, day after day. We ourselves wish to be our experiments and guinea pigs [Versuchs-Thiere]" (KSA, 3, 551/GS, #319). One's every conviction then becomes a questionmark, every thought a point of view, every yes a potential no. This is the essayistic style which Nietzsche proposes for living, a style whose means are the achievement of its ends.

To live with tremendous and proud composure; ever beyond--. To have and not to have one's affects, one's pro and con, at will, to condescend to them for a few hours; to seat oneself on them as on a horse, often as on an ass-- for one must know how to make use of their stupidity as much as of their fire. To reserve one's three hundred foregrounds; also the dark glasses. . . .³⁷

Is living in just this way perhaps what it means to be an Übermensch? not transcending what is human, all too human, but deliberately living out one's fragmentation, exploiting its richness, being ever "above," "beside," "in front of" and "behind" oneself, in tragic multiplicity, continually testing one's experience, and in this test extending one's limits? And the ethic of "beyond good and evil"--like the other prepositional and adverbial formulations so central in Nietzsche's philosophy, Selbstüberwindung, Umwertung, Vorspiel, and das gefährliche Vielleicht--would it no longer mean departing from traditional values and forms of life but attempting to rework and revitalize them, to make them flexible, believing and not believing, lucidly submitting to the equivocal processes of interpretation?

³⁷ "Mit einer ungeheuren und stolzen Gelassenheit leben; immer jenseits--. Seine Affekte, sein Für und Wider willkürlich haben und nicht haben, sich auf sie herablassen, für Stunden; sich auf sie setzen, wie auf Pferde, oft wie auf Esel:--man muss nämlich ihre Dummheit so gut wie ihr Feuer zu nützen wissen. Sein dreihundert Vordergründe sich bewahren; auch die schwarze Brille . . ." (KSA, 5, 231/BGE, #284. Cf. also GS, #107).

The passage cited above--an apology for an aesthetics of distance, contradiction, "rich ambiguity," and irony--calls for a stylistic mastery of the discontinuity to which man is destined. This is Nietzsche's art, to which he is led by the recognition of the paradoxical nature of truth. The goal of his art is to make the tension of discontinuity single and deliberate, to will it as the aim of life. Nietzsche's admission that often he seats himself on his opinions as on an ass thus allows us to deconstruct his imperious, unsubtle legislations of values into changing shades within an overall picture. In particular, it allows us to locate at the center of this picture (not only of Beyond Good and Evil and Thus Spoke Zarathustra, but of all his writings) a suffering, shy, and fatalistic Nietzsche. Nietzsche can be identified neither with his basic, subsurface knowledge nor with his joyful dance above it. He exists in the plan to elevate his "lower self" to his highest ideal, in moving through the steps required, in "essaying" the higher as the most difficult of tasks not impossible. The task of disciplining multiplicity into oneness is as tragic as it is exhilarating. Yet in attempting to achieve this oneness Nietzsche appropriates his destiny; and thus he achieves his end. In his words:

The trust in life is gone: life itself has become a problem. Yet one should not jump to the conclusion that this necessarily makes one gloomy. Even love of life is still possible, only one loves differently. It is the love for a woman that causes doubts in us. The attraction of everything problematic, the delight in an X, however, is so great . . . that this delight flares up again and again, like a bright blaze over all the distress of what is problematic, over all the danger of uncertainty, and even over the jealousy of the lover. We know a new happiness.³⁸

38 "Das Vertrauen zum Leben ist dahin: das Leben selbst wurde zum Problem.--Möge man ja nicht glauben, dass Einer damit nothwendig zum Dusterling geworden sei! Selbst die Liebe zum Leben ist noch möglich,--nur liebt man anders. Es ist die Liebe zu einem Weibe, das uns Zweifel macht . . . Der Reiz alles Problematischen, die Freude am X ist aber . . . zu gross, als dass diese Freude nicht immer wieder wie eine helle Gluth über alle Noth des Problematischen, über alle Gefahr der Unsicherheit, selbst über die Eifersucht des Liebenden zusammenschlüge. Wir kennen ein neues Glück. . . . (KSA, 3, 350-51/GS, Preface, #3).

Chapter Two

Robert Musil

Complex as the relationship between Robert Musil and Friedrich Nietzsche is, there are fundamental affinities in their work. Critics have commented upon some aspects of this relationship: Nietzsche's influence on Musil, the references and allusions to the philosopher in Musil's The Man Without Qualities (Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften) and in his journals, the overlapping concerns of the two writers.¹ What I plan to do here is to analyze the common subject of their thought, that is, the issues their writing takes up in differing but complementary ways. Beyond Nietzsche and Musil as individual writers is the question of their unity as phenomena which flow together (as Yeats said of Nietzsche and Blake) within a single bed of thought. This common bed is my concern, not the many connections, comparisons and contrasts which could be drawn between their work.

To understand the bond between Musil and Nietzsche (and through that bond individual features of the work of each), we must read them from a critical point of reference outside

¹ See especially the works by Alleman, Berghahn, Heydebrand, Holm, Kaiser and Wilkins, Olmi, Peters, Pike, Reichert, and Seidler cited in the bibliography.

them both. This "third" point of reference must be mobile. Depending on the issues under discussion, it must sometimes begin with Nietzsche and move forward to Musil and sometimes move from Musil back to Nietzsche. On the one hand, Nietzsche provides an intellectual foundation for much of Musil's most interesting work. On the other, Musil thinks beyond Nietzsche, drawing conclusions from Nietzschean intuitions. Each writer supplies a running commentary on the other's text. Here I shall consider Musil mainly as "taking his cue" from the philosopher: as furthering Nietzsche's intellectual analyses and proposing answers to problems which Nietzsche himself was unable to furnish.

In what, then, is conceived of as a type of dialogue between these writers, the main subjects of the discussion are: man's duty to determine the nature of reality once nothing is seen as true or real in itself; the loss and quest for integrity of self; and the function of art (with all the ambivalence this term holds for both writers) as the essential means of realizing reality. The question of determining reality is one that arises following Nietzsche's "murder" of metaphysical explanations--of God and "the soul," of the findings of science, of the dictates of morality, and of the rules of logic. Once reality has lost its visible order and justification,

an Umwertung der bisherigen Werte becomes a human requirement. Musil responds to the appeal for a transvaluation of all values in the most Nietzschean of fashions: not with a new moral credo or social program (liable, as it would be to charges of dogmatism, partiality, and arbitrariness) but with a painstaking exploration of the ethical possibilities still viable for an advanced human culture. His intellectual integrity, reluctant, like Nietzsche's, to yield to a wish for certainty, seeks out new guidelines for human behavior, pursues but does not follow them. Musil faces the crisis of reality announced by Nietzsche more directly, perhaps, than any twentieth century writer but Martin Heidegger.

If culture is a macroscopic reflection of the crisis of reality, the self is its microscopic focus. Bridging the inner and outer worlds--the "will" (or what Musil prefers to call the "soul") and the realm of nature and political action--the individual self is an obvious locus for Musil's speculations on the unresolved nature of reality. In both Nietzsche and Musil, a transvaluation of values implies a redefinition of the self. Both reject traditional "truths" of psychology and seek to build new ones. While other thinkers have developed aspects of Nietzsche's psychology (especially the instinctual or libidinal component), none has been so radically Nietzschean

as to dissolve the very notion of the self. Against the background of Nietzsche's more decisive (but perhaps less incisive) psychology, Musil's theoretical originality shines most strongly. He discovers complexities of behavior unexamined by Nietzsche at the same time that he lays bare limitations in Nietzsche's own psychology.

Finally, there are the intricacies of Nietzsche's and Musil's efforts to find aesthetic answers to metaphysical and moral issues. Nietzsche had shown that every act entails an aesthetic decision. If both writers agree that the art of living has not yet been adequately developed, then they face the task of formulating a new language for it. The main features of this new language (for living as well as understanding) are remarkably similar in both cases. For the literary philosopher as for the philosophical novelist, this "new art" must incorporate multiplicity, relativity, and variability to the highest degree. It must open and preserve possibilities. Formally speaking, and the style of each writer bears it out, it must resist a closure of forms to achieve form as process.

The Undefinedness of Reality

Once Nietzsche had shown that interpretations amount only to interpretations, reality became a metaphysical questionmark. If one takes Nietzsche's arguments seriously

then what matters, what is true, what is to be done-- all this must be built from scratch. Reality has become "undefined"--unlimited and unexplained. If meanings are all partial and equally "true," there is also a possible infinity of them. With the falling away of ideal definitions arises a new infinity of the natural. The natural must now be determined by man; it has no bounds. Speaking especially of the implications of his thought, Nietzsche stresses, "the world has become 'infinite' for us all over again, inasmuch as we cannot reject the possibility that it may include infinite interpretations" (KSA, 3, 627/GS, #374). As Musil writes, this new infinity of the natural faces man with "the burden of gazing right into the midst of the still undefined relationships of things [die Verantwortung, mitten in noch unbeschriebenen Beziehungen des Lebens zu blicken]" (GW, 6, 24/YT, 33). This burden is the starting point for Musil's fiction. It is dramatized in his first novel, The Confusions of the Pupil Törless (Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless), which provides a glimpse into many of the dilemmas Musil will address in The Man Without Qualities. This pupil's confusions concern not the proper application of the academic disciplines, but the claim to truth of these disciplines. In fact, Törless' interest in the methodology of academic disciplines (such as mathematics, a rational

system resorting to irrational numbers) is far from academic. "'If mathematics torments me,'" he explains to Beineberg, his mystically inclined friend, "'it's because I'm looking for something quite different behind it from you--what I'm after isn't anything supernatural at all, it's precisely the natural.'"² Törless' real confusion stems from his realization that no interpretation breaks through the surface to the thing itself:

Törless was assailed by a sort of madness that made him experience things, processes, people, all as something equivocal. As something that by some ingenious operation had been fettered to a harmless explanatory word, and as something entirely strange, which might break loose from its fetters at any moment now.

True: there is a simple, natural explanation for everything, and Törless knew it too; but to his dismayed astonishment it seemed only to tear off an outer husk, without getting anywhere near laying bare what was within. . . .³

² "'Wenn mich die Mathematik quält . . . so suche ich dahinter ganz etwas anderes als du, gar nichts Übernatürliches, gerade das Natürliche suche ich'" (GW, 6, 83/YT, 112).

³ Es kam wie eine Tollheit über Törless, Dinge, Vorgänge und Menschen als etwas Doppelsinniges zu empfinden. Als etwas, das durch die Kraft irgendwelcher Erfinder an ein harmloses, erklärendes Wort gefesselt war, und als etwas ganz Fremdes, das jeden Augenblick sich davon loszureissen drohte.

Gewiss: es gibt für alles eine einfache, natürliche Erklärung, und auch Törless wusste sie, aber zu seinem furchtsamen Erstaunen schien sie nur eine ganz äussere Hülle fortzureissen, ohne das Innere blosszulegen. . . (GW, 6, 64/YT, 85).

If Musil feels the burden of gazing into the midst of the as yet undefined relations of things, it is especially because he took part in undefining the relations established by tradition. Critics have commented upon the fact that Musil takes apart many of the same "truths" as Nietzsche did--the distinction between good and evil, social and political idealism, criminal psychology, self-knowledge, the duality of cause and effect, to mention just the most obvious--and reaches many of the same conclusions. However, it is less important to recognize that Musil criticized the same "truths" than to recognize that he submitted them to such criticism. The target of his attack is not the content of particular ideas but the forms of their expression, not specific languages but language itself. If Nietzsche and Musil have common enemies it is because their critical method dictates the matter. But once one adopts this critical stance, the matter to which it can be applied becomes virtually unlimited. Indeed Musil applies it to areas which Nietzsche did not touch. In so doing, he furthers the undefinition of reality--to the point where the reformulation of truth, or the revaluation of values, becomes even more questionable than it is in his predecessor.

Broadly speaking, Musil deconstructs traditional truths in two ways: through philosophical analysis and

literary satire. The Man Without Qualities presents a drama in which a highly trained intellectual encounters the struggling idealism of the Viennese society of the late Austro-Hungarian Empire. Ulrich is the intellectual (the higher intellectual of the age), and the Parallel Action (die Parallelaktion) is the campaign which Musil satirizes: Ulrich, the so-called man without qualities, is thrust into the midst of the activities of this government campaign founded to discover a new idea to guide the age. A type of symbolical net ensnaring the ideas of the various individuals of this novel, the Parallel Action dramatizes both the contemporary disintegration of belief and the implicit need for a transvaluation. The people directly involved in the campaign and as well as those along its fringes (Clarisse, Meingast, and Hans Sepp), are seeking, each in his own blind way, a new language by which to comprehend reality, a new moral program. As suggested even by the dramatic date when the novelistic action unfolds, 1913, the crisis of values is universal.

One of Musil's most striking satirical metaphors for the "comprehensive" visions that come up in the course of the Parallel Action's investigations is that of a "dot" [ein Punkt] which people provide themselves with to stare at in secret. Each person who submits a proposal to Ulrich, the honorary secretary of the imperial campaign, may be

seen as someone who keeps his eyes glued, his whole life long, on

a secret dot that everyone else refuses to see, although it is so obviously the very dot from which originate all the calamities of a world that will not recognize its saviour. Such fixed points [Punkte], where the person's center of gravity coincides with the world's center of gravity, may be for instance a spittoon that can be shut with a simple catch . . . or the introduction of Öhl's shorthand system . . . or conversion to a natural mode of living, which would call a halt to the way the world is running to waste, as well as offer a metapsychical theory of the movements of celestial bodies, a plan for simplifying public administration, and a reform of sexual life.⁴

As one moves up the scale from these small fries to the more illustrious members of the Parallel Action, the dots become bigger and more blurred. Though less ridiculous than the proposals that Musil here delineates, the solutions to the "disease of the times" entertained by the intellectual elite of Vienna are no less facile. Count

⁴ einem heimlichen Punkt . . . den kein anderer bemerken will, obgleich dort doch offenbar das ganze Unglück der Welt anhebt, die ihren Erlöser nicht erkennt. Solche fixierte Punkte, in denen das Gleichgewichtszentrum einer Person mit dem Gleichgewichtszentrum der Welt übereinfällt, sind zum Beispiel ein Spucknapf, der sich durch einen einfachen Griff schliessen lässt . . . oder die Einführung des Kurtzschriftsystems Oehl . . . oder die Bekehrung zu einer naturgemässen, der herrschenden Verwüstung Einhalt gebietenden Lebensweise, aber auch eine metapsychische Theorie der Himmelsbewegungen, die Vereinfachung des Verwaltungsapparat und eine Reform des Sexuallebens (GW, 1, 140/MWQ, 1, ch. 37).

Leinsdorf wants to establish a link between business and eternal truths (or Besitz und Bildung); General Stumm would like to put some military order into the civilian mind; Arnheim strives for the Interresenfusion Seele-Geschäft; Feuermal proposes a return to human goodness; Clarisse looks for reason in madness; Diotima searches for answers in the library and finally takes up the study of Eros. Ulrich, the immanent critic of the Parallel Action, has his own ideal synthesis: Genauigkeit und Seele (precision and the soul). This formula, which he thinks up one evening, both ties him to his age and distinguishes him from it. What makes him different from his contemporaries is not the nature of his goal (which like theirs is to discover a new, synthetic vision of reality), but his realization that such a goal is unthinkable without a radical revision of the processes of human understanding. If the soul--passion, ultimate reality--is the central issue, it must be defined with the utmost precision. To perform a real transvaluation of values, man must first become a critic of his own language.

Our first view of Ulrich shows the full extent of the intellectual responsibility this man has taken upon himself. Stopwatch in hand, he is standing by the window of his house, assessing the amount of energy consumed by people on the street who might be said to be doing

"nothing at all." He is interpreting humanity by means of physics.⁵ After trying to measure the countless efforts that a human must make just to stay standing vertically, Ulrich comes to two conclusions:

The expenditure of muscular energy made by a citizen quietly going about his business all day long is considerably greater than that of an athlete who lifts a huge weight once a day. Physiologically this has been established, and thus without doubt the social sum-total of little everyday exertions too, as a result of their suitability for such summation, brings far more energy into the world than do the deeds of heroes; indeed, the heroic exertion appears positively minute, like a grain of sand laid, with immense illusion, upon a mountain top. The idea appealed to him.⁶

Ulrich is conducting that type of intellectual research which leads to a transvaluation of values. He is subjecting the traditional morality of self-exertion (or rather its shaky foundations) to a test of fact. Furthermore, as

⁵ Musil applies the same method on the opening page of the novel where he accounts for an ordinary perception such as "It was a fine August day in the year 1913 " with a meteorological explanation.

⁶ Die Muskelleistung eines Bürgers, der ruhig einen Tag lang seines Wegs geht, ist bedeutend grösser als die eines Athleten, der einmal im Tag ein ungeheures Gewicht stemmt; das ist physiologisch nachgewiesen worden, und also setzen wohl auch die kleinen Alltagsleistungen in ihrer gesellschaftlichen Summe und durch ihre Eignung für diese Summierung viel mehr Energie in die Welt als die heroischen Taten; ja die heroischen Leistung erscheint geradezu winzig, wie ein Sandkorn, das mit ungeheurer Illusion auf einen Berg gelegt wird. Dieser gedanke gefiel ihm (GW, 1, 12-13/MWQ, 1, ch. 2).

the next paragraph makes clear, he is doing it not out of idleness but out of a resolution to question the very "truths" he depends upon most: "But, it must be added, it was not really because he liked a life of urban respectability [weil er das bürgerliche Leben liebte]; on the contrary, he was merely choosing [es beliebte ihm] to create difficulties for his own inclinations, which had once been different." Ulrich is a man with heroic aspirations heroically renouncing the heroic ideal.

The next lines develop the Nietzschean character of this scene in two ways. They show Ulrich actively attempting an Umwertung of the notion of heroism, and they locate the need for such transvaluations in metaphysical uncertainty:

Perhaps it is precisely the common man who has an intuitive prophetic glimpse of the beginning of an immense new, collective, ant-like heroism? It will be called rationalized heroism and will be regarded as very beautiful. But what can we know of that today?! At that time, however, there were hundreds of such unanswered questions, all of the greatest importance. They were in the air; they were burning underfoot. The time was on the move. . . . But one simply didn't know what it was moving towards. Nor could anyone quite distinguish between what was above and what below, between what was moving forwards and what backwards.

Vielleicht ist es gerade der Spiessbürger, der den Beginn eines ungeheuren neuen, kollektiven, ameisenhaften Heldentums vorausahnt? Man wird

es rationalisiertes Heldentum nennen und sehr schön finden. Wer kann das heute schon wissen?! Solcher unbeantworteter Fragen von grösster Wichtigkeit gab es aber damals hunderte. Sie lagen in der Luft, sie brannten unter Füssen. Die Zeit bewegte sich. . . . Man wusste bloss nicht, wohin. Man konnte auch nicht recht unterscheiden, was oben und unten war, was vor und zurück ging (ibid.).

This evocation of Vienna in 1913 has its closest stylistic parallel in Nietzsche's description of the chaotic disorientation of modern times after the death of God, the legitimizer of truth:

Whither are we moving? . . . Are we no plunging continually? And backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing?

Wohin bewegen wir uns? . . . Stürzen wir nicht fortwährend? Und rückwärts, seitwärts, vorwärts, nach allen Seiten? Giebt es noch ein Oben und ein Unten? Irren wir nicht wie durch ein unendliches Nichts? (KSA, 3, 481/GS, #125).

Even Nietzsche's last question is echoed by Musil, for in the very next line, Ulrich reluctantly acknowledges the nihilistic implications of this cultural condition: "It doesn't matter what one does . . . in a tangle of forces like this it doesn't make a scrap of difference [es kommt in diesem Gefilz von Kräften nicht im geringsten darauf an]!" Yet Ulrich is no more willing than Nietzsche to resign himself to nihilism: Passing the punching bag

after turning from the window, "he gave it a blow far swifter and harder than is usual in moods of resignation or states of weakness" (GW, 1, 13).

This first description of Ulrich establishes a general scheme within which his intellectual comportment can be understood. On the one hand, he is a man performing a critique of traditional values and their rational grounds (heroism and the simplistic quantifications of human exertion that underlie it). On the other, he is trying to ground them anew in a more inclusive set of facts (the collective sum-total of individual efforts). The first dimension of Ulrich's activity involves essentially raising new questions (questions which seem always to focus upon the same suspicious unilateralism of perspectives). "There were hundreds of such unanswered questions, all of the greatest importance," the narrator comments ironically, and Ulrich's function is precisely to raise them. The second aspect of his activity, dependent upon the first, involves a tentative reconstruction of truth in face of the nihilistic threat which has arisen with the demise of the old truths. Before analyzing Ulrich's constructive efforts, however, let us see how far he takes the destruction of truth.

Let us look at another instance in which Musil's critical consciousness applies itself to the destruction of truth. We could take nearly any of the topics Ulrich or the narrator considers; however, Musil's destruction of

truth may be most clear in his treatment of the very issues which make it seem that Musil is incompatible with Nietzsche: the "doctrines" of Nietzsche's philosophy. In The Man Without Qualities, Nietzsche's philosophy comes under attack in the figures of Meingast and Clarisse. Some of Nietzsche's ideas are identified with that simplistic type of thinking engaged in by the Parallel Action.

Let us begin by dismissing the idea that Clarisse stands for Nietzsche--either in Musil's mind or in Ulrich's. Clarisse's ideas are almost invariably derivative or incoherent. Her "Nietzscheanism" (for which Ulrich is responsible, since it is he who first gave her the philosophical works) consists in a personal interpretation, spurred by a type of psycho-sexual frustration. A very complex case psychologically, Clarisse cannot be taken as a correlative for Nietzsche. She is an hysteric--an embodiment of the lack of restraint which Nietzsche's philosophy sometimes inspires in uncaredful readers (today as well as in Musil's day). Since her Nietzscheanism tells only part of the story--the story both of Nietzsche and of her own inclinations--she is disqualified from representing more than an imaginative appropriation of select tenets of the philosopher.⁷ Let us take instead the more clear-cut case of Meingast, the "prophet" she so admires.

⁷ See Seidler.

Meingast's "philosophy" of will and illusion can be reduced to a syllogism: (a) action is motivated by will-power; (b) will-power requires illusion, or not-knowing; hence (c) illusion must be preserved, even enhanced, so that the will can command as strongly as possible. Ostensibly a parody of the philosopher Ludwig Klages, Meingast is an incarnation of a type of Nietzscheanism in vogue throughout the first decades of the century through the proselytism of Nietzsche's sister, Elizabeth Förster.

Musil does not bother to take issue with the ideas of this "prophet": he simply dismisses them. Asked what he thinks of Meingast, Ulrich replies, "A gas-bag [ein Schwätzer!]" (GW, 3, 839/MWQ, 3, ch. 19). Meingast chatters about the Zeitwollen (will of the times); he claims that one should base one's decisions not upon true and false but upon the presumably self-evident categories of Wert and Unwert (GW, 3, 918); he speaks of illusion without taking the time to ask what it entails. Meingast's terms are hollow. His mistake is the one criticized throughout The Man Without Qualities: that of summing up experience in metaphysical abstractions rather than analyzing the particularity of individual situations. Even if Musil himself is given to believe in the will to power and in the human preference for illusion over truth, he cannot accept Meingast's a priori analysis of these questions.

If Musil is criticizing a contemporary oversimplification of Nietzsche through Meingast, he is doing it under the aegis of a Nietzschean critique of metaphysics. He is taking Nietzsche to task for the same reason Nietzsche attacks the philosophical tradition of Europe: for advancing untenable definitions of reality. Nietzsche himself is his own best critic; there is enough scepticism in his philosophy to topple his most dogmatic penchants, especially his identification of essential reality as Wille zur Macht. Although Nietzsche tried to dissociate his own philosophy from traditional metaphysics, Musil draws attention to the fact that it contains elements common to that abstract, doctrinal metaphysics, elements popular in Musil's own day and which he wished to deflate like the other "dots" of the age. Yet if he attacks the doctrinal Nietzsche it is as part of a program to further the destruction of truth undertaken by the more skeptical Nietzsche.

In chapter 108 of The Man Without Qualities, Musil writes of how systemmatizations of life always depend upon some irrationalen unberechenbaren Rest (irrational, incalculable remainder) as a final factor in their explanations. In religions it is called the inscrutability of God, in Meingast's system it is "will," in the life of General Stumm it is honor, discipline and Service Regulations Part III, in Bonadea's ingenuous schizophrenia it is "the heart," which leads her to commit sexual follies. Yet even if

Bonadea herself had a system, Musil ironically writes, "politics in Kakania possessed none" (GW, 2, 522/MWQ, 2, ch. 109). This failure of a system is the ultimate disease of Kakanien (Musil's dysphemism for the Austro-Hungarian empire), of which thinkers such as Meingast are symptoms rather than cures. The ability to fall back upon some final incalculable factor or Rest is called having a Weltanschauung, and it is something "that modern man has lost" (GW, 2, 520). If Musil's contemporaries have lost their Weltanschauung, it is in large part due to the fact that Nietzsche (along with Kierkegaard and others in vogue at the time) uncovered the hidden Reste, or omissions, of "comprehensive" understandings of the world. The consequence (which is even clearer in the philosophy of difference of the second half of the century) is that the world itself becomes experienced as a series of Reste: If to General Stumm the intellectuals of the day seemed never to be content, it was because "their thoughts never came to rest, and beheld that eternally wandering residue [Rest] in all things, which never comes into order" (GW, 2, 519/MWQ, 2, ch. 108).

Ulrich, I have suggested, is the bad conscience of these intellectuals. If Musil's satiric narrator takes characters such as Meingast and Arnheim less seriously than he, it is because they aspire to facile formulations of this residue. They propound Weltanschauungen in an age that no longer allows them. If a person really accepts the loss

of a Weltanschauung, he is faced with a choice: "He must either entirely give up the habit of thinking about his life, something in which many people indulge, or he gets into that strange state of conflict in which he has to think and yet apparently never can reach the point of satisfaction."⁸ The majority of the intellectuals of The Man Without Qualities fall into both categories at once: They seek a new metaphysics and are never convinced they have found it; yet the naïveté of their thinking really amounts to non-thinking. Ulrich is the only character who fully submits to the sonderbaren Zwiespalt of the second choice. Only in him does the endless struggle of attempting to understand and never succeeding become, as Nietzsche would say, a destiny. Nor is it by chance that Musil writes that this discord, or Zwiespalt, can just as easily take the form of "complete disbelief" [vollständigen Unglaubens] as of "complete subjection to belief" [vollständigen Unterwerfung unter den Glauben] (ibid.). For Ulrich as for Nietzsche--we shall see this later--this irresolvable discord is both at once: faith in the absence of faith, or the belief of a man without beliefs.

⁸ "Er muss sich entweder des Nachdenkens über sein Leben ganz entschlagen, woran sich viele genug tun, oder er gerät in jenen sonderbaren Zwiespalt, dass er denken muss und scheinbar doch nie recht damit zum Ende der Zufriedenheit gelangen kann" (GW, 2, 520-21/ ibid.).

As he continues his investigation of systematic understanding in the next chapter, 109, Musil moves from the metaphor of a residue to that of a person's clothes. Just as the articulation of the residue in all things seems to give some ultimate shape to the truth of reality, the choice of one's clothes seems to give shape to the truth of self. "Clothes, if lifted out of the fluidity of the present and regarded, in their monstrous existence on a human figure, as forms per se, are strange tubes and excrescences, worthy of the company of a shaft through the nose or a ring extended through the lip. But how enchanting they become when they are seen in combination with the qualities they bestow on their wearer!"⁹ The same thing happens when a tangle of lines on a paper emits the meaning of some sublime word. Fundamentally, the relation of clothes to a person's essence is as uncanny as if a halo were suddenly to pop up behind a man's head as he was putting a sandwich on his plate at a tea party, "And such a power of making the invisible, and even, indeed, the non-existent, visible is what a well-made dress or coat demonstrates every day!" (ibid).

⁹ "Kleider, aus dem Fluidum der Gegenwart herausgehoben und in ihrem ungeheuerlichen Dasein auf einer menschlichen Gestalt als Form an sich betrachtet, sind seltsame Röhren und Wucherungen, würdig der Gesellschaft eines Nasenpfeils und durch die Lippen gezogenen Rings; aber wie hinreissend werden sie, wenn man sie samt den Eigenschaften sieht, die sie ihrem Besitzer leihen!" (GW, 2, 526).

The real miracle of this correspondence between form and content, however, is the circular process underlying it: it is our initial choice of the clothes which allows them to reveal so much about us. Musil speaks of them as "debtor-objects": we lend them money and get paid back at an enormous rate of interest. And then comes the conclusive announcement: "in fact there are only debtor-objects. This quality that clothes have is also possessed by convictions, prejudices, theories, hopes, belief in anything, thoughts, indeed, even thoughtlessness possesses it, in so far as it is only by virtue of itself that it is penetrated with a sense of its own rightness."¹⁰ All forms of apprehension--whether theories, beliefs, hopes, or simple ideas--are as extrinsic to the matter they address as clothes to the person who wears them. Their status as truths follow only from our being predisposed towards them.

At this point of Musil's reflection, the lexical echoes are unmistakable. Überzeugungen and Vorurteile, in particular, but even Glaube, come already staggering from the blows Nietzsche had delivered them: "A very popular error: having the courage of one's convictions; rather

¹⁰ "eigentlich gibt es nichts als Schuldnerdinge. Denn jene Eigenschaft der Kleidungsstücke besitzen auch Überzeugungen, Vorurteile, Theorien, Hoffnungen, der Glaube an irgendetwas, Gedanken, ja selbst die Gedankenlosigkeit besitzt sie, sofern sie nur kraft ihrer selbst von ihrer Richtigkeit durchdrungen ist" (GW, 2, 526).

it is a matter of having the courage for an attack on one's convictions!!!"; "Convictions are prisons"; "On the Prejudices of Philosophers" (Chapter One of Beyond Good and Evil), these and many other phrases represent the immediate heritage of the words. Little did Nietzsche "sound out" more fully than the hollowness of prejudices and convictions. (The obvious third would be Gewissen, or conscience, but one easily understands why Musil excludes it from his list: it is a creditor-object.)

Musil "paraphrases" two of the main points in Nietzsche's critique of belief. The first is genealogical: any theory, morality, belief, or hope always stems from a personal investment. One never takes up a position out of a disinterested decision about its truth-value. We stand by something as true for other, usually physiological reasons. And even if Musil does not let us see for sure what the other reasons are, it is still clear that one singles out an idea as an object of belief long before it has proven its truth. Less impelled to subvert the intellect than is Nietzsche, Musil does not reduce beliefs, morality, or philosophy to the needs of libidinal fear or lust for power. He simply posits, without explaining, the act of faith which originates the belief. "Credo ut intelligam," he writes a few pages later, is the basis for human knowledge. Every creed is only a means to produce a supply of intellectual credit. "In love as in

commerce, in science as in the long jump, one has to have faith before one can win and reach one's aim" (GW, 2, 528/ibid.). While Nietzsche grounds the leap to belief in physiological states, Musil describes the leap without attempting to ground it. That he does not engage in such an attempt is due to his more refined skeptical sense--for to engage in a metaphysics of grounds (whether they be identified with the will, with physiology or with any other cause) is to fall prey to one's own attack upon convictions. Moreover, by not trying to seek grounds, Musil focuses more deeply upon the paradoxes of the intellect that "ground" both his and Nietzsche's skepticism.

Merely to understand--even before entertaining prejudices or systematic theories--one must have the faith to jump from an Abgrund onto a set of unfounded initial principles of understanding (which one may then no longer question without the risk of falling back into the Abgrund). This is Töless' frightening realization which was touched on earlier: irrational numbers symbolize the Abgründigkeit, the foundational unsoundness, of each and every method of understanding. Even after Törless' math teacher inspires him to read Kant's Critique of Pure Reason--which "treats of the grounds determining our actions [die Bestimmungsstücke unseres Handelns]" and furnishes "those mental necessities [Denknotwendigkeiten] . . . which . . . determine

everything although they themselves cannot be understood immediately" (GW, 6, 77).--Törless still concludes, "there's nobody who knows where the first mesh is that keeps all the rest in place" (GW, 6, 82).

The second Nietzschean point in this critique of belief, which follows from the first, concerns the inevitable erroneousness of knowledge. It is clear from the preceding arguments that what men consider to be true never is. While presumably expressing some dimension of a person's being, beliefs, like clothes, only embellish his nakedness. As the irrational final factor in a system of understanding, the Rest is only an object of faith and an apology for the system's own inadequacy. Yet if truths are never actually true, they still cannot be abandoned so easily. The specious truth-value of beliefs is supported by their use-value. "Truth," as Nietzsche writes, "is the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live. The value for life is ultimately decisive" (WP, #493). Musil expands upon the notion by speaking of understanding as the production of a Verblendung (blindness, delusion) with the help of which we manage "to live alongside the most uncanny things and remain perfectly calm about it because we recognize those frozen grimaces of the universe as a table or chair, a shout or an outstretched arm, a speed or a roast chicken." If we are capable living "between one open chasm

of sky [Himmelsabrund] above our heads and one slightly camouflaged chasm of sky beneath our feet," it is only because "in between them we treat a stratum of forms [Schichte von Gebilden] as the things of the world" (GW, 2, 526-27). The analysis of this Schichte von Gebilden--which takes many forms in The Man Without Qualities--is Musil's novelistic contribution to a critique of truth. He draws these Gebilden out of countless hiding places: psychologically, they are the Eigenschaften that make up the fictitious entity called one's character, as well as the forms of one's feelings; philosophically, they are logical principles and systematically linked ideas; morally, they are conceptions of good and evil and the various ideas, such as freedom, constraint and responsibility, which ground them.

Such configurations of deception or error, and here we have the third point of agreement between Musil and Nietzsche, are products of art. All in all, Musil concludes, it is

an extremely artificial state of mind [Bewusstseinzustand] that enables man to walk upright between the circling constellations and permits him, in the midst of the almost infinite unknownness [Unbekanntheit] of the world around him, to place his hand with dignity between the second and third buttons of his coat. And in order to achieve this, not only does every man need his own artifices [Kunstgriffen] . . . but these personal systems of artifice are . . . artfully built into the institutions for the maintenance of society's and the

community's moral and intellectual equilibrium [in die moralischen und intellektuellen Gleichwichtsvorkehrungen der Gesellschaft und Gesamtheit] " (GW, 2, 527/MWQ, 2, ch. 109.

The infinity and unknownness of man's horizon (which has come back into view upon the demise of conventional Weltanschauungen) has always been the metaphysical setting for man's life; yet through interpretative fabrications, man narrows such infinity into a finite perspective (according to infinity the slot of a "residue" at best). Musil's explanation for this artistic reduction is no less similar to Nietzsche's than is his assessment of it: "Such an attitude lies considerably below the potentiality [der Höhe] of our intellect" (ibid.). That is, man is capable of much grander and wider visions of reality than those which have hitherto prevailed. The philosopher, Nietzsche writes, is concerned above all with what "might yet be made of man; he knows with all the knowledge of his conscience how man is still unexhausted for the greatest possibilities."¹¹

The key to attaining such grander and wider visions of reality is in cultivating the heterogeneity of human perspectives. Just as beliefs have a verticality, or a ground of origin, they also have a horizontality, or a co-existence

¹¹ ". . . aus dem Menschen zu züchten wäre, er weiss es mit allem Wissen seines Gewissens, wie der Mensch noch unausgeschöpft für die grössten Möglichkeiten ist" (KSA, 5, 126/BGE, #203).

with other beliefs. For the most part, the horizontality of belief is not coherent. The panorama of knowledge shows an amass of intellectual opinions, theories, and principles which have little to do with each other. Science does not mesh with religion, religion does not mesh with common sense, and a man moves from one to another of hundreds of divergent positions whenever it serves his purposes. Nietzsche, as we remember, not only diagnosed the general disintegration of belief but also envisioned the possibility of a Dionysian unity within such dispersion. Wholeness is to be achieved precisely by welcoming the vieldeutiger Charakter des Lebens. Music methodically attempts to articulate this rich ambiguity and irreducible plurality of perspectives in his description of the world.

If Diotima tried to come to terms with civilization, for example, she would have to admit it is "a frustrating state of affairs, full of soap, wireless waves, the arrogant symbolic language of mathematical and chemical formulae, economics, experimental research and mankind's inability to live in simple but sublime community" (GW, 1, 103/MWQ, 1, ch. 24). Musil's analysis addresses not the genealogy of a point of view but the conceptual conglomeration of numerous points of view. Here are at least seven different interpretations one could form of the concept civilization. Yet even if based upon a sound method of analysis, each would be false

precisely to the extent that it is one-sided, only one among many. The implication is that an interpretation may begin to acquire some degree of validity only once it takes up a position within a context of possible interpretations of the same phenomenon. To understand the meaning of civilization, we must transcend all single perspectives and try to take in the whole picture, one composed of multiple images (a sense which is shared by such contemporaneous experiments in the visual arts as Cubism, simultanéisme, and so on). Each interpretation is at best an approximation; and yet it may be that a fairly accurate approximation could be had by a cumulative sum-total of interpretations.

Immediately inspired by the philosophy of Ernst Mach, Musil's plurality of perspectives is strictly post-Nietzschean. Nietzsche himself would probably not have constructed such a multi-layered account of a single phenomenon. If he had referred to seven different meanings of the word civilization, it would have been in order to set one meaning against the other and undermine the exclusivity of each. It would have been to deconstruct the ostensible unity of the phenomenon under consideration, not to attempt a comprehensive vision of it. While Nietzsche tends to use the contradiction between different languages as evidence of the falsity of each, Musil wants to grant partial truth to each and to see if they can be combined into a synoptic understanding.

Musil's question, as we shall see in the final section of this chapter, is whether it is possible to establish an order among incongruous languages, to invent a single language which could incorporate them all as items of an inclusive lexis.

If Musil's concern is post-Nietzschean, it is because it develops a latent suggestion of Nietzsche's thought. When Nietzsche condemns bisherige Werte in the name of being beyond good and evil, he means that what is to be overcome in the tradition is primarily the unilateralism of viewpoints. "The dangerous and uncanny point has been reached," he announces, "where the greater, more manifold, more comprehensive life [das grössere, vielfachere, umfanglichere Leben] transcends and lives beyond the old morality [über die alte Moral lebt]" (KSA, 5, 216/BGE, #262). The time has come for embracing the new infinity of the natural, for realizing multiplicity and contradiction in knowledge as well as in life, for abandoning the fiction of essences for the manifold richness of appearance. Today a philosopher "would be compelled to find the greatness of man, the concept of 'greatness,' precisely in his range and multiplicity" (KSA, 5, 146/BGE, #212). Nietzsche proposes this ideal; Musil takes the first steps towards examining its viability. In the last section of this chapter, we shall see how Musil attempts to

"systematize" a plurality of interpretation. For now, it is sufficient to recognize that the undefinition of reality in Nietzsche and more explicitly in Musil moves in a logical line from the destruction of individual truths to a tentative vision of truth as plurivocal.

Musil takes the undefinition of things so far as to equate reality with possibility. If reality is predicated upon interpretation, then the only reality is that of the imagination. This is not to say that the external world does not exist: Musil stops short of this extreme consequence of the hypothesis (represented, for instance, by Paul Valéry, for whom nothing is real except "the idea") for the simple reason that he mistrusts abstraction. There is no criterion by which to judge the validity of the idea. Here Musil establishes his distance not only from Valéry but also from Nietzsche: While Nietzsche acknowledged the arbitrariness of interpretations, he did not let this deter him from appealing for new ones--for the invention of new values. He seemed to believe that his exposition of the falsity of previous interpretations was enough for men to replace them with more authentic ones. Yet what keeps the new values from being just as false as the others is a question he chose to repress. Musil, on the other hand, never lets go of his suspicion that any idea or image fails to capture the matter at hand. Granting that the only reality is that of the

imagination, he also takes precautions to stress that it is only a "utopic" or possible reality.

Let us examine the steps by which Musil reaches this position. We have seen that for Musil as for Nietzsche conceptions of reality are always illusions. Truths are shields guarding man from what he does not wish, or cannot bear, to acknowledge. Just as he wards off infinity by closing himself within a stratum of forms that he calls "the things of the world," so he escapes his daily reality by imaginatively transforming it:

It seems that reality is something that the worthy, practical realist does not ever wholly love and take seriously. As a child he crawls under the table, when his parents are not at home, by this brilliantly simple trick making their living-room into a place of adventure; as a growing boy he hankers after a watch of his own; as the young man with the gold watch he longs for the woman to go with it; as a mature man with watch and wife he hankers after a prominent position; and when he has successfully attained the fulfillment of this little circle of wishes and is calmly swinging to and fro in it like a pendulum, it nevertheless seems that his store of unsatisfied dreams has not diminished by one jot, for when he wants to rise above the rut of every day we will resort to a simile [Gleichnis]. Obviously because snow is at times disagreeable to him, he compares it to women's glimmering breasts, and as soon as his wife's breasts begin to bore him, he compares them to glimmering snow; he would be horrified if one day he and his little "turtle-dove" suddenly had horny bills to coo with, or if her lips really turned into coral, but poetically he finds it stimulating. He is capable of turning everything into anything--snow into skin, skin into blossoms, blossoms into sugar, sugar into powder, and powder back into little drifts of snow [cf. p. 71 of this study, on changing every U into an

X --for all that matters to him, apparently, is to make things into what they are not.¹²

Musil is not merely drawing attention to the irony of the fact that the man most dependent upon illusion is the so-called realist. He is making a metaphysical assertion: as one of his chapter headings has it, "that even ordinary life is of a utopian nature" (ch. 84). Similarly, Ulrich's reflection on the Nietzschean question of his youth--"why all figurative [uneigentlichen] and (in the higher sense of the word) untrue utterances were so uncannily favored by the world (GW, 1, 148)--leads him to the conclusion that "'reality has in itself a nonsensical yearning for unreality [in der Wirklichkeit ein unsinniges Verlangen nach Unwirklichkeit]"

¹² Es scheint, dass der brave, praktische Wirklichkeit-mensch die Wirklichkeit nirgends restlos liebt und ernst nimmt. Als Kind kriecht er unter den Tisch, um das Zimmer der Eltern, wenn sie nicht zu Hause sind, durch diesen genial einfachen Trick abenteuerlich zu machen; er sehnt sich als Knabe nach der Uhr; als Jüngling mit der goldenen Uhr nach der zu ihr passenden Frau; als Mann mit Uhr und Frau nach der gehobenen Stellung; und wenn er glücklich diesen kleinen Kreis von Wünschen zustande gebracht hat und ruhig darin hin und her schwingt wie ein Pendel, scheint sich dennoch sein Vorrat unbefriedigter Träume um nichts verringert zu haben. Denn wenn er sich erheben will, so gebraucht er dann ein Gleichnis. Offenbar weil ihm Schnee zuweilen unangenehm ist, vergleicht er ihm mit schimmernden Frauenbrüsten, und sobald ihn die Brüste seiner Frau zu langweilen beginnen, vergleicht er sie mit schimmerndem Schnee; er wäre entsetzt, wenn ihre Schnäbel sich eines Tags als hornige Taubenschnäbel herausstellen würden oder als eingesetzte Korallen, aber poetisch erregt es ihm. Er ist imstande, alles zu allem zu machen--Schnee zu Haut, Haut zu Blüten, Blüten zu Zucker, Zucker zu Puder, und Puder wieder zu Schneegeriesel--, denn es kommt ihm anscheinend nur darauf an, etwas zu dem zu machen, was es nicht ist (GW, 1, 138/MWQ, 1, ch. 37).

steckt]'" (GW, 1, 288/ch. 69). To understand fully the ontological import of such a statement, we must again have recourse to Nietzsche.

Nietzsche generalizes the process of artistic creation --interpretation of the world in service of power--to all of the organic and inorganic world. In his posthumous notes, he reflects on the intuitions he first expressed in The Birth of Tragedy: "How far does art reach into the inside of the world? And are there 'artistic forces' apart from the 'artist'? As one knows, this question was my point of departure: I said yes to the second question, and to the first, 'The world itself is nothing but art'" (G, 14, 366). Elsewhere he again restates his original intuition: "the world as a work of art that gives birth to itself" (Schlechta, 3, 495/WP, #796). In his Nachlass Nietzsche tries to give scientific validation to the hypothesis which was too idealistically or "metaphysically" formulated in his first book. "Error begins in the organic world. 'Things,' 'substances,' properties, act-ivities [Tätig'keiten] --one should not read all that into the inorganic world! They are the specific errors by virtue to which organisms live" (G, 13, 69). That is not merely to say that we observers of the world are mistaken to speak of "states" or immutable facts, but that organisms themselves "mistake" their surroundings. They take their bearings within ceaseless flux, and thus begin to master

their existence by perceiving fixed "objects," "conditions" and "things" around them. Martin Heidegger, whose two Nietzsche volumes are indispensable to understanding the aesthetic nature of the will to power, glosses one of Nietzsche's famous quotes as follows: "A lizard hears the slightest rustling in the grass but it does not hear a pistol shot fired quite close by. Accordingly, the creature develops a kind of interpretation of its surroundings and thereby of all occurrence, not incidentally, but as the fundamental process of life itself: the 'The perspectival is the basic condition of all life' (G, 7, 4/ Nietzsche, 1, 212). Nietzsche's ontology does away with the equation of reality and truth: "'Semblance' as I understand it is the actual and sole reality of things" (G, 13, 50/ibid., p. 215). What is understood as truth, even in the inorganic world, is only a particular vision of things, one which preserves a particular condition of life. Heidegger explains: "Truth, i.e., true being, i.e., what is constant and fixed, because it is the petrifying of any single given perspective, is always only an apparentness that has come to prevail, which is to say, it is always an error" (ibid., p. 214). And, as opposed to art, which enhances life by inventing new perspectives, the "will to truth," or to fixed apparition, is "already a symptom of degeneration" (G, 14, 368/ibid., p. 216).

Musil's claim that reality contains a nonsensical yearning for nonreality ultimately alludes to this view of art "'as the real task of life, art as life's metaphysical activity'" (Schlechta, 3, 694/WP, #853. Cf. BT, Preface, #5). Whatever state of affairs is, or seems to be, is only an artistic interpretation of life. Furthermore, the yearning for nonreality, which in Nietzsche's terms would be understood as the artistic creativity of the will to power, is actually responsible for the establishment of reality. The nonreal, the undefined and unknown, the merely hypothetical and imaginary is at a certain point simply codified--as "reality," as "truth." When we identify a phenomenon as X or Y, we say no more than what it appears to be from one among many possible perspectives. Hence speech about identity should be reformulated: It is speech about possibility. One cannot speak with the copula but only with the similitic "as." Propositions are not literal but figurative.

At a certain point Ulrich thinks up the following figure which he wants to express to Clarisse but ends up keeping to himself: "God is far from meaning the world literally; it is an image, an analogy, a turn of phrase, that he must make use of for some reason or other, and it is of course always inadequate; we must not take him at his word, we ourselves must work out the sum that he sets us."¹³ If Ulrich

¹³ "Gott meint die Welt keinesweg wörtlich; sie ist ein

proposes that we not take God--or language--literally but rather work out the sum he sets us anew, he means, as we shall see in the last section of the chapter, that we must perform a transvaluation of values, in the higher sense of the phrase: not a reinterpretation of the world in terms of new images, but a revaluation of our attitude towards figurative language itself.) Reality, whatever its configuration, is always the product of illusion. Man does not usually recognize, for instance, "that he must believe he is something more in order to be capable of being what he is; he must somehow have the sense of that something more above him and around him, and yet at times he may be suddenly deprived of it. Then he lacks something imaginary [etwas Imaginäres]" (GW, 2, 529/MWQ, 2, ch. 109). This something imaginary that shapes a man's reality--be it an ideal, a delusory self-image, a business, or, more generally, the socio-spiritual context to which he belongs--is actually the most real thing about his existence. Delusion lies at the basis of experience.

If reality cannot be conceived as a given, it is also on account of change. Musil follows Goethe and Nietzsche in viewing existence as a process of becoming, as a

Bild, eine Analogie, eine Redewendung, deren er sich aus irgendwelchen Gründen bedienen muss, und natürlich immer unzureichend; wir dürfen ihn nicht beim Wort nehmen, wir selbst müssen die Lösung herausbekommen, die er uns aufgibt" (GW, 2, 357-58/MWQ, 2, ch. 83).

creative self-making. "This order of things is not as solid as it pretends to be," Ulrich suspects; "nothing, no ego, no form, no principle, is safe, everything is in a process of invisible but never-ceasing transformation, there is more of the future in the unsolid [Unfesten] than in the solid, and the present is nothing but a hypothesis that one has not yet finished with" (GW, 1, 250/MWQ, 1, ch. 62). Things are only insofar as they are becoming, and that is why Musil, like Nietzsche, judges the present by how much future it contains. Whatever seems to have obtained a fixed form, to have become "actualized" as something self-same, has lost its fluidity in the process, as if to content itself with its self-approximation. (Significantly, the second volume of The Man Without Qualities is titled Seinesgleichen Geschieht.) This is what disturbs Törless when he feels that an explanatory word only tears off the outer husk of the thing itself, like "truth" in Nietzsche's philosophy--a defensively fossilized form among the creative mobility which is life proper. For Musil it makes no difference whether that which has assumed form is a thing, a lifestyle, a character, or even a thought: in each case its codification belies its deeper and more essential potential. This is the suspicion that leads a man to question the validity of those structures, principles, and patterns which are offered him as constitutive of reality. From the Nietzschean question about one's own truth, it is

only a step to the question of reality in general:

But is the truth I am getting to know my truth? The goals, the voices, the reality, the seduction of it all, luring and leading one on, all that one follows and plunges into--is it the real reality or does one still get no more than a breath of the real, a breath hovering intangibly on the surface of the reality one is offered? What is so perceptible to one's mistrust is the cut-and-dried way that life is divided up and the ready-made forms it assumes, the ever-recurring sameness of it, the pre-formations passed down by generation after generation, the ready-made language not only of the tongue but also of the sensations and feelings.¹⁴

One of Musil's advances upon Nietzsche, as we shall see later, is his thematization of the virtual impossibility of any direct realization of individuality.

What seems always to happen in nature is that "every play of forces tends in the course of time towards an average value and an average condition, a compromise and a state of inertia" (GW, 1, 23/MWQ, 1, ch. 62). Creative new beginnings, extraordinary and exceptional outbursts do not establish themselves as enduring realities; being, as that which lasts, is possible only as a repetitive order of Seinesgleichen.

¹⁴ Ist denn die Wahrheit, die ich kennen lerne, meine Wahrheit? Die Ziele, die Stimmen, die Wirklichkeit, all dieses Verführerische, das lockt und leitet, dem man folgt und worin man sich stürzt:--ist es denn die wirkliche Wirklichkeit, oder zeigt sich von der noch nicht mehr als ein Hauch, der ungreifbar auf der dargebotenen Wirklichkeit ruht?! Es sind die fertigen Einteilungen und Formen des Lebens, was sich dem Misstrauen so spürbar macht, das Seinesgleichen, dieses von Geschlechtern schon Vorgebildete, die fertige Sprache nicht nur der Zunge, sondern auch der Empfindungen und Gefühle" (GW, 1, 129/MWQ, 1, ch. 34).

Thus, if so-called reality, with its average self-sameness and a priori conventions, lacks the capacity to incorporate originality in process, then it is not as real as it could be. Real reality would seem to lie in potentiality. It would be the act of taking shape, the creative self-formation which both resists and transcends definitive settlement.

This final undefinition of reality is one of the logical conclusions of Nietzsche's ontology of artistic becoming, which he got from Goethe and de-idealized. If the implications inhere in Nietzsche's philosophy, it was left to Musil to draw them. Nietzsche did not problematize becoming to the point where actuality and reality seem finally to confront each other as mutually exclusive. If reality is undefined in his philosophy, it is nevertheless what it becomes, what it makes itself. With Musil, on the other hand, reality is not only indefinite; there is the suggestion that it can never become definite, never be formally actualized. If one takes Nietzsche's ontology literally, one can speak of being only as possibility; Musil plays pupil to Nietzsche's Heraclitus. Perhaps what one should do, Ulrich considers, is abolish reality entirely (die Wirklichkeit abzuschaffen). Actually, in the age of nihilism, reality--even the reality of the actual--has already been abolished: The real or true world, as Nietzsche recounts in the famous one-page "History of an Error," has finally become a myth (TI, ch. 4).

"Truth," from Plato through to the late nineteenth century Christian era, has only denied the potential of life.

"Reality" has lost its meaning. In his iconoclastic and legislative enthusiasm, Nietzsche did not let himself be waylaid by the hidden dangers of such a loss of reality.

Musil--like most twentieth century writers (though with considerably more lucidity)--did.

On the second page of Musil's first novel, long before the man without qualities decides to dissociate himself from reality, the young Törless already experiences the outer world as "only a shadowy, unmeaning string of events, indifferent stations on his way, like the marking of the hours on a clock-face [nur ein schattenhaftes, bedeutungsloses Geschehen . . . gleichgültige Stationen wie die Stundenziffern eines Uhrblattes]" (GW, 6, 8). He gazes at life "only as through a veil [nur wie durch einen Schleier]" (ibid.). We recall the similar distance with which Ulrich is first introduced in The Man Without Qualities: His initial reflections result in the thought that given the tangle of forces which is the world, it doesn't make a scrap of difference what one does. Living is deprived of reality in the degree to which it fails to accommodate one's creative efforts. Musil goes so far as to ascribe to Ulrich, as he stands in front of a church, the "resistance of a primal instinct against this world petrified into millions of tons of stone, against this

rigid lunar landscape of feeling into which one had been set down with no will of one's own."¹⁵ One cannot fail to recognize here, especially in Musil's choice of the word willenlos, a significant divergence from Nietzsche's vision of man's self-made destiny. Yet it is none other than Nietzsche who, with his utopic ideal of willing the world, emphasized man's will-less dissociation from that which is. Having persuasively argued that the late nineteenth century bourgeois world has lost its credibility (is a world from which, as Musil puts it, "God . . . has withdrawn his credit" [GW, 2, 529]), Nietzsche appeals for a passionate redefinition of reality. Where this leaves his heirs, those who refuse to replace lost illusions with new ones, is in that suspension between the demise of the old world and the birth of a new one, in that Zwischen, to borrow Heidegger's term, of "the No-more of the gods that have fled and the Not-yet of the god that is coming" (Existence and Being, 289). The actual has not yet again become real. Musil views Nietzsche's plans for reinvesting it with as much suspicion as the previous Weltanschauungen he criticized. Reality has lost its warrant, its necessity; it is for the moment indifferent. The only sensible thing to do is to

¹⁵ "Urwiderstand, den man ursprünglich gegen diese zu Millionen Zentnern Stein verhärtete Welt, gegen diese erstarrte Mondlandschaft des Gefühls hat, in die man willenlos hineingesetzt wurde" (GW, 1, 130/MWQ, ch. 34).

abolish it completely. One must suspend one's belief in reality and thereby make ready for a new mode of experience. (We remember that the action of The Man Without Qualities begins with Ulrich's decision "to take a year's leave from his life in order to seek an appropriate way of using his abilities" (GW, 1, 47/MWQ, 1, ch. 13 .)

If reality is to be abolished, however, what is to take its place? That is, what is to house the possibility of the real? There are only approximative names for it. In Törless the most satisfactory is moralische Kraft; in The Man Without Qualities it is moralische Phantasie. In the last chapter of that book which Musil himself saw to press (3, 38), Ulrich explains to his sister Agathe the difference between the regulation of human behavior, or morality as commonly understood, and the source of such regulations, or morality proper. "Morality," the narrator remarks, "was for him neither conformism [Botmässigkeit] nor the sum of acquired knowledge, but living out the infinite fullness of life's possibilities" (GW, 3, 1028). Reality is to be abolished in order to liberate man's potential. Man, as Nietzsche had it, is essentially the "not yet determined animal [das noch nicht festgestellte Thier]" (KSA, 5, 81/BGE, #62), the fabbro, the creature of potentiality par excellence. The problem with history as it has been lived hitherto is that it has not come near to

embodying his moral creativity. If the methodologies of reason, science, and technological organization have been developing at a staggering pace, the imagination which applies such methods has been "fixed and closed" (ibid.). Alongside the systematization of self-same patterns of life stands "a mound of broken shards, which are feelings, ideas, heaped up in strata just as they came into existence--always no more than side-issues--and subsequently were discarded" (ibid.). Regardless of the fact that these side-issues (Nebensachen) are precisely what give shape to reality (cf. GW, 1, ch. 4), reality never assimilates more than a diluted or "normalized" version of them. Hence it is logical that Ulrich, in his search for ways to realize the moral imagination, should elaborate a program of living not the history of the world but the history of ideas (GW, 2, 364/MWQ, 2, ch. 84). "Morality is imagination [Phantasie]" (GW, 3, 1028/MWQ, 3, ch. 38): To live with one's fullest moral potential, that is, with the greatest power of self-determination, means to live life in the manner of art (GW, 2, 367/ch. 84), to exist like a character in a book (GW, 2, 573/ch. 114). As suggested in the Nietzsche chapter (pp. 73-75), this would involve eliminating the "fatty tissue" (Fetterüst) and congealed metaphors from one's life, and restoring "the primal condition of life" (GW, 2, 574. See also pp. 118-19 of this chapter).

Although Musil objects to the word will, his idea of the moral imagination could hardly be closer to the artistic ontology of the will to power. For Nietzsche as well as Musil, the urprüngliche Zustand des Lebens is that of self-and-world creating action. We have suggested that the principle of will to power is based upon a vision of life as artistic. The why of action may be power but its what is art (the sense of an increase in power is contingent upon an act of interpretation). Nietzsche's will to power is essentially a will to form, to appropriation, to coherence within chaos. It is like the continually renewed creation of a state or system. In man, the will to power is expressed as the ability to evaluate, to reach decisions, to legislate the way things shall be: otherwise put, as morality. Musil's moralische phantasie, like Nietzsche's Wille zur Macht, is the power to shape the world. It is ultimately the only authentic reality: the interpretative process which makes the forms of reality (which could just as easily be different) what they are. Yet there is a difference between Musil and Nietzsche on the question of the actualization of such imaginative energy. Nietzsche contends that the success or failure of creativity depends upon power. While Musil agrees in part, he discovers many obstacles to the expression of moral energy which Nietzsche either suppressed in his own thinking or did not take into

consideration. In examining these obstacles, Musil thinks through the possibilities of the Nietzschean ideal of living life in the manner of art. What Nietzsche posits, he questions, hoping to come up with a more viable program for achieving the same ends.

Nietzsche confidently espouses willing, self-making, passionately dictating values. Musil speaks more tentatively of filling the big hole called the soul; of "a spiritual [seelische] force" within a person; of the "attempt to develop the forces of innerness [Versuch . . . die Kräfte des Inneren zu entfalten]" (GW, 5, 9-10). How to become what one is is not so self-evident as it appears. First of all, one doesn't quite know what it is one is supposed to realize--what, that is, is the content of that hole called the soul. Musil devotes a whole novel to recounting the difficulty of attaining this inner truth of self: The Confusions of the Pupil Törless. The realm of will or moral decision is the most elusive of all subjects of knowledge. For Törless it is "a sudden silence, which is like a language one cannot hear" (GW, 6, 24). Secondly, and it follows from this first uncertainty, one can never be sure whether one's vision, image, or idea of reality is authentic. There comes a point, Törless says, "'where you no longer know whether you're lying or if what you've made up is truer than you are yourself [ob man lügt ob das, was man erfunden

hat, wahrer ist als man selber]'" (GW, 6, 22). While an Übermensch would simply assert his vision and embrace it as true, a man without qualities questions the veracity of even his most personal visions (even if, as we shall see in the next section, this distance too has been learned from Nietzsche and must ultimately be read back into his Übermensch--a man who is much more skeptical than Nietzsche presents him as being). What one envisions may be more real than oneself, but it is an immense blur, necessitating the act of "harkening after a solemn mystery [Lauschen auf ein ernstes Geheimnis]" (*ibid.*). Musil realizes that underlying, if not belying, the Nietzschean ideal of self-creation is the virtually insoluble problem of self-discovery.

As we have seen in terms of becoming in general, the inner self one is in search of may never be capable of taking on shape. Ulrich readily admits that the idea of living after the manner of art is inviable: Often "we have an idea that we act on for a bit, but after a while its place is taken over by habit, inertia, selfishness, and the promptings of our urges, because that is the way things work. And so what I have described is perhaps a condition that cannot by any means be carried to its conclusion" (GW, 2, 369/MWQ, 2, ch. 84). To really become what one is, as Nietzsche proposes, one would have to become becoming.

The issue, in Musil's terms, is whether it is possible "to repossess oneself of unreality [sich wieder der Unwirklichkeit bemächtigen]" (GW, 2, 575). Both Nietzsche and Musil want to answer this question in the affirmative. But both admit--Musil quite explicitly, Nietzsche only obliquely through the acquiescence of the will in amor fati and the ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichens--that strictly speaking it is impossible. If the question is how to live in a figurative fashion, then one cannot do so literally. The last section of this chapter will show that life can only be figuratively figurative.

Finally, the autonomously mechanical processes of life seem to afford no occasion for the moral imagination to enter a language. The outer world poses much more of a barrier to self-realization than Nietzsche would admit. "In earlier times one could be an individual with a better conscience than one can today. . . . Today . . . responsibility's point of gravity lies not in the individual but in the relations between things. Has one not noticed that experiences have made themselves independent of man?"¹⁶

The technocratic society of the twentieth century has

¹⁶ "Man ist früher mit besserem Gewissen Person gewesen als heute. . . . Heute . . . hat die Verantwortung ihren Schwerpunkt nicht im Menschen, sondern in den Sachzusammenhängen. Hat man nicht bemerkt, dass sich die Erlebnisse vom Menschen unabhängig gemacht haben?" (GW, 1, 150/MWQ, 1, Ch. 39)

little place for individual desire (as Ulrich realizes at the very beginning of the book, conceiving as he does of personal heroism having to cede to a type of collective heroism). What a person may once have felt to be his most unique qualities have become data which "have gone on to the stage, into books, into the reports of scientific institutions and expeditions, into communities based on religious or other conviction. . . . Who today can still say that his anger is really his own anger, with so many people butting in and knowing so much more about it than he does? There has arisen a world of qualities without a man to them, of experiences without anyone to experience them."¹⁷ It seems that if one takes the idea of selfhood seriously one can no longer identify with any of the characterological traits offered as constitutive of the self. "Most likely," Musil writes, "the dissolution of the anthropocentric attitude . . . has finally begun to affect the personality itself" (ibid.). In his emphasis on the self-regulative structures of existence, Musil makes one of the most important moves towards replacing the lingering

¹⁷ ". . . in die Bücher, in die Berichte der Forschungsstätten und Forschungsreisen, in die gesinnungs- und Religionsgemeinschaften . . . wer kann da heute noch sagen, dass sein Zorn wirklich sein Zorn ist, wo ihm so viele Leute dreinreden und es besser verstehen als er?! Es ist eine Welt von Eigenschaften ohne Mann entstanden, von Erlebnissen ohne den, der sie erlebt" (ibid.).

anthropocentrism of the nineteenth century with twentieth century "logocentrism"--according to which all matters of identity must be referred back to language (a position best represented, perhaps, by Martin Heidegger's philosophy of linguistical Da-sein).¹⁸ Nietzsche is the pivotal figure in this shift: His philosophy of will and valuation seems still to harbor the entity "man" at its center, while his destruction of metaphysics so undefines reality as to leave no entity or essence intact. What is left are only hermeneutic relations among particulars and illusive signs of appearance. Finally, the undefinition of reality culminates in the dissolution of the self, the traditional seat of the real, and in the need to conceive it anew.

The Dissolution of the Self

The entity referred to as a person--a presumably individual configuration of feelings, thoughts, and actions--is as questionable in its nature and function as the context to which it belongs. With the abolition of reality, the self loses its metaphysical bases. Its structures collapse, its grounding principles retreat from sight.

¹⁸ This use of the word "logocentrism" is different from that of Jacques Derrida and the Deconstructionists. Indeed, they too, insofar as they see all problems of reality as problems of language, belong within this logocentric approach, taking it one step further and deconstructing it.

The disintegration of psychological identity which begins with German Romanticism and continues with Nietzsche's critique of conceptual unities comes to dissolution with Musil's meticulous dismantling of the human faculties. Nietzsche never gave up his ambition to tie human behavior down to physiological processes. Musil, on the other hand, seems willing, at least theoretically, to let go of the idea of a basic nature to the self. Not only could everything be "just as easily different," not only does the twentieth century lack guidelines for integrated self-development, but there seems to be no "given" to the self to begin with. Taking his cue from Nietzsche's arguments against all rational "wholes" and applying the even more radical analytic positivism of Ernst Mach, Musil dissects the purported unity of the self more minutely than Nietzsche. Ironically however, and it is an irony of the essence of Musil's intellectual Zwiespalt, or discord, as we shall see in the last section of this chapter, Musil is more committed than his predecessor to the task of unifying the self, to breathing life into its dismembered corpse. This Zwiespalt is proper to any full commitment to an intellectual issue: Supposing that in the modern world the self lacks solid grounds for action and belief, as already suggested by Nietzsche, Musil cannot solve this problem without thoroughly diagnosing it. He must further the research and

also grapple with the question Nietzsche did not adequately answer: Can unity of self be reinstated at all? Once consciousness, reason, the soul, and conscience have lost their claim as unequivocal spokesmen for self-identity, what is to fill the vacuum they leave behind? Where is one to locate the essence of human nature? These are unskirt-able questions which Nietzsche leaves us with, and Musil addresses them more directly than all but the existential philosophers (with whom he agrees in this: man's essence is to be sought in his existential relations with things of the world). But before drawing conclusions, let us recapitulate the major events in Nietzsche's own act of dissolving the self.

Nietzsche prepares the way for Musil by deconstructing the self into a heterogeneous set of affects and impulses. Willing, the outcome of all organic operations, cannot be understood as a type of Schopenhauerian primal faculty. It is "something complicated, something which is a unity only as a word."¹⁹ If we fail to perceive the plurality of ingredients making up what appears to be a single inner

¹⁹ "etwas Complicirtes, Etwas, das nur als Wort eine Einheit ist" (KSA, 5, 32/BGE, #19). The passage continues: "in jedem Wollen ist erstens eine Mehrheit von Gefühlen. . . . Wie also Fühlen und zwar vielerlei Fühlen als Ingredienz des Willens anzuerkennen ist, so zweitens auch noch Denken. . . . Drittens ist der Wille nicht nur ein Complex von Fühlen und Denken, sondern vor Allem noch ein Affekt."

sensation, it is largely on account of our belief in the "synthetic concept 'I'" (KSA, 5, 33/ibid.). In truth, "our body is but a social structure [ein Gesellschaftsbau] composed of many souls," and the notion of an I is constructed as an implication of these different operations. "L'effet c'est moi" (ibid.).

Nietzsche's repudiation of the Ich, like that of Ernst Mach, is often articulated in the form of a polemic with Descartes.²⁰ "A thought comes when 'it' wishes, and not when 'I' wish, so that it is a falsification of the facts of the case to say that the subject 'I' is the condition of the predicate 'think'. It thinks . . ." (KSA, 5, 31/BGE, #17). Again, in his Nachlass, Nietzsche asserts: "The 'subject' is only a fiction: the ego of which one speaks

²⁰ A link between Nietzsche and Musil, Ernst Mach is a more immediate model of ego deconstruction for Musil. Mach enters into the question of the Ich by quoting the eighteenth century physicist and aphorist, Georg Cristoph Lichtenberg: "In his philosophical notes, Lichtenberg says: 'We become conscious of certain presentations that are not dependent upon us. Where is the border-line? We know only the existence of our sensations, presentations, and thoughts. We should say, "It thinks," just as we say "It grows light." It is going too far to say Cogito, if we translate Cogito by "I think." The assumption, or postulation, of the ego is a mere practical necessity.' Though the method by which Lichtenberg arrived at this result is somewhat different from ours, we must nevertheless give our full assent to his conclusion" (The Analysis of Sensations, I, 12, in The European Philosophers from Descartes to Nietzsche, ed. Monroe C. Beardsley, New York, 1960, p. 784). It may be that Musil, who wrote his philosophy dissertation on Mach and thus knew this particular work well, was also inspired by this passage in his choice of the term "border-line case" (Grenzfall) as one of the central metaphors of the third volume of The Man Without Qualities.

when one censures egoism does not exist at all" (Schlechta, 3, 534/WP, #370). The ego, like the will, is only a "begriffliche Synthesis" (Schlechta, 3, 850/WP, #371). In what seems to be the first draft for Jenseits #19 (quoted above) Nietzsche declares: "My hypotheses [sic]: The subject as multiplicity [Vielheit]" (Schlechta, 3, 473/WP, #490).

Musil develops this hypothesis of subjective multiplicity, giving it the novelistic figure of Ulrich, the man without qualities. Ulrich's distinction is not that he possesses no qualities but that he possesses too many, none of which seem to be truly his own (eigen). He has not submitted them to a process of selection and coordination which results in that mental "system" referred to as a self, definable in terms of its attributes. He has not subordinated his many qualities to a "governing drive." Ulrich identifies with no Eigenschaft singly but with all of them in their multiplicity.

In "A Man Without Character," a story in the Nachlass zu Lebzeiten--the last thing Musil published--which stands as a condensed treatment of this question of unity of self, Musil speaks of the protagonist's Eigenschaftlosigkeit, or quality-lessness, as the lack of a character. "Character" denotes psychic unity. A person shows character by the fact that his behavior, ideas, feelings, and morals form a

coherent pattern. Even a criminal has character if his actions are consistent.²¹ Yet Musil questions whether such consistency is intrinsic to the self or merely the product of a logic which the individual himself does not determine. One's "character" may simply be an error without which it may not be possible to live, a formal unity finding a place within a mechanical system of social expectations. The character or structure of the self which defines one's behavior seems to be of a non-personal origin, dictated by the receptivity of the world to certain types of behavior and not to others.²² It is only a seeming reality, a totality only from a specific point of view. In truth,

the inhabitant of a country has at least nine characters: a professional one, a national one, a civic one, a class one, a geographical one, a sex one, a conscious,

²¹ This is not the case with Moosbrugger, the famous criminal in MWQ, simply because, like Ulrich, he represents a fundamental freedom from coherence. He is a dramatic example of how human behavior eludes traditional schemes of understanding.

²² "'Ein junger Mensch, wenn er geistig bewegt ist,' sagte Ulrich zu sich . . . 'sendet unaufhörlich Ideen in allen Richtungen aus. Aber nur das, was auf die Resonanz der Umgebung trifft, strahlt wieder auf ihn zurück und verdichtet sich, während alle anderen Ausschickungen sich im Raum verstreuen und verlorengeln!'" (GW, I, 116, Ch. 29). As a result, such a man is beset by "eine quälende Ahnung des Gefängniswerdens; ein beunruhigendes Gefühl: alles, was ich zu erreichen meine, erreicht mich" (GW, I, 129, Ch. 34).

an unconscious and perhaps even too a private one; he combines them all in himself, but they dissolve him, and he is really nothing but a little channel washed out by all these trickling streams, which flow into it and drain out of it again in order to join other little streams filling another channel. Hence every dweller on earth also has a tenth character, which is nothing more or less than the passive illusion of spaces unfilled; it permits a man everything, with one exception: he may not take seriously what his at least nine other characters do and what happens to them, in other words, the very thing²³ that ought to be the filling of him.

Given the multiplicity of characters ascribable to a single person, any characterization of him will grasp no more than one of his potentially countless dimensions. The conceptual scheme that underlies the analysis--whether

23 ". . . ein Landesbewohner hat mindestens neun Charaktere, einen Berufs-, einen National-, einen Staats-, einen Klassen-, einen geographischen, einen Geschlechts-, einen bewussten, einen unbewussten und vielleicht auch noch einen privaten Charakter; er vereinigt sie in sich, aber sie lösen ihn auf, und er ist eigentlich nichts als eine kleine, von diesen vielen Rinnsalen ausgewaschene Mulde, in die sie hineinsickern und aus der sie wieder austreten, um mit andern Bächlein eine andre Mulde zu füllen. Deshalb hat jeder Erdbewohner auch noch einen zehnten Charakter, und dieser ist nichts als die passive Phantasie unausgefüllter Räume; er gestattet dem Menschen alles, nur nicht das eine: das ernst zu nehmen, was seine mindestens neun andern Charaktere tun und was mit ihnen geschieht; also mit andern Worten, gerade das nicht, was ihn ausfüllen sollte" (GW, 1, 34/MWQ, 1, ch. 8).

focusing on his emotional make-up, unconscious desires, or any other aspect of the self--necessarily dictates the results. However defined, "character" is only a partial whole. It is a tendency to repetition that one has acquired involuntarily.²⁴

How much inner will is reflected in one's professional, class, or sex determination? Nowhere is there a sufficient reason for everything's having turned out as it has (es hätte auch anders kommen können, GW, 1, 131). Practical life is more a process of passive internalization than of active externalization. As a consequence, for all the ostensible differences among people, "if you analyse the nature of a thousand human beings, all you're left with is two dozen qualities, feelings, forms of development, constructive principles [Ablaufarten, Aufbauformen], and so on, which is all they consist of" (GW, 1, 66/MWQ, 1, ch. 17). The rigid self-sameness of historical actuality penetrates even into the most personal recesses of one's inner life.

²⁴ "Man beginnt," Musil writes, "es immer mehr als beschränkt zu empfinden, unwillkürlich erworbene Wiederholungsdispositionen einem Menschen als Charakter zuzuschreiben und dann seinen Charakter für die Wiederholungen verantwortlich zu machen" (GW, I, 116/ch. 29). One is reminded of Nietzsche's reasons for rejecting free will: "Die Menschen wurden 'frei' gedacht . . . um schuldig werden zu können" (KSA, 6, 95) and "der Mensch wurde mit Hilfe der Sittlichkeit der Sitte und der socialen Zwangsjacke wirklich berechenbar gemacht" (KSA, 5, 293).

Even one's most immediate emotional reactions are conditioned by general models: "One loves because there is love, and in the way that love has always been; one is proud as an Indian, a Spaniard, a virgin, or a lion; indeed, in ninety out of a hundred cases even murder is committed only because it is considered tragic and magnificent."²⁵ (Here we recognize the extent to which art is responsible for this normative process. It furnishes the metaphors that transform the world into a turn of phrase [Redewendung], a development which, as we shall see later, Musil tries to offset by engaging in a deconstructing and "possibilizing" literature.)

Character, feelings: Musil challenges the authenticity even of thinking. If Nietzsche had criticized the postulation of a subject behind the act of thought, he had not effected a total break between thinking and the person who does it. According to Musil, on the other hand, when we pride ourselves on having attained the solution to a problem, we claim responsibility for an act that occurs no less mechanically than that of a dog trying to get through a

²⁵ "Man liebt, weil und wie es die Liebe gift; man ist stolz wie die Indianer, die Spanier, die Jungfrauen oder die Löwe; man mordet sogar in neunzig von hundert Fällen nur deshalb, weil es für tragisch und grossartig gehalten wird" (GW, 2, 364/MWQ, 2, ch. 84).

narrow door with a stick in its mouth: "it goes on turning its head left and right until the stick slips through [er dreht dann den Kopf solange links und rechts, bis der Stock hindurchrutscht]" (GW, 1, 112/MWQ, 1; ch. 28.) And this characterizes not only logical operations but also so-called flashes of inspiration (which in Ecce Homo Nietzsche claims as his unique personal patrimony: "This is my experience of inspiration; I don't doubt that one has to go back thousands of years to find anyone who could say to me 'it is mine too'" [KSA, 6, 340 / Ecce Homo "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," #3]). One's thoughts seem to have so little to do with oneself, writes Musil, that one experiences the nonplussed feeling that they "have created themselves instead of waiting for their originator. Nowadays many people call this nonplussed feeling intuition, whereas formerly it used also to be called inspiration, and they think they must see something suprapersonal in it; but it is only something non-personal, namely the affinity and kinship of the things themselves that meet inside one's head."²⁶ If it sometimes seems as if one has a purely

²⁶ ". . . dass sich die Gedanken selbst gemacht haben, statt auf ihren Urheber zu warten. Dieses verdutztes Gefühl nennen viele Leute heutigentags Intuition, nachdem man es früher auch Inspiration genannt hat, und glauben etwas Überpersönliches darin sehen müssen; er ist aber nur etwas Unpersönliches, nämlich die Affinität und Zusammengehörigkeit der Sachen selbst, die in einem Kopf zusammentreffen" (GW, 1, 112/MWQ, 1, ch. 28).

unique mental experience, the minute one "understands" the experience "it no longer has the form of the thought [des Gedankens] in which it was experienced, but already that of the thing thought [des Gedachten], and this unfortunately is a non-personal one, for the thought is then extraverted [nach aussen gewandt] and adjusted for communication to the world" (ibid.). The ordinary tendency to identify oneself with one's thoughts and feelings, to possess them as characteristics of self, is here subverted. Thinking is a coordination of distant ideas, the possibility of which is already pre-dictated by the language that contains them. (It will be up to Heidegger, with his hermeneutical Logostheorie, to thematize the nature of such a language.)

Musil's questioning of the authenticity of the various forms of self-expression rigorously extends the Nietzschean suspicion concerning the prejudicial nature of what seems to constitute one's innermost being: moral convictions, conscience, free will, and the power of decision. The implication of Musil's skeptical reflections is that if self-overcoming is possible, it entails not only a transvaluation of belief (Nietzsche) but more importantly, a transvaluation of what it means to think and feel.²⁷ More

²⁷ While Nietzsche did, in fact, question the authenticity of feelings (as is clear from his genealogical reductions of pity to self-aggrandizement, hatred to fear, tolerance to ressentiment, and so forth), his "translations"

than the "what" of the psyche one must reassess its "how." It is again the veil of language, the ready-made language not only of the tongue but also of the sensations and feelings that keeps one at odds with oneself. To speak with Wittgenstein, a private language is not possible.

The subject, then, is merely a "housing unit" for processes of feeling, thought, and action. Although a man "consists" of these operations, they dissolve him. Within the self can be located no center that gathers these attributes into a coherent whole, no "soul" so to speak at the bottom of one's being. But as Nietzsche remarks, the way is then open "for new versions and refinements of the soul-hypothesis; and such conceptions as 'mortal soul,' and 'soul as subjective multiplicity,' and 'soul as social structure of the drives and affects,' want henceforth to have citizens' rights in science."²⁸ Nietzsche is again proleptic: Musil earns citizens' rights for at least one of these soul-hypotheses: subjective multiplicity.

of their respective meanings is conducted within the standard language of emotional definition (hatred = X, fear = Y).

²⁸ "Es ist, unter uns gesagt, ganz und gar nicht nöthig, 'die Seele' selbst . . . los zu werden und auf eine der ältesten und ehrwürdigsten Hypothesen Verzicht zu leisten. . . . Aber der Weg zu neuen Fassungen und Verfeinerungen der Seelen-Hypothese steht offen: und Begriffe wie 'sterbliche Seele' und 'Seele als Subjekts-Vielheit' und 'Seele als Gesellschaftsbau der Triebe und Affekte' wollen fürderhin in der Wissenschaft Bürgerrecht haben" (KSA, 5, 27/BGE, #12).

If the self can be disintegrated into an incoherent plurality of regulative procedures, Musil reminds us that it also consists of the empty channel into and out of which these various streams flow. If the streams are seen as man's "attributes" or appearance, then his corresponding "essence" would be a hollow mold, a vacuous container. This would seem to be the only true description of the "soul," of the subject or hypokeimenon ("that which underlies" one's actions). This passive Phantasie unausgefüllter Räume or "tenth character"--which permits a man everything, on the condition that he does not take seriously what his at least nine other characters are doing--is one of Musil's entirely new topics, which can be thematized in such terms only in the wake of Nietzsche. It is the abgründlicher Grund of the self, exposed through the Nietzschean unmasking of human artificiality. That is, once one has taken stock of one's attributes and found them to be lacking in reality, what is necessarily left over is an empty channel. If thoughts, feelings, and actions are mere acquisitions, there must still be something that can house them in a single person. There is still a locus of connection, even if the connections themselves are spurious.²⁹

²⁹ To claim that the connections result in an economy describable as will to power is to beg the issue, for what is at stake here is not the nature of the human network as much as the ground upon which it is built.

Pushing the Nietzschean deconstruction of all human qualities to the extreme, Musil finally arrives at a point where nothing seems predicable of the human except an essential nothing.

This overcoming of the idea of man as will to power by that of an essential but nevertheless empty channel is the ultimate logic of the Nietzschean logic. It is the final step along the road to complete nihilism--at the end of which, so Nietzsche believed, constructive thought can again become possible. And it is precisely here that Musil begins to build anew. The empty channel at the heart of the inessential man is "the big hole called the soul [das grosse Loch das man Seele nennt]" (GW, 1, 185/MWQ, 1, ch. 46)--a doorway opening onto the possibility of a new understanding of what it means to be human.

Musil uses the word Seele as a pivot--with monumental ambiguity and irony. While helping Nietzsche to bury it in a pile of metaphysical illusions, he also resurrects it. Negatively defined, the soul "is simply what curls up and hides when there is any mention of an algebraic series [das, was sich verkriecht, wenn man von algebraischen Reihen hört]" (GW, 1, 103/MWQ, 1, ch. 25). It is one's final and unperjured witness in the failing defense of one's reasons--a Rest. It moves in the waves of feelings aroused by love and beauty and stilled once more by

religion and art. Less ironically, however, the soul is all that is missing in the mechanical procedures of existence. It is, if there were such a thing, the ultimate truth of reality, which after Nietzsche can no longer be committed to a concept, and after Musil no longer to an action. Seele names the namelessness of nature. With the resurrection of this Romantic word, the nihilistic route turns sharply before the impassable fields of ineffability. For, the consequence of Nietzsche's philosophy is that language faces its own failure; truth acquiesces no more to logos. But when one is forced to remain silent about what cannot be said, it becomes natural to speak of silence. This is Musil's role in the overcoming of nihilism: He voices the ineffability of the real. He embraces the paradox that soul, the word most mocked by the positivist, is also the one that the positivist most needs. While it is certainly an inadequate word for ultimate reality, it--as opposed to the pseudo-articulate terms of the pseudo-sciences--is nevertheless the only inadequate name that can be used properly, the only one that "knows its place." And thus it is that the fumes of what Nietzsche calls the "most vaporous concepts" destroyed by the nineteenth century inspire the twentieth.³⁰

³⁰ In order to speak about being in An Introduction to Metaphysics (New York: Doubleday, 1961), Heidegger first has

This paradoxical but predictable resurrection of the soul is in the fullest sense of the phrase a transvaluation of a value. Musil takes this "vaporous" Romantic word and reinvests it with meaning. Like Yeats's anti-self, soul denotes the fullness of passion that the practical man has failed to achieve in his life. It is all that the man could "just as easily be," and with far more authenticity. It is the sum total of his deepest resources, his instinctive desires, and his unspeakable yearning. It is his unknowable inner necessity, always betrayed by his outer compromises. It may be equated with what in Törless Musil called a moral force and later moral imagination: not codes of conduct but the source of morals before they

to reckon with Nietzsche's charge that such "highest concepts" are no more than "the last cloudy streak of evaporating reality" (pp. 29-33). Soul, being, existence, and truth itself--these "vaporous fallacies" are reborn in the twentieth century, not simply as problems but as the most meaningful of concepts. Reality itself is dependent upon nothingness: "L'univers," writes Paul Valéry, "n'est qu'un défaut/ Dans la pureté du Non-être!" ("Ebauche d'un serpent," 29-30). Heidegger considers the meaning both of being, as that-which-is (das Seiendes), and of Sorge, the basic condition of human experience, to be made possible by man's being-unto-death and by the fact that, in some positive way, nothing is. Jean-Paul Sartre understands human freedom and consciousness as a lack of being. Wittgenstein announces that the most significant human concerns--ethics, religion, and aesthetics--must be left in silence. Musil's Törless recognizes that what is most real is what is most imaginary. (That this recognition is that of a pupil indicates, among other things, that Musil considers it just his starting point.)

don a strait-jacket. Finally, it is the power to transcend the very limits of identity as defined by the structures of living, a transcendence fleetingly instanced in dreams, youth, and love, and which seems to betoken our ultimate belonging to being as a whole.

It is in response to the calling of this vague inner necessity that Ulrich dissociates himself from his (human, all-too-human) qualities. Even Arnheim, his arch-antagonist admits it: "The man had reserves of as yet unexhausted soul. . . . Somehow every human being . . . in the course of time dissolves his soul in intelligence, morality, and lofty ideas . . . and in this his best-beloved enemy the process had not been completed" (GW, 2, 548/MWQ, 2, ch. 112). Ulrich, as opposed to the manless assortments of qualities that are his contemporaries, is closer to the "man himself." Closer, but not quite there. He is not yet a man, in the sense of being his own person; for the time being (which extends throughout the thousand and some odd completed pages of the novel) he exists in the paradoxical condition of a man without qualities, a person still searching for his person and for the manner to bring it to life. This is what distinguishes Musil's vision of self from that of Nietzsche.

Musil performs an immanent critique of the Nietzschean ideal of Selbstüberwindung (self-overcoming). Immanent

critique is meant in the Hegelian sense: to give oneself to an argument, follow it step by step until finally its conclusion is seen to be different from that which was originally thought. For Musil as for Nietzsche, the prospect of self-realization would seem to involve a dialectical process: self-divestment followed by self-investment. One divests oneself of one's own arbitrariness--one's inherited morals, stale selfsameness, and acquired codifications--and begins to make oneself anew. Construction of self is contingent upon the dissolution of the self that is given. The problem, however, is how to constitute a bridge between the divested self and the self-investment that is to follow. Devoted though he may be to the Nietzschean imperative Werde der, der du bist, Musil does not see how it can be taken literally. "Fundamentally . . . Ulrich felt himself capable of every virtue and every kind of badness" (GW, 1, 251/MWQ, 1, ch. 62). His dilemma is that among his countless arbitrary possibilities there is not one which can be identified as an inner necessity. And if one did stand out, how would one know whether it was real? And what method would one use to bring one's truth to life? Sheer creativity, as Nietzsche suggests, or would the givenness of language, environment, history, and necessity demand a share in the making? "Between events and himself, indeed between his own feelings

and some inmost self that craved understanding of them," Törless found that "there always remained a dividing-line [eine Scheidelinie], which receded before his desire, like a horizon, the closer he tried to come to it. Indeed, the more accurately he circumscribed his feelings with thoughts, and the more familiar they became to him, the stranger and more incomprehensible did they seem to become, in equal measure" (GW, 6, 25/YT, 34-35). Ulrich is no autonomous Zarathustra. Bound, like Nietzsche and all men, to the banality of his condition, he is no more free to be what he wills than is the Viennese society of 1913 which he reflects. Supposing there really is "something in us stronger, bigger, more beautiful, more passionate and darker than ourselves," as Törless senses, it could hardly be teased out by mere will. Rather, it would be "something we have so little power over that all we can do is aimlessly strew thousands of seeds, until suddenly out of one seed it shoots up like a dark flame and grows away out over our head."³¹ If one tried to realize that "inner man,"

³¹ ". . . dass etwas in uns ist, das stärker, grösser, schöner, leidenschaftlicher, dunkler ist als wir [cf. Nietzsche's Dionysus, whose intention, so he tells the philosopher in BGE #295 (KSA, 5, 239), is to make man "stärker, böser und tiefer; auch schöner"] . . . worüber wir so wenig Macht haben, dass wir nur ziellos tausend Samenkörner streuen können, bis aus einem plötzlich eine Saat wie eine dunkle Flamme schiesst, die weit über uns hinauswächst . . ." (GW, 6, 92/YT, 123).

wouldn't it be subject, as it struggled to take form, to the distorting pressures of reality? Wouldn't it inevitably translate into a language not of its own making? And what does Nietzsche propose as criteria for authentic selfhood? Doesn't the mask stick fast to each and every self-dramatization? Isn't any seeming unity of self as deceptive a system as those "unities" which Nietzsche criticizes in the human sciences at large?

Nietzsche felt the relentless power of these questions. In fact, if his philosophy is tragic it is precisely because it battles to advance a new humanism--a new project of self-realization--against the paralyzing menace of such an awareness. In Musil this awareness is no longer what Zarathustra calls an abysmal silence buried beneath one's words, but luminously present, an open field upon which to play out the complex project of becoming what one is.

Musil's initial response to the Nietzschean call for self-realization is to expose the enormity of the difficulties attending the task. He answers the challenge by increasing the challenge. But as he replaces the image of the Übermensch with that of the man without qualities, he also proposes a very specific interpretation of what Übermenschlichkeit may mean for a historical man, what Selbstüberwindung may entail in concrete action.

Given Musil's ontology of undefinable reality, of the relative and merely functional value of all things, the idea of actualizing an inner or "authentic" self would seem to be a fiction. There is no determinate soul or "man" beneath or independent of one's qualities, only a lack of the man in the qualities. To Ulrich, the narrator writes, "the value of an action or of a quality, indeed their essence and nature, seemed . . . dependent on the circumstances surrounding them, on the ends that they served, in short, on the whole complex--constituted now thus, now otherwise--to which they belonged" (GW, 1, 250/MWQ, 1, ch. 62). Hence, an actualization of the man could only be achieved through the moral relations he takes up with the outside world. There is no self "in itself" and then the moral arena that it enters as a splendid new member; there is only the arena itself, which is shaped by the interdependent play of subjective will and objective necessity and is itself the relation of subject to object.³² It is the harmony of these inner and outer dimensions that accounts for the experience of "self-realization." This is the import of Musil's claim that in earlier times one could be

³² Here Musil comes closer to a vision of man as being-in-the-world, as articulated by Heidegger, than to the romantic idea of an isolated self often propounded by Nietzsche.

an individual with a better conscience than one can today. "People used to be like the stalks of corn in the field. They were probably more violently flung to and fro by God, hail, fire, pestilence and war than they are today, but it was collectively, in terms of towns, of countryside, the field as a whole" (GW, 1, 150/MWQ, 1, ch. 39). Thus, too, when Ulrich proposes that the Parallel Action establish "a terrestrial secretariat for Precision and the Soul [Genauigkeit und Seele]"--that it re-establish a link between mechanical objectivity and amorphous subjectivity--Count Leinsdorf understands him quite well and explains it like this:

There was a time when people grew naturally into the conditions they found waiting for them, and that was a very sound way of becoming oneself [eine verlässliche Art, in der sie zu sich gekommen sind]; but nowadays, with all this shaking up of things [bei der Durcheinanderschüttelung], when everything is becoming detached from the soil it grew in, one really ought, even for the production of soul so to speak, to replace the traditional handicrafts by the sort of intelligence that goes with the factory [müsste man . . . die Überlieferung des Handwerks durch die Intelligenz der Fabrik ersetzen] [GW, 2, 597/MWQ, 2, ch. 116].

If self-realization involves the commensurability of innerness and outer conditions, at the beginning of the twentieth century the first step towards the achievement of this end would be to recognize--and internalize--the shock

up nature of things (the Durcheinanderschüttelung) in the outer world. Paradoxically, it would be to accept the lack of commensurability and radical disunity between the inner and the outer, between the "ideal" self and its actual configuration, between amorphous Seele and the codified Genauigkeit of technological organization, between imaginative freedom and the restraints placed upon it. In this light, to have soul would be to admit one's lack of a soul, to consider it only a desideratum. Today one would realize soul by refusing to believe that it can be realized. Similarly, to be a man would mean to understand that, the way things stand, one consists of "qualities without a man," to understand that one is not and cannot be a man simply at will. One would recognize that unity of being--of self, as well as of self and other--is real only insofar as it is a privation, a longed-for, a symbolic reminder of what could be. The realization of unity would be contingent on an admission of the radical disunity of being, on a lived awareness of the opposition between the traditional pairs of intrinsic truth and extrinsic appearance, idea and act, feeling and logic, freedom and necessity.³³

³³ The only way to overcome these oppositions, as both Nietzsche and Musil knew (and twentieth century philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Derrida stress repeatedly), is to abandon the very language of metaphysics in which these oppositions have their place. The problem, however, is that we cannot get outside this language.

Self-realization would involve a resolute act of self-dissolution. Thus the man without qualities is a reflection of reality and an embodiment of its quest for a logic. Just as the things outside him have no fixed meanings but enter into multiple functional contexts, so does he. With Ulrich, "man as the quintessence of human possibilities [der Mensch als Inbegriff seiner Möglichkeiten], potential man, the unwritten poem of his own existence, materialized as a record [als Niederschrift], a reality, and a character, confronting man in general" (GW, 1, 251/MWQ, I, ch. 62). Ulrich is more "himself" than others in that he exists in his capacity for being anything. Here is the invisible Seele coming back into sight, the groundless "ground" of the self becoming paradoxically visible. For Ulrich stands as a record of the unwritten poem of his existence. To be all that he could be, he refrains from committing himself to form; he cultivates multiplicity; he abandons the univocity of the actual for the plurivocity of the real. Keeping his distance from ideologies, from "certainties," "beliefs," and "truths," he seeks a method to obliterate categorical distinctions and to restore the unity of experience.™ He studies the functional relativism of modern physics as well as the writings of the medieval mystics. His philosophy is what Nietzsche calls that of "the dangerous Maybe [das gefährliches Vielleicht]" (BGE, #2). His attitude to the world is "actively passive."

Active passivism, one of Musil's key phrases, may be understood as an attitude that takes its bearings in the very midst of that tension between self divestment and investment. Like the Nietzschean Übermensch, the active passivist considers values which pass for absolute to be merely provisional. If he abstains from such "provisional" commitments, it is out of his commitment to the prospect of absolute commitment. Yet the only thing that is absolute is human provisionality. For Nietzsche, it goes by the name of the innocence of becoming; Musil understands it as the inevitable determinacy of history, functional relativism, and the laws of natural inertia.

Thus this actively passive man without qualities "does not say No to life, he says Not Yet!" (GW, 2, 444/MWQ, 2, ch. 97)--not because he is not ready to commit himself, but because life itself is not yet prepared for his type of commitment. As the narrator of "Ein Mensch ohne Charakter" admits after introducing the protagonist of his tale as "a man who never had character," "yet it worries me that perhaps I've merely not grasped his importance at the right time and whether in the last resort he isn't some kind of pioneer or precursor."³⁴ The man without qualities leads a

³⁴ "doch ich bin in Sorge, dass ich vielleicht bloss seine Bedeutung nicht rechtzeitig erfasst habe und ob er nicht am Ende so etwas wie ein Pionier oder Vorläufer ist." (GW, 7, 534).

Not Yet existence because things themselves, in their variability and becoming, are always Not Yet. Like the Übermensch, the man without qualities is given to the indeterminacy of his present and is hence a man of future, a "pioneer," even if it is not clear of what. His "truth" is suspended--the old one outgrown and the new one out of sight.

The man without qualities presents a critique of the Übermensch as Romantic hero (as author of his destiny and creator of values) and at the same time a development of the Übermensch as disciple of Dionysus, the dismembered god. Not a completed self, a transcendent unity, or a master of his own will, the Übermensch can master no more than his own dismemberment. He makes problematic existence ethical. Groundless and insecure, he accepts this condition as the grounds for his self-enhancement. Put in another way, Musil elaborates the more skeptical aspects of Nietzsche's thinking on the self. Instead of developing the dogmatic pronouncements, Musil amplifies Nietzsche's asides, explores his suggestions, gives thought to his misgivings, and learns from his mistakes. Instead of pondering the grandiose portraits of willfulness, like D'Annunzio and D. H. Lawrence, Musil peruses Nietzsche's sketches of man as an experiment and guinea pig. Instead of self-creation, it is self-discovery that interests him.

On the way toward a transvaluation of values, toward the achievement of "one will, one health, one sun," as Nietzsche puts it (KSA, 5, 249/GM, Preface, #2), Musil examines the indeterminacy of the present, the interim wait, the labor of transition.

Musil's actively passive man without qualities recalls the Übermensch's acquiescence in fate. The appropriation of change is clearly the goal, but necessity is as strong as a lock. Moreover, if Selbstüberwindung is the key to this lock, it never succeeds in opening it. Selbstüberwindung is no momentous, transfiguring act. It is an ongoing process and inconclusive attempt, which does not annul the disunity of being. The only unity which can be achieved is that of a methodical manipulation of this disunity. Hence Ulrich, like Nietzsche's wanderer and masked philosopher, is ever "on his way": exploratory, experimental, expectant, and enduring. Nietzsche and Musil both offer a paradoxical vision of a stoical expedition towards a reappropriation of reality. The agon is endless. The self finally appears not as an autonomous entity but as a relational process involving multiple languages of union and disunion, equivocal drives and values, and countless interdependencies. The self is dissolved into subjective multiplicity, and begins to "be itself" only in an art of essayism.

Ulrich's Ambition

If we look carefully at the few moments when Törless writes, we find that they represent two different types of art. One provides reassuring pictures about the way things are. The other treats experience as indefinite.

The first amounts to acting. Under the influence of "associations originating outside and borrowed emotions" (GW, 6, 13), Törless sometimes begins an epic romance or a little story. "In his excitement over the sufferings of his heroes, crossed in love, his cheeks would flush, his pulse quicken, and his eyes shine. But when he laid down his pen, it was all over."³⁵ All that happens here is that Törless gives himself over to the influence of images contained in his readings, "just as an actor needs the compulsion that a role imposes on him" (ibid.). This type of art is passive, not active. Like the Wagnerian music which Walter plays in The Man Without Qualities, it acts as an anodyne to emptiness and despair. As Nietzsche would say, it has the narcotic effect of illusion. And like Thomas Mann, Musil follows Nietzsche in declaring such art to be a form of decadence.

³⁵ "In der Erregung über die Liebesleiden seiner Helden röteten sich dann seine Wangen, seine Pulse beschleunigten sich und seine Augen glänzten. Wie er aber die Feder aus der Hand legte, war alles vorbei" (GW, 6, 13/YT, 18-19).

The second time we witness Törless writing, however, he is trying "to do some hard thinking about himself." He even invents an experimental method. By simply recording the strange nature of the experiences he has undergone in recent months, he expects that "the real intellectual pattern of it would emerge of its own accord, just as an encompassing line stands out distinctly and gives form to a tangled composition of hundreds of intersecting curves." He writes "rapidly and without form." Scratching out his first, too affirmative sentence ("I feel something in me and don't quite know what it is") Törless shifts into an interrogative mood. Why, he wonders, do things seem odd to him which are perfectly ordinary to others? Why does he not take things for what they appear to be? "What is it about them that makes them seem strange? Something about them that I don't know about. But that's just it! Where on earth do I get this 'something' from? I feel its existence; it affects me; just as if it were trying to speak. I get as frantic as a man trying to lip-read words from the twisted mouth of someone who's paralyzed and not being able to do it."³⁶

³⁶ "Was befremdet mich an ihnen? Ein Etwas, das ich nicht kenne. Aber das ist es ja eben! Woher nehme ich denn dieses 'Etwas'? Ich empfinde sein Dasein; es wirkt auf mich; so, als ob es sprechen wollte. Ich bin in der Aufregung eines Menschen, der einem Gelähmten die Worte von den Verzerrungen des Mundes ablesen soll und es nicht zuwege bringt" (GW, 6, 89/YT, 119).

Here Törless' writing attempts to come to grips with a "something" about things (ein Etwas) which cannot be put into words. His writing gazes into the infinity of the natural, raises questions, contemplates the problematic and indefinite nature of things. It hopes to discover an intellectual pattern, not simply to give form to surface appearances.

The aim of this second kind of writing seems to be Musil's own. It is concerned not with things per se but with something about them that eludes definition. On the most basic level, then, it seeks to deconstruct systems of interpretation, to open rather than to close horizons of the understanding (whether morality, science or literature in the narrower sense of the word). On its own terms, each of these interpretations produces only partial answers, surface evaluations, and conceptual clichés. To liberate the Etwas in things, Musil engages in a critique of conventional languages of interpretation--artistic genres of expression, opposite values, unequivocal "truths," and even the scheme of identity and difference. "Maybe," Nietzsche proposes, "popular valuations . . . are . . . merely foreground estimates." Maybe all formal distinctions are misleading and things are rather insidiously related, tied to, and involved with their opposites--"maybe even one with them in their essence."

Maybe! But who has the will to concern himself with such dangerous maybes! For that, one really has to wait for the advent of a new species of philosophers, such as have somehow another converse taste and propensity from those we have known so far--philosophers of the dangerous maybe in every sense. And in all seriousness, I see such new philosophers coming up.³⁷

Nietzsche here conjures up the Musilian project. The fact that Nietzsche speaks of philosophers of the maybe rather than of artists helps us to understand the next, extra-critical dimension of Musil's art. If Musil finds static interpretations and unequivocal languages to be simplistic, he must discover another, more complex, more universal, and more flexible approach to experience. It must be more open and inquisitive than this "first type" of art, and thus a philosophical art.

For Nietzsche the consummate art, philosophy is pure inquiry, a building from scratch. Attempting to overcome the relativity of individual languages, it seeks the logos. Its interpretive field is unlimited, its method less

³⁷ "Vielleicht! --Aber wer ist Willens, sich um solche gefährliche Vielleichts zu kümmern! Man muss dazu schon die Ankunft einer neuen Gattung von Philosophen abwarten, solcher, die irgend welchen anderen umgekehrten Geschmack und Hang haben als die bisherigen,--Philosophen des gefährlichen Vielleicht in jedem Verstande.--Und allen Ernstes gesprochen: ich sehe solche neue Philosophen heraufkommen" (GW, 5, 17/BGE, #2).

prejudiced than the other arts. To think, taking this verb in the widest sense, means to be receptive to the openness of things.³⁸

Ulrich, the man without qualities, confronts the world with the bearing of a thinker. Attempting to transcend limited interpretations, he enters the service of Nietzsche's gefährliches Vielleicht. "Nothing is stable for him. Everything is fluctuating, a part of a whole, of innumerable wholes that presumably belong to a super-whole, which, however, he doesn't know the slightest thing about. So every one of his answers is a part-answer, every one of his feelings only a point of view."³⁹ What matters to

³⁸ Thinking, says Nietzsche, is also the only type of activity which allows one to do nothing whatsoever that is impersonal. Thus he distinguishes between the thinker and the scholar: The scholar's drive for knowledge does not necessarily tie up with his other drives. "The real 'interests' of the scholar . . . lie usually somewhere else--say, in his family, or in making money, or in politics. Indeed, it is almost a matter of total indifference whether his little machine is placed at this or that spot in science, and whether the 'promising' young worker turns himself into a good philologist or an expert on fungi or a chemist: it does not characterize him [es bezeichnet ihn nicht] that he becomes this or that. In the philosopher, conversely, there is nothing whatever that is impersonal" (KSA, 5, 20/BGE, #6). This helps explain why Ulrich leads such a theoretical existence: To be who he is he must remain open to possibilities, attempt to understand who he is. Cf. also Martin Heidegger, who states that man's existence is "authentic" only insofar as it remains open, in thought, to the "openness of being" (Was Heisst Denken, Teubingen, 1954).

³⁹ "Nichts ist für ihn fest. Alles ist verwandlungsfähig, Teil in einem ganzen, in unzähligen Ganzen, die vermutlich zu einem Überganzen gehören, das er aber nicht im geringsten

Ulrich are not the incomplete schemes which enclose reality but the Überganze in which second order distinctions are surpassed. "He wants as it were the wood and the others the trees" (GW, 1, 17). The wood, the Wald, is the essence of things as well as their as-yet undefined relations, their ultimate order.

Thus Ulrich's real ambition throughout this year of vacation from his life is to attain die Ordnung des Ganzen (GW, 1, 27). "Why did he live so vaguely and undecidedly? Undoubtedly--he said to himself--what banished him to an aloof and anonymous form of existence was nothing but the compulsion to that loosing and binding of the world that is known by a word one does not like to encounter alone: spirit [Geist]." ⁴⁰

A process in which all history, art, and science partake, Geist is the sum-total of world-creation. It does not represent the forms of becoming--the provisional perspectives created and destroyed--but becoming itself. Geist "mixes things up, unravels them, and forms new combinations

kennt. So ist jede seiner Antworten eine Teilantwort, jedes seiner Gefühle nur eine Ansicht . . ." (GW, 1, 65).

⁴⁰ "Warum lebte er also unklar und unentschieden? Ohne Zweifel,--sagte er sich--was ihn in eine abgeschiedene und unbenannte Daseinsform bannte, war nichts als der Zwang zu jenem Lösen und Binden der Welt, das man mit einem Wort, dem man nicht gerne allein begegnet, Geist nennt" (GW, 1, 153/MWQ, 1, ch. 40).

[bringt durcheinander, löst auf, und hängt neu zusammen]"
(GW, 1, 153).

It would seem that Ulrich is less interested in creating new forms than in understanding the way in which forms are created. The Etwas he pursues is Geist as a whole, which seems always to be missing in each of its manifestations. He is seeking a "magic formula, a lever that one might be able to get a hold of, the real spirit of the spirit [den eigentlichen Geist des Geistes], the missing, perhaps very small, bit that would close the broken circle" (GW, 1, 155). To close the circle would mean to bridge the actual and the real, the conditional and the unconditional, to "perfect" existence much as Nietzsche imagines it happening in amor fati and the acceptance of the eternal return of the same. For Musil, too, the appropriation of such absolute becoming would amount to something like the mastery of an ultimate will. In fact, according to the narrator, Ulrich had always "wanted to become something like a leader and master of the spirit" [er . . . so etwas wie ein Fürst und Herr des Geistes hätte werden wollen]" (GW, 1, 152). Even now, in the present time of the novel, Ulrich often conceives of his task as that of "transforming the world's haphazard state of consciousness into a single will [diesen fahrlässigen Bewusstseinzustand der Welt in einem Willen zu verwandeln]" (GW, 1, 251). His idea of a "conscious utopianism" would

amount to "a constructive will [ein Bauwille] . . . that does not shrink from reality but treats it, on the contrary, as a mission and an invention" (GW, 1, 16).

Ulrich, then, wants to close the broken circle, to appropriate the eigentlichen Geist des Geistes. He wants to actualize the full potential of the moral imagination without submitting it to a strait-jacket. He would take Nietzsche's noch nicht festgestelltes Tier and turn him into das niemals festzustellende Tier.⁴¹ For, as we have suggested earlier, what Ulrich really aims at is the liberation of life's full creative potential, the "restoration" of the "primal condition of life" (GW, 2, 574).

Now, what Ulrich comes to understand as the novel progresses is that such a primal condition cannot be restored. Call it creativity, Geist, will, "moral power," or simply becoming--such full artistic potential cannot be achieved in a completed form. The infinite cannot be embodied in a finite system. Creativity transcends each of its products.⁴² From this it follows that any art which presumes to embody totality will be deluded. Whether a novel, a poem, or a metaphysics, it will base itself on a denial of existential finitude.

⁴¹ Nietzsche's phrase, ". . . der Mensch [ist] das noch nicht festgestellte Thier (man is the as yet undetermined animal)" is from BGE, #62.

⁴² See also Chapter One, pp. 76-77.

Here, at the point of the greatest impossibility comes the dialectical turn. The inability to bring into being the creative potential of reality opens up the highest possibilities of human invention. Just as Nietzsche develops the idea of an absolute, Dionysian will to power within the context of accepting a fate one cannot change, so Musil elaborates an infinitizing aesthetic within a tragic awareness of the limits of language. By recognizing its own limits, art can extend them. It can use illusory languages truthfully. Striving for totality with no hope of succeeding, it can approach totality. This approach, approximation, or attempt constitutes the idiom for artistic becoming. It is the essay within which man truly achieves his potential.

The Essay⁴³

What does Musil mean by "essay"? He describes it as an "attempt" (ein Versuch), an attempt at totality. However, an essay is not just the "provisional . . . expression of a conviction that might on a more favorable occasion be elevated to the status of truth." An essay is "the unique and unalterable form that a man's inner life assumes in a

⁴³ On the use of the essay in Musil's period and its meaning, see Georg Lukács, "Über Form und Wesen des Essays," Die Seele und die Formen (Berlin, 1911). See also David S. Luft, Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture 1880-1942 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 18-22.

decisive thought [ein Essay ist die einmalige und unabänderliche Gestalt, die das innere Leben eines Menschen in einem entscheidenden Gedanken annimmt]” (GW, 1, 253/MWQ, 1, ch. 62). The important word is entscheidend, "decisive," or more exactly, "deciding." The essay is the shape that thought takes as it is deciding--weighing, distinguishing, evaluating, judging, as part of a process of coming to a decision. Acting out this process means submitting to a tension of possibilities in an effort to resolve them. Thus, paradoxically, it is precisely Ulrich's compulsion to the "loosening and binding of the world," in the passage quoted earlier, which makes him live "vaguely and undecidedly [unentscheiden]." Ulrich experiences the tension but resists an ultimate decision, for it would put the choosing behind him. Musil, too, in The Man Without Qualities as a work, submits to the Zwiespalt of the decision-making process. We have seen that the novel plays out a conflict between the desire for absolute coherence and the recognition of infinite relativity, between idealism and its nihilistic foundation. But sensing that "to every question . . . there cling as many answers as there are bees in a hive" (GW, 1, 127), Musil is caught in a greater tension than an either/or. There is, in fact, no decision if it involves choosing between two given options, between two actual possibilities. Musil, as one of his characters in Die Schwärmer puts it, is interested in neither the first

nor the second possibility but in the "uninvented third."⁴⁴

In aiming at this third, uncreated possibility, the essay has the same goal as Musil's other metaphor for aesthetic decision (or for the form of decision): metaphor itself. Originally a single image, a metaphor later gets divided into two different components: an element of truth and an element of fancy. But why, Musil asks, can it not be taken for exactly what it is--that is, both at once. And neither. A metaphor is the realization of that third possibility, a bridging (metapherein) of two seemingly separate concepts in a unified third. Its significance lies precisely in its power to bridge. If divided into two components, the metaphor loses its "original vital state [ursprüngliche Lebenszustand]" (GW, 2, 582). The metaphor, too, is a "unique and unalterable form" that a thought assumes in a decisive moment. It is a revelatory flash, an unprecedented meaning breaking free from the limitations of literal codes. By the existing criteria of literal significance it is false. And yet it is true; it lies between.

⁴⁴ "But . . . life always makes you choose between two possibilities, and you always feel: One is missing! Always one--the uninvented [unerfundene] third possibility" (GW, 6, 311/The Enthusiasts, 16).

It is this betweenness of the metaphor and of the decisive essay which interests Musil. The essay tries to achieve the original vital state of the metaphor on a larger scale, through bridging of more numerous codes. To begin with, it takes a subject which seems already invested with literal significance and turns it into a question ("What is friendship?" and so on, thinking of Montaigne). It reassesses the nature of an issue--not, however, by offering a new and unequivocal definition, but by considering it to be an issue without a simple meaning. In the sequence of its paragraphs, an essay "takes a thing from many sides without comprehending it wholly" (MWQ, 1, ch. 62). It replaces predicative language ($A=B$, $X=Y$) with a more subtle, differential, and pluralistic hermeneutics ($A=B+C+D+\dots$). Instead of presenting a coherent picture, it offers a crossing of perspectives, a bridging of differences which contribute to a whole but never complete it. In the attempt to express totality, the essay incorporates points of view, supplementary considerations, and divergent theoretical contexts, which could be multiplied indefinitely.

Hence one could see the essay as an attempt to synthesize an infinite number of interpretive positions into a single framework. Indeed, if ever one tried to account for the nature of any single thing, nothing less would be required. For instance, if psychologists tried to explain the

behavior of the madman Moosbrugger, the points of view and research materials they would have to incorporate in their account would look something like this: "AH. --AMP. --AAC. --AP. --ASZ." (Musil lists twenty-seven of them, plus additional titles of journals spelled out.) What it comes down to, Musil remarks, is that

truth is not a crystal one can put in one's pocket, but an infinite fluid into which one falls headlong. One need only think of each of those abbreviations linked up with hundreds, or at least dozens, of printed pages, each page linked up with a man with ten fingers, a man who writes it, and for each of his fingers ten disciples and ten opponents, each disciple and each opponent also with ten fingers, and to each finger the tenth part of a personal idea, and one gets a faint picture of what truth is like.⁴⁵

The essay aspires precisely to such ramified truth. Yet for all the cross-references it may contain, the attempted totality will still remain incomplete. Nevertheless, the

⁴⁵ "Die Wahrheit ist eben kein Kristall, den man in die Tasche stecken kann, sondern eine unendliche Flüssigkeit, in die man hineinfällt. Man denke sich an jede dieser Abkürzungen einige Hundert oder Dutzend Druckseiten geknüpft, an jede Seite einen Mann mit zehn Fingern, der sie schreibt, an jeden Finger zehn Schüler und zehn Gegner, an jeden Schüler und Gegner zehn Finger, und an jeden Finger den zehnten Teil einer persönlichen Idee, so gewinnt man eine kleine Vorstellung von ihr" (GW, 2, 533-34/MWQ, 2, ch. 110). Cf. the way in which the narrator tries to account for what the word civilization means to Diotima (p. 110).

essay seems to be the only method that does the unsystematic and fluid nature of truth justice. Its openness of form allows for ambiguities, correlations, and irreconcilable points of view--for threads only loosely tied. Every yes can receive its no, every ironic rub can be tolerated.

The essay suggests not only Nietzsche's perspectivism but also a method for effecting a transvaluation of values. A transvaluation, as we have seen, involves an unresolvable tension between existing interpretations (values) and possible alternatives to them. Invention requires critique; new forms are created in conjunction with the destruction of old ones. And yet, new forms are never simply created from scratch. They grow out of the old ones, like transmutations. To transvaluate does not mean suddenly to invent a new language. It means to engage in a hermeneutics of the languages that are already operative, in a self-critique of the values and interpretations (whether actual or potential) which are already given but not coherently tied to each other. A transvaluation entails a continuous redefinition of interpretive contexts and an overcoming of "opposite" values. Things are simultaneously what they have been and are not yet. Their nature cannot be fixed. Transvaluative interpretation is thus elastic, a system of maybes. Its points of view are mutable and multiple. Avoiding any single method and, with it, all claims to systematicity, the essay pursues the unsystematic play of reality.

And thus it guarantees an ongoing process of transvaluation. It submits multiple ingredients to a furnace of endless hermeneutic combustion. Decision is never over. Identities take shape through differences. In this hermeneutic plurality, every moment seems to mark a new beginning, a "self-overcoming" of a previous value, and the relations between them display the vieldeutiger Charakter des Lebens. As an ongoing "system" of interpretation, the essay is an artistic approximation of the loosening and binding of the world called Geist, of the methodical and also arbitrary process of history, of the pluralistic oneness of artistic becoming.

At this point it should be noted that even Musil's much discussed "mystical alternative" to essayistic struggle is no alternative but rather a necessary step in the essayistic project. Musil sometimes suggests that there might be an immediate and completely artless experience of metaphysical unity which is entirely different from all deliberate attempts to achieve the same result. As the novel progresses, he plays with the idea of Ulrich attaining this oneness through love for his twin sister. These different attitudes to oneness are simply different sides of the same coin.

In two important chapters of The Man Without Qualities (I, 30 and II, 116), Musil writes that Ulrich feels sundered

into two conflicting states of mind. The first state is all creation and openness, characterized by a desire to invent the world--or to perfect this one. The second Ulrich, "the less visible of the two," walks silently with "his fists clenched in pain and anger" (GW, 1, 155). He is a man of anguish with no words at his disposal, frustrated by the failure of his first ambition. "He had finally come to see himself as one held captive by preparations that would never be finished; and in the course of the years his life had run out of the sense of necessity as a lamp runs out of oil" (GW, 2, 592-93). His soul rebels. A mystic feeling of union with all things begins to rise-- "a primal memory of a childlike relationship to the world, all trustfulness and abandonment." This memory takes the form of a "haunting sense of once having beheld the whole wide world in what later fills only the flower-pot in which morality's miserable little herbs send up what sprouts they can" (*ibid.*). As in chapter 116, Ulrich's feeling of unity originates in a recognition that he is severed from the wholeness of being:

Ulrich could not say anything at all, but at this moment he thought of the strange experience that "spirit" [Geist] is as of a beloved by whom one has been deceived all one's life long, without loving her any the less for that [cf. the citation from Nietzsche above, p. 83]; and this united him with everything that came

his way. For when one loves, everything is love, even what is pain and loathing. The little twig on the tree and the pale window-pane in the evening light became an experience sunk deep in his own essential nature (GW, 1, 156).

Ulrich's love arises from anguish, his sense of communion from estrangement, his trust in necessity from a sense of his lack of necessity. The paradoxical logic is this: Ulrich's recognition of the absence of wholeness implies that there is--somewhere, somehow--a greater totality than his mind can reach: it is a possibility which inheres in things--he feels it through its absence. This wholeness is a positive negativity, tragically present in its absence (cf. Heidegger's claim that a sense of nothing is what allows for a sense of something ["Was ist Metaphysik?" Wegmarken, Frankfurt am Main, 1967]). Ulrich loves existence precisely on account of its fragmentation, because the sense of fragmentation suggests that there is a deeper unity to things than either the mind can perceive or the will determine. Seemingly arbitrary, reality has its own necessity.

Again, Nietzsche's concept of amor fati presents an illuminating parallel. If the ultimate goal of man's will to power is to "perfect" the world, the goal is achieved only by acknowledging the world as a state of unalterable imperfection. Power is free when it acknowledges its limits. According to this argument, it is far from

incidental that in the second chapter on the divided Ulrich, Musil claims that creative reality arises out of a combination of power and love. Power is the desire to dominate the world, to appropriate it aggressively and control its possibilities. Love, on the other hand, consists in receptivity to the invisible and ever missing link, to reality's failure to meet our demands. Power and love, these "two trees in which [Ulrich's] life grew divided," are roughly analogous to the other conceptual contraries that Musil strives to unify: precision and the soul, conceptual truth and metaphor, history and idea, actuality and possibility. Yet these pairs are already unified, mutually engendering each other in an endless circle. The desire for the second state is produced by the limits of the first; the methodical attempts characteristic of the first state are already the product of the second.

Mysticism thus cannot be seen as the other of essayism. Essayism itself is the project that includes the mystical feeling as the goal which pulls it onward. The vague intuition of an invisible and ultimate perfection (Ulrich experiences it "as long as a smile") is precisely what originates the quest for order. The love of things as they are proceeds from the will's admission that it is cut off from a perfect world--that such imperfectibility is fatum. The essay is thus not simply an imperfect attempt; it is a self-conscious perfection of this imperfection.

The Literary Essayism of The Man Without Qualities

In The Man Without Qualities, the word essay is used as a metaphor for an aesthetics of life; it is the method which Ulrich suspects is best suited to the complexity of experience. Earlier, I have described some of the features and implications of this way of life, especially in terms of self-dissolution, self-overcoming, "betweenness" and "not-yetness." But essayism is more than an existential program. It is, more basically, a metaphysics--Musil's "scientific" account of a world of becoming. Ulrich consciously applies to his life a principle he perceives already at work in reality. As it unfolds with its plurality of systems and play of forces, its contextual and relative values, its fluctuating motion between creation and destruction, between history and idea, reality, too, is an essay. Its only defect as it were is that it is a "haphazard state" of affairs, a sloppy essay. It is neither methodical nor creative enough. It belabors its paragraphs with repeated material (Seinesgleichen), draws facile conclusions from insufficient evidence (its "truths," in the Nietzschean sense), begins new sentences with no thought for continuity. Reality is a flawed work of art.

The cultural condition described by Musil's novel (Vienna, 1913) is a particularly good example of this kind of situation. The main events of the novel involve the

intricate preparatory research, the multifarious and fruitless attempts of Viennese intellectuals to discover some synthetic formula for moral, political, and ideological stability. Gathering the most diverse points of view into a plurilogical exchange, the Parallel Action seems to be an enormous social essay. And yet it is not. It does not attempt to transform its haphazard condition into a single will. That is, the consciousness of these intellectuals has not reached the Nietzschean point of recognizing that nihilistic disintegration must first be accepted and then turned around: made deliberate and artistic. Disintegration cannot be negated with the hope to reinstate some previous, or even new, principle of unity. Consciousness must become constructive within and by virtue of its own disintegration. In the Parallel Action as in historical reality, there is not enough newness of vision, not enough deliberate encounters of difference, not enough engagement in the decision-making process.

The implicit metaphysics of reality must be made explicit, made conscious and aesthetic. If Ulrich represents the existential version of the art of essayism, The Man Without Qualities represents its literary version. In an effort to find an answer to the single question of how to live rightly, Musil transcribes the ceaseless process of

decision-making that such an attempt involves. He analyzes for the sake of synthesis, differentiates to discover identity.

Sometimes the divisions that this art entails are so great that there seem to be few ways of bringing the sundered elements back together. This occurs on the level of Musil's own beliefs, which tend to polarize fact and idea; on the level of Ulrich's individual biography, "flawed" as it would seem by his failure to bridge mental life with the action required of him in the historical world; and on the level of the novel's structure, which does not embody its ideas in objective or narrative correlatives as much as it alternates dramatic events with theoretical analyses. Instead of resolving the tension between identity and difference, Musil's work preserves it.

One of the chief rhetorical strategies by which Musil achieves this end is irony. Irony, like metaphor, makes an equation which also implies a difference. It points out the distance between what appears to be and what is actually, the case, between the ostensible fact and its significance. Respecting the elusiveness of such significance, the ironic writer makes no literal assertions. He suggests--suspending meanings in a state of possibility. Irony constitutes the writer's admission of impotence in the face of experience, in the face of necessity: Things are simply what they are; he takes them as such and expresses mistrust.

Musil's first type of irony is narrative. He describes a person's behavior in terms which respect its external appearance but suggest that the truth is quite different: "Bonadea was also in quest of great ideas. . . . She was capable of uttering the words 'the True, the Good, and the Beautiful' as often and as naturally as someone else might say 'Thursday'" (GW, 1, 41-42). Then there is dramatic irony, by which an event takes on a different meaning in the light of an event that follows it. In the remarkable chapter in which Ulrich has a sense of "the real spirit of spirit" and feels "united with everything that [comes] his way," he stumbles into a brawl which lands him in the hands of the law (GW, 1, ch. 40). Both of these types of irony help constitute the satire of Musil's novel. Satire, too, is an admission of impotence.⁴⁶ Yet both types of irony, as well as the satiric vision they produce, are symptoms of intellectual irony. This is the irony of the writer toward himself, toward his own thoughts, visions, and hopes. "For me," Musil explains in an interview in 1926, "irony is not a gesture of condescension, but a form of struggle [Ironie (ist mir) nicht eine Geste der Überlegenheit, sondern eine Form des Kampfes]" (GW, 7, 941). One of the forms this irony takes in The Man Without Qualities is that

⁴⁶ On Musil's satiric irony, see Allemann and Arntzen.

of a type of simultaneous sameness and difference between the narrator and the protagonist. For the most part, their intellectual positions are hardly distinguishable. In fact, given the skepticism of the narrator, an experimental life like Ulrich's would seem to be the only one that makes sense. But frequently, the narrator stands back and smiles at his hero, as if to imply that he has been through it all before (though he is none the wiser for it). In his journals, Musil suggests that the narrator could be understood as a type of elder brother to Ulrich. A brother can offer advice yet knows that only experience will make the difference. The question of where to place Musil in this dialogue of brothers is an impossible one. He divides his mind between them. He needs the distance, needs the duplicity within which to move. Had he made it a first person narrative, or identified less strongly with his protagonist, he would not have been essayistic but would have been committed to a point of view. His decisions would have been taken. Instead, he preserves his mobility.

The equivocal perspectives of The Man Without Qualities go far beyond the relation between the narrator and Ulrich. Notwithstanding his irony, Musil shows immense intellectual sympathy with his other characters. The points of view these characters present are always (or almost always) eloquent, original, and cogent. In fact, until Ulrich

raises an objection, we hardly suspect that there's a loop-hole in their positions. Even then, the ideas of Arnheim, Count Leinsdorf, Leo Fischel, and Walter are usually more convincing than Ulrich's, less preposterous and abstruse, certainly more down to earth. This is not only because as readers we lack Ulrich's intellectual sophistication. It is because many of the thoughts of Musil's characters are also his own. They are frequently drawn almost verbatim from his journals. Rather than reserving his intellect for Ulrich and the narrator, Musil divides it among the entire cast of the novel. It comes to the point, not simply that we cannot decide "who is right," but that we are not even sure whether deep down these characters are not saying the very same thing in different terms. They seem to represent so many perspectives on repeated themes, with subtle correlations among their views. Intellectually, Ulrich is the primus inter pares, but these various "equivalences" form necessary cross-references of Musil's mind.

What does it mean that a theoretical view is embodied in a character of fiction? The question, ultimately, is how does a novel enhance the essayistic project I have spoken of in Musil? Let me start with the first, more particular issue. Musil's thoughts are embodied in a network of positions represented by various characters. By

being embodied in a fictitious character, each of these theoretical positions is again embodied in what is itself a network (in the same way that one scholar involves ten fingers, ten disciples for each finger, and so on). Added on to the theoretical network, then (which could just as well be handled by a literary essay), is another network even more complicated than that of reason: a person--a living complex of affects, prejudices, a history, practical duties, social, political, and sexual ties. Such a character, we remember, has at least "nine characters," each of which informs the ostensibly "single idea" he expresses. And yet, the point is not to subdivide truth ad infinitum and to imply that this is what Musil's essay is all about. Essayism--the paradoxical project to achieve continuity within discontinuity--is truly essayistic only if it takes full account of the paradoxical nature of its project. By complicating the networks that are to be unified, Musil makes his project all the more difficult.

What is it, then, about this novel The Man Without Qualities which makes it more essayistic than, say, a purely philosophical attempt at truth? Part of the answer is already implied by the suggestion that Musil's novel contains a greater plurality of techniques than philosophical writing. To speak a language of all languages, the essay must be more than an essay. It must incorporate more

languages than those of reason--the language of the emotions, of practical action, of poetic imagination, of chance and historical necessity. For this one needs character, action, and metaphor.

Ever in pursuit of the third possibility that lies between any two, Musil extends the range of the literary essay to include the "sliding logic of metaphor" and narrative drama. Ultimately, Musil's essay is the novel in which metaphor, drama, and essay fuse. Let us briefly reconsider the question of metaphor. Insofar as it presents an indissoluble synthesis, metaphor is Musil's metaphor for the goal of the essay. It achieves a single unity. It overcomes the limitations of literal language in the creation of new truth. Perhaps it was for this reason that Musil claimed he was neither a philosopher nor a novelist but a poet. The truth of the matter, however, is that, given his rationalistic strain and perhaps also in reaction to the arbitrary associations often cultivated by expressionistic and other literature of his time, Musil was not completely comfortable with metaphor. He preferred simile. The difference is that simile accounts for the metaphoric equation, it shows the linkage. In that respect it plays out the essay's attempt at union. Musil's "poetic" faculty --creating distant equations and imaginative visions--is balanced by reason. And thus he joins with the most astute

logic things that seem unbridgeably different:

There are still thousands of people nowadays who are something like scent-sprays diffusing the power of love. . . . And it was so too that she lived; she distributed herself in tiny droplets of rarefied love among all the things that deserved it, condensing as a cloudy breath upon them at some distance from herself; and all that she was actually left with was the empty bottle of the body that was one of Permanent Secretary Tuzzi's domestic chattels.⁴⁷

At the end of this bridge is an ironic twist. Even metaphoric associations reveal the difference between what could be (Diotima's desire to be a scent-spray of love) and what actually is (the empty body belonging to another person). This brings us to the dramatic structure of The Man Without Qualities, which counterposes to the hypotheses and experimental visions of the novel the solid matter of actual history.

All the different strata of experience in which a value or thought is grounded (as in the nine characters of a person) act as a brake to essayistic invention. The dramatic setting of Vienna in 1913, on the brink of a war

⁴⁷ "Es gibt noch heute Tausende solcher Menschen, die den Verstäubern von Liebeskraft gleichen . . . so lebte sie auch, sie verteilte sich in kleinen Tröpfchen feinsten Liebe an alle Dinge, die es verdienten, schlug sich als Hauch, in einiger Entfernung von sich selbst an diesen nieder, und für sie selbst blieb eigentlich nur die leere Flasche des Körpers zurück, die zum Hausstand des Sektionschefs Tuzzi gehörte" (GW, 1, 332/MWQ, 2, ch. 78).

it does not foresee, shows possibilities struggling against the force of necessity, against the sclerotic and inevitable course of events. This portrayal of history as the setting for man's attempts is one of Musil's contributions to the Nietzschean project of essayism.

When he was in his early twenties, Musil read Nietzsche's The Gay Science and jotted in his notebook, "The characteristic thing is that he says: this could be this way and that that way. Thus one could construct this on that and that on the other. In short: he speaks of pure possibilities, pure combinations, without showing us any of them actually carried out."⁴⁸ Leaving aside the astonishing resemblance between the way Musil saw Nietzsche and the way we see Musil, we can observe the following: Musil is concerned that art, or thought, or writing should achieve more than pure possibilities. The question he is concerned with is an ethical one--how to live--and as a young man Musil thought Nietzsche shirked this issue.⁴⁹ The pressing

⁴⁸ "Das Charakterische liegt darin, dass er sagt: dies könnte so sein und jenes so. Und darauf könnte man dies und darauf jenes bauen. Kurtz: er spricht von lauter Möglichkeiten, lauter Combinationen, ohne eine einzige uns wirklich ausgeführt zu zeigen" (Tagebücher, 1, 19).

⁴⁹ Years later Musil annotates this journal entry as immature. Compare what he says of Nietzsche in 1914: "Wir Deutschen haben--ausser dem einen grossen Versuch Nietzsches --keine Bücher über den Menschen" ("Anmerkung zu einer Metapsychik," GW, 8, 1019).

issue is actual existence, as it is possible today. For the young Musil, hypotheses were relevant only to the extent to which they were based on the data of historical reality. Moreover, they must be actualizable with the same degree of necessity as is shown by the events of the world. Nietzsche raised matters for thought and opened horizons. But he failed to show what his projects would entail in a historical-empirical world.

The dramatic setting of The Man Without Qualities gives shape to that fatum which Nietzsche vaguely says one can be at peace with. Musil weighs down the present, complexifies it, shows the intransigence of its systems of morals, politics, economics, physical and other laws. It is a gigantic apparatus, a "world petrified into millions of tons of stone." Without such a context of intransigent external necessity, essayism crumbles. Everything becomes possible--equally easy and equally arbitrary. Nihilism is perpetrated through a play of fantasy. Thus Nietzsche's proposal that the individual be a legislator of values--if only an abstraction, or a mythic possibility--is not enough. Musil is concerned with how the Übermensch (or any other model of post-nihilistic existence) would be actually possible. Instead of communing with eagles on mountain-tops like Zarathustra, Ulrich inhabits a bustling modern city, battling his time from within his time.

We have seen that beneath the surface Nietzsche had more respect for necessity than for unrestrained freedom. However (guessing, as he surely did, that there would be no shortage of writers to dwell on the actual conditions of modern existence), he did not bother to analyze the complex nature of this necessity. He dedicated his efforts to teaching man the responsibilities that attend such a setting. Nietzsche's work thus calls for completion: it sketches a master plan of theoretical goals and problems, and hands it to future artists to work out the details. Musil hones the problems, detecting subtle lies and questionable truths hidden in the most basic acts of daily existence. He satirizes man's presumption to found moral programs on solid bases. He speculates about what an absolute morality involving relative values would look like. He shows how a man of intellectual integrity would have to approach the course of his daily life. Responding to Nietzsche's appeal for the "creation of truth," he tries to combine poetry, reason, science, and even the non-language of mystic feeling into a coherent understanding of the world. He shows that the individual is not free of his society but its microcosm, down to his most "personal" and "individual" qualities. One is a set of qualities without a man or else a man without qualities. In the latter case, one has a will but no means of expressing it. While

pursuing the Nietzschean goal of essaying morality, Musil's novel shows how an individual's attempt to achieve a sense of necessity comes into direct confrontation with another and more manifest necessity--the unaccommodating structure of biological, physical, psychological, and political forces.

Hence, by writing a historical novel, Musil explores the essayistic project in all its complexity. For an actual man, this project means striving to create and to live his truth in a world that is already constituted. The Man Without Qualities depicts this world--a multiple strata of inherited methods, interpretations, and forms of life which are the basis for each individual's existence. This is the context for essayism. One cannot overcome it; one must accept it as given and attempt to achieve one's potential in it. The essayist cannot simply invent a new moral language. He can only use the languages already in use, transforming, reinterpreting, and transvaluating them. The Man Without Qualities, as Musil writes, "is an attempt at a dissolution and a hint of a synthesis [ist Versuch einer Auflösung und Andeutung einer Synthese]" (GW, 7, 942). The engagement in this attempt is the morality which Musil discovers.

Chapter Three

Joseph Conrad

Conrad's manner of writing has little in common with Nietzsche's and Musil's (in The Man Without Qualities). Theirs is light-footed, spry, and intellectually buoyant; his, on the other hand, is plodding, murky, and dense. While they seem to alight upon thoughts, he ponders dilemmas with no hint of a solution. Their vision is extensive in range, his intensive. He clings to the moral tradition while they seek to define it anew. The problematic nature of experience intoxicates Nietzsche and turns Musil into a master ironist; it makes Conrad unshakably anxious. They banish dread in love of the mind; doubt, for Conrad, is a visible burden. Valuing action above any thought, he associates the free-spiritedness and intellectual sophistication which characterize Nietzsche and Musil with anarchy, nihilism, and pretense.¹ Conrad's novels also demand a

¹ On Conrad's view of irony and skepticism as "affectations," see pp. 244-45. On the nihilistic and anarchic implications of free thinking--which Conrad traces to brooding inaction and, like Nietzsche, to resentment against one's superiors--see especially Under Western Eyes and The Secret Agent. In the latter work, the statements of the anarchists are so reminiscent of Nietzsche that one suspects that Conrad intended to parody the philosopher. Edward Said has recognized these echoes and properly judges them

different approach from the essayistic writing of Musil or the aphoristic capers of Nietzsche. The reader is confronted with thick layers of symbolic meaning, imagistic pictures and sensory evocations, impenetrable figures, jumbled events, the filtering consciousness of multiple narrators. Conrad expresses himself more figuratively than the more ratiocinative Musil and Nietzsche.

However, for all their differences in temperament and manner, Conrad, Nietzsche, and Musil are concerned with the same fundamental issue: how to achieve human integrity --morally, psychologically, epistemologically, and ultimately even metaphysically. All of them are concerned with man's not knowing how to act, with the splintering of identity, with truth collapsing into illusion. Conrad's fiction moves right to the center of these crises. Not only are the questions it raises about the nature of human existence similar to Nietzsche's and Musil's, but so are its answers. They too are non-answers, non-closures. They inhabit the space opened up by the suspicion that no understanding is sufficiently convincing. Yet Conrad's fiction does not, on account of that, choose the way of an ironic commentary, a resigned reflection, or an absurdist rebound from unanswerable questions. Nor does it offer a moral "solution"

"superficial resemblances" ("Conrad and Nietzsche," Joseph Conrad: A Commemoration, ed. Norman Sherry London: Macmillan, 1976 , p. 65).

to the problems it examines. Prodded by the most radical skepticism, Conrad labors, like Musil and Nietzsche, to discover the logic he seeks. His endeavor is philosophical, hence also tragic, for his questioning spirit obtains no answers. His writing, too, like Nietzsche's and Musil's speaks in order to listen. This is its destiny, which Conrad accepts from the start.

I shall be basing my reading mainly on the early Conrad, the author of Lord Jim, "Heart of Darkness," "The Nigger of the Narcissus," and the somewhat later "The Secret Sharer"--works in which he confronted more intensely than elsewhere the problems of self-delusion, moral uncertainty, the risks of fortune, and the fragmentation of the human psyche. The existential situations as well as the task that faces both writer and characters in these stories are Nietzschean: dangerously unstable conditions of life and belief within which man is forced to take a stand. How well Conrad knew Nietzsche's work remains uncertain.² What

² Conrad was familiar with at least some of Nietzsche's work before Thomas Common's anthology of 1901, Nietzsche as Critic, Philosopher, Poet and Prophet, for in 1898 his close friend Edward Garnett sent him an essay he had just written on Nietzsche (Letters from Conrad, ed. E. Garnett, pp. 157, 158). The five or six references Conrad makes to Nietzsche tend to disparage the philosopher for his idea of the will to power and his "mad individualism" (letter to Helen Sanderson, cited in Karl, Three Lives, p. 486). To my knowledge, the only study of Conrad and Nietzsche is Edward Said's essay referred to above, in which he examines the affinities between Conrad's and Nietzsche's sense of

is certain, though, is that he carries on a dialogue with Nietzsche, sometimes assenting, sometimes dissenting, replying with a voice that Nietzsche would have heard.

Conrad's Circle

Paul Ricoeur presents an argument for Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as three modern "masters of suspicion."³ Each demystified, deconstructed, or demythologized previous understandings of human consciousness. Whether understood in an ideological, moral, or psychological key, consciousness is a deceptive surface revealing something quite different beneath it. It is "false," or "masked," consciousness. Conrad applies Nietzschean suspicion to human motivation.⁴ A prying writer, he is driven to understand the real belief behind the belief, the motive behind the motive.

the duplicity of language. Ian Watt and Frederick Karl (Three Lives) draw some helpful parallels, and Eloise Knapp Hay, Fredric Jameson, and J. Hillis Miller allude to occasional Nietzschean motifs in Conrad's work. Lionel Trilling reads Conrad's "strange and terrible ambivalence toward the life of civilization" as continuing the tradition of Blake and Nietzsche ("On the Teaching of Modern Literature," Beyond Culture, New York, 1965, p. 19).

³ Paul Ricoeur, "The Critique of Religion," in The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, ed. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 213-123.

⁴ Critics have long since recognized Conrad's affinities with Freudian psychology and even with the critique of capitalism. For psychological readings of Conrad see especially Albert J. Guerard and Bernard Meyer. For Conrad's political vision see Avrom Fleishman, Irving Howe, Eloise Knapp Hay, and Fredric Jameson.

The main way in which Conrad exercises his suspicion is by posing dramatic tests to his characters, critical situations that call into question what they are or think they are. While readers have generally recognized the centrality of these dramatic events, they have often failed to appreciate the nature of the problems raised out of their determination to explain Conrad's answer to these problems. In this respect, Thomas Moser, one of the best Conrad critics, is emblematic. He begins his Conrad: Achievement and Decline by positing the need to answer a few basic questions about the nature of Conrad's world, the first being "to understand what has value" for Conrad. He establishes that "humanity is important; fidelity is the highest virtue." His preliminary conclusion is that "Conrad, the moralist, with his simple idea of fidelity . . . chooses the central situation of the early stories: the test . . . which reveals whether or not he is faithful to the community." On the basis of his performance, Moser argues (pp. 11-15), the character takes his place within Conrad's "moral hierarchy."

While it is true that the test is the central situation of Conrad's early stories, it is not true that it consigns his characters a position in a moral hierarchy. Nor, for that matter, is it true that morality itself--understood as a distinction between good and evil--is what Conrad hopes to determine. There are, for Conrad as for Nietzsche and

Musil, no unproblematic values.⁵ He tests moral prejudices with the same relentlessness as he does the belief in psychological unity, knowledge, and ultimately truth itself--the criteria underlying any hierarchy or system of judgment. We cannot appreciate the nature of Conrad's tests unless we recognize the range of their application.

The moral dimension of these challenges is the most conspicuous. The dilemma that prods Jim restlessly on from place to place, finally landing him in Patusan, where he "fails" again with Gentleman Brown, arises at the moment when he jumps off the Patna. When challenged by the actual fear of danger, the heroic code of "a man destined to shine in the midst of danger and storms" reveals itself to be a fiction. Jim deserts the ship he thinks is sinking, abandoning eight hundred passengers to doom. In "The Nigger of the Narcissus" the sailors experience a similar

⁵ Karl, on the other hand, argues that Conrad "did believe in absolutes, and by no means threw his lot in with the philosophical relativists. . . . Rejecting the relativistic implications of Frazer's anthropology as much as he did Nietzsche's form of demonry, Conrad saw human behavior in terms of the individual's commitment to certain absolutes, certain givens . . ." (Three Lives, p. 28). The issue, however, is not relativism vs. absolutism but the struggle for absolutes once they have fallen apart. As Douglas Hewitt notes, Conrad is intensely aware of "the existence of a world of moral and spiritual values, yet every quality, every virtue, every position in which he might hope to rest in security, is at once undermined" ("Conrad and the 'Few Simple Notions,'" Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Marvin Mudrick, Englewood, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966, p. 62).

test, this time in the form of a consumptive "nigger" who shakes their courage and will to live. Donkin, the lazy and resentful egotist, challenges their work ethic and brings them to near mutiny. Only in the terror of a storm do they undergo their greatest test of all, in which they recover the hardy virtues so sorely taxed by these other forces. In "The Secret Sharer" a captain's supreme responsibility, as well as his duty to bring men to justice, is challenged by the murderer who boards his ship. Will the captain break the law and endanger his ship to see him safely off, or will he betray the man with whom he identifies himself? His conscience is in crisis. So is that of Marlowe, a conventional seaman who encounters the lawless Kurtz. Sailing into the heart of darkness, he understands for the first time the "merciless logic" which consists in abandoning "good" and "evil." He must condemn and cannot.

These crises, however, are much deeper than moral: they are also psychological and epistemological. What the secret sharer challenges is the very self-control of the captain whose ship he boards. Confronted with the Congo and also with the failure of Jim, Marlowe no longer knows what to believe. In these moments of stress, the characters and narrator have the ground they stand on taken out from under them. The point, which must later be elaborated, is this: "Beliefs"--moral, political, or otherwise--are

not what govern the challenges Conrad sets his characters; such challenges are what govern belief. "Govern" is meant here in two senses. Challenges lie in ambush for any belief and expose it to be an illusion. But challenge also generates belief. This new belief can now no longer be a simple belief in X or Y. Such simple beliefs are precisely what fate challenges, tragically uprooting them, leaving space only for a state of potential belief, which is belief in the struggle to secure belief, in the fate of having to struggle before being able to believe. This "metabelief" is what Nietzsche called amor fati. Indeed, it is the condition that is generated in Conrad's protagonists in moments of crisis. A fateful, unexpected occurrence destroys their illusions, thereby constituting an awakening, a revelation. "The truth," writes Conrad, can be wrung out of us only by some cruel, little, awful catastrophe" (LJ, 197). This truth which is revealed is no truth in the ordinary sense of the word, as the opposite of illusion. It is a tragic discovery: that truth is wed to illusion, even one with it. As he plays out the "program" of suspiciously undermining illusions to discover the truth they hide, Conrad discovers that truth is only a deeper illusion. Conrad's fiction follows this circle. It does not judge its characters on moral grounds but only on the basis of whether they submit to that fateful struggle which reveals this circle.

The Unmasking of Truth

Such cruel, revelatory catastrophes epitomize a general pattern in Conrad's early fiction in which super-structures of human illusion are shattered by infrastructures of "truth." Wittingly or unwittingly, Conrad's characters run up against a deeper reality than is evident in bourgeois life.

Marlowe sails away from the center of enlightened civilization (though the "biggest and greatest town on earth" is cloaked in darkness and gloom) into "the mystery of an unknown earth" (PC, 492). Whether read as a journey into the unconscious, into death, or into the frightening prospect of amorality, "Heart of Darkness" suggests that a glimpse beneath the surface of things yields a vision which is darker, more elemental, and more primordially real.⁶ For all the merit of close readings of this underlying reality, Conrad's symbolic depiction allows for no specific identification of the matter at hand. Conrad could not be broader, more vague, and more metaphysical in characterizing what Marlowe witnesses in the heart of darkness. It was an "inner truth," a "terrible frankness" (PC, 540). "We are

⁶ Guerard reads Marlowe's journey as one into the unconscious, in which Kurtz represents a type of "Freudian id or the Jungian shadow" (p. 41). Crews reads it as an Oedipal fantasy. Feder ("Marlowe's Descent into Hell") sees it as a journey into the underworld, in which individual moral conflict is related to its social and political milieu.

accustomed," Marlowe tells his fellow sailors, speaking for the collective group of civilized men, "to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there--there you could look at a thing monstrous and free" (PC, 539-40). Kurtz and the Congo represent an elemental and naked essence of life. There Marlowe encounters man's very soul. "If anyone had ever struggled with a soul, I am the man" (PC, 586).

Less overtly metaphysical, Lord Jim, "The Secret Sharer," and "The Nigger of the Narcissus" also represent the discovery of a hidden reality. Having let an unsuspected truth about himself come to light in his jumping off the Patna, Jim spends the rest of his life caught between truth and self-delusion, between a fact he cannot accept (presumably cowardice) and another, more essential truth he hopes to make surface (his potential heroism, his innate courage and moral dignity). And others in the book are similarly waylaid by unacceptable truths about themselves, notably Marlowe, who is interested in Jim only because he recognizes him as "one of us." "Was it for my own sake that I wished to find some shadow of an excuse for that young fellow whom I had never seen before . . . ?" Sensing that Jim's case presents the "hint of a destructive fate ready for all of us" (LJ, 31), Marlowe researches his story with an almost desperate desire to confirm his own

self-certainty. "I positively hoped to obtain from that battered and shady invalid some exorcism against the ghost of doubt" (LJ, 32).

The strongest reflection of Jim's stumble into truth is offered by the ostensibly invulnerable Captain Brierly, a man who "had never in his life made a mistake . . . one of those lucky fellows who know nothing of indecision, much less of self-mistrust" (LJ, 35). Brierly sits with "contemptuous boredom" (LJ, 43) on the commission investigating Jim's case. Yet throughout that ordeal he must have been holding "silent inquiry into his own case" and "the verdict must have been of unmitigated guilt" (LJ, 36): barely a week after the end of the inquiry he commits suicide. Could it be, Marlowe wonders, that Brierly's end is tied up with the "revenge of fate for that belief in his own splendour which had almost cheated his life of its legitimate terrors" (LJ, 40)?

"The Secret Sharer" sharpens the psychological focus of the revelation. In the calm of the night the skipper encounters his double, a fellow seaman representing his theretofore unrecognized potentialities of behavior. As it turns out, they are antinomian, ambiguous and uncontrollable. A stranger to himself and the ship, the captain cannot master his duty until he has assimilated this hidden dimension of himself into his own self-knowledge. In "The Nigger of the

Narcissus" this hidden substructure is symbolized in James Wait, the dying black man who disrupts the principles his fellow sailors have always taken for granted. In him, as in the storm that besets the Narcissus, lies a force that calls into question every sustaining certitude of everyday consciousness. This Nigger "would never let doubt die. . . . Invulnerable in his promise of speedy corruption he trampled on our self-respect, he demonstrated to us daily our want of moral courage; he tainted our lives" (PC, 335).

"It's extraordinary," reflects Marlowe, "how we go through life with eyes half shut, with dull ears, with dormant thoughts. Perhaps it's just as well; and it may be that it is this very dullness that makes life to the incalculable majority so supportable and so welcome. Nevertheless, there can be but few of us who had never known one of these rare moments of awakening when we see, hear, understand ever so much--everything--is a flash before we fall back again into our agreeable somnolence" (LJ, 87). What Conrad dramatizes in the dramatic crises of his stories is an awakening from slumber. These decisive moments seem to break life into two different orders, one which is entirely illusion and veil, the other a "disorder" which is veiled. The "seeing, hearing and understanding" in the moment of awakening is like a sudden blindness, exposing our habitual, everyday consciousness as artifice. In Lord Jim, Marlowe

is suddenly stunned by the "irremediable horror" of a scene made visible to his imagination:

It had the power to drive me out of my conception of existence, out of that shelter each of us makes for himself to creep under in moments of danger, as a tortoise withdraws within its shell. For a moment I had a view of a world that seemed to wear a vast and dismal aspect of disorder, while, in truth, thanks to our unwearied efforts, it is as sunny an arrangement of small conveniences as the mind of man can conceive. But still--it was only a moment: I went back into my shell directly. One must--don't you know?--though I seemed to have lost all my words in the chaos of dark thoughts I had contemplated beyond the pale. These came back, too, very soon, for words also belong to the sheltering conception of light and order which is our refuge (LJ, 190).

Language stands for the enlightenment of reason, masking chaos with a semblance of order. Like Nietzsche, who on this point follows Schopenhauer, Conrad believes that one must retreat to this sheltered world of representation to avoid despair. "Truth," as we have seen, "is a kind of error without which a certain species of living creature could not live." It is a "sunny arrangement" which makes life tolerable. And, although each revelatory experience shatters some aspect of this artificial truth, man tries immediately to reconstruct his shelter.

Taking Shelter

To understand what types of protective language man appeals to in danger, one might ask just how civilization shackles and conquers the "thing monstrous and free" that is the Congo. The answer is complex, but the most important method by which to conquer the monster is by avoiding a confrontation with it: consigning it to oblivion. As he sails up the Nile, Marlowe often confesses that he is unwilling to face the "overwhelming realities" that he sees before him. Coming from a man who has voluntarily pursued a confrontation with the horrors that other men avoid, the statement sounds ironic--the irony of seeing the truth while deliberately trying to escape it. On the other hand, there is more to it, for some responsibilities do actually deter Marlowe from delivering himself to his vision. One situation has him coming around a bend in the river to be suddenly struck by a passionate uproar of hidden natives on the shore. It is an uncanny experience that Marlowe is unable to interpret:

What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valor, rage--who can tell?--but truth--truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder--the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But he must at least be as much of a man as these on the shore. He must meet that truth with his own true stuff--with his own inborn strength. . . . An appeal to me in this fiendish row--is there? Very well; I hear; I admit . . . (PC, 540).

Marlowe is prepared to confront that truth. At this point, however, it seems that one of Marlowe's listeners interjects a cynical remark, for Marlowe jumps to respond:

Who's that grunting? You wonder I didn't go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no--I didn't. Fine sentiments, you say? Fine sentiments be hanged! I had no time. I had to mess about with white lead and strips of woolen blanket helping to put bandages on those leaky steam pipes--I tell you. I had to watch the steering, and circumvent those snags, and get the tin-pot along by hook or by crook. There was surface truth enough in these things to save a wiser man. (PC, 540-41, emphasis added).

Marlow is certainly earnest, yet there is still something bathetic about his need to put bandages on steam pipes while such an incredible scene is occurring on shore. In this fiendish row is an "appeal" to Marlowe, much like the "sign" and "call" that wrenches Lord Jim away from his sunny arrangement with his woman Jewel (see pp. 235-37). But, ironically, Marlowe's duty to mere survival, and lack of time, stand in the way of a response to this deeper, metaphysical appeal.

"What saves us is efficiency--the devotion to efficiency," says Marlow, distinguishing between a modern, bourgeois ethic and that of a Roman warrior forced to face the darkness. In Lord Jim work is again associated with oblivion. "To bury him," Marlowe says of Jim, struggling to live down his guilt, "would have been such an easy

kindness! It would have been so much in accordance with the wisdom of life, which consists in putting out of sight all the reminders of our folly, of our weakness, of our mortality; all that makes against our efficiency . . ."

(LJ, 106). Practical concentration means intellectual exclusion. In the strange world of the jungle, Marlowe's actual labor seems to him to be but a "noisy dream." When you do not have a moment to spare, the sinister nature of reality is tucked out of sight. Marlowe admits that he even got used to this reality after a while:

I did not see it anymore; I had no time. I had to keep guessing at the channel; I had to discern, mostly by inspiration, the signs of hidden banks; I watched for sunken stones; I was learning to clap my teeth smartly before my heart flew out, when I shaved by a fluke some infernal sly old snag that would have ripped the life out of the tin-pot steamboat and drown all the pilgrims; I had to keep a lookout for the signs of dead wood we could cut up in the night for next day's steaming. When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality--the reality, I tell you--fades. The inner truth is hidden--luckily, luckily (PC, 537).

Marlowe's attendance to "mere incidents of the surface"--necessary though they may be for survival--shields him from the metaphysical context of his own struggle. From here, it is not far to Ulrich's existential decision, in The Man Without Qualities, that if he is to achieve any sort of understanding of his life he must begin by taking leave of his practical responsibilities.

Other elements besides work contribute to man's protective strategies. The only way to respond to the appeal of truth, Marlowe says, is to meet it with one's own "inborn strength." "Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags--rags that would fly off at the first good shake" (PC, 540). Principles, theories, and beliefs belong to the surface. They lie and mislead, robbing us of our ability to deliberate on the spot. Marlowe praises Jim precisely because he is someone who seems immune to "the solicitation of ideas": "Hang ideas! They are tramps, vagabonds, knocking at the back-door of your mind, each taking a little of your substance" (LJ, 27). Marlowe is drawing a distinction between the languages of truth--rational interpretations, wishful theories, mental formulas, and acquired beliefs--and truth itself; between truth as an illusion that makes life bearable, and Truth as something which requires all man's strength to face. Conrad's contempt for ideas reveals a profound mistrust for consciousness's secure distance. Thought translates action into terms which reassure the agent. Nietzsche makes the point philosophically, and Conrad portrays it at work in action.

Jim, after all, has been seduced by an idea. This is the source of the split within him between his principles and his actual conduct. His vocation for the sea declares

itself, Conrad writes, "after a course of light holiday literature" (LJ, 4). On board "he would forget himself, and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature. He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through the surf with a line . . . always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book" (LJ, 5. Cf. Törless' relation to literature, p. 159).

Jim's idea of himself as a hero originates as a fantasy serving his vanity, his will to dictate the way things should be--what Nietzsche would have interpreted as his will to power.

In fact, one of the focal points of Conrad's critique of Kurtz is the latter's attachment to language, to persuasive but falsifying rhetoric. "Kurtz discoursed. A voice! a voice! It rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart" (PC, 589). The same magnificent eloquence marks Conrad's anarchists, revolutionaries, do-nothings and nihilists. Donkin is the most persuasive man on board the Narcissus. The terrorists of Under Western Eyes and The Secret Agent support their subversive activity with brilliant arguments. In relation to these characters, Conrad is often in the same position as Dostoevski, who wants to side with Alyosha but gives the more

convincing role to Ivan. Conrad is as threatened by persuasive nihilistic reason as Dostoevski himself.⁷ While Nietzsche and Musil share this distrust of the intellect, Conrad outdoes them. He insists on submitting reason to the test of action. He exposes the limits of the intellect by showing it founder in experience.

If ideas are untrue to experience, it would seem at least that facts speak for themselves. But here too Conrad applies the Nietzschean suspicion. Surprisingly for a man who praised action and scorned speculation, the positive claim of facts also belongs to the deceptive surface. When Jim tries to explain to the court what happened on board the Patna, Conrad underscores the irony of this approach to the issue. "They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him [repetition conveying contempt for the very concept], as if facts could explain anything" (LJ, 18). "The facts those men were so eager to know had been visible, tangible, open to the senses"; but they can explain nothing about Jim's action. Along with them was "something invisible, a directing spirit of perdition that dwelt within, like a malevolent soul in a detestable body" (LJ, 19). Here we recall Törless' attempt, in Musil's novel, to explain to his professors why he assisted in terrorizing Basini:

⁷ On this similarity between Conrad and Dostoevski cf. also Hewitt, "Few Simple Notions," p. 61.

the facts only hide something else that has no language-- the truth of the matter itself.

Jim cannot explain any more than the mate of the Sephora can explain why he has murdered a mutinous sailor. If one approached the issue from a moral point of view, it would make no sense at all. "You don't see me coming back to explain such things to an old fellow in a wig and twelve respectable tradesmen, do you? What can they know whether I am guilty or not--or of what I am guilty, either?" (PC, 688). The case against moral criteria of judgment could not be made clearer. With their set beliefs, the respectable tradesmen would be utterly incapable of understanding the behavior of a Jim or a Leggatt. Ideas, "facts," rational arguments and moral distinctions--these are powerless to account for the depths of human motivation. And yet, these are precisely what make up the thought processes of the mass of humanity, and especially of the bourgeoisie. Marlowe is shocked when he returns to London from the Congo; the superficiality of the common citizen sickens him:

I found myself in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretense, because I felt so sure they could not know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of

commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive. . . . I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces, so full of stupid importance (PC, 593-94).

This crass and ignoble world is oblivious of the possible intensity of experience. The "knowledge" upon which it bases its values is merely a posture, breeding pettiness and false confidence. Essentially, the whole system aims at nothing but security. Between Conrad's individuals and the men of this world there can be no discourse. A letter to Jim from his father, in which the "old chap" conveys news of a favorite dog and of a pony "which all you boys used to ride," etc., necessarily goes unanswered. What could he have had to say, Marlowe reflects, to "all these placid, colourless forms of men and women peopling that quiet corner of the world as free of danger or strife as a tomb, and breathing equably the air of undisturbed rectitude . . ." (LJ, 208)

Conrad sometimes goes so far as to attain Musilian conclusions--to the effect that even one's most "personal" qualities are just a product of the cultural system. In "An Outpost of Progress," for instance, which recounts the effect of the wilderness on two average individuals "whose existence is only rendered possible through the high organization of civilized crowds," Conrad moves into the following conclusion:

Few men realize that their life, the very essence of their character, their capabilities and their audacities, are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings. The courage, the composure, the confidence; the emotions and principles; every great and every insignificant thought belongs not to the individual but to the crowd: to the crowd that believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and of its morals, in the power of its police and of its opinions (PC, 462, emphasis added).

Conrad's mistrust is complete. Like Nietzsche, he sees through the lies men tell themselves to ensure their own power. The principal lie is that they understand, that they can systematize life into reassuring certainties. Conrad burrows beneath this superstructure, exposing it as artifice, as, ultimately, calculated artifice. One hardly needs to stretch the text to find Conrad agreeing with Nietzsche that morality itself is only a ploy to guarantee mutual protection among men. The epistemological bases are all there. Language--of the emotions, of theoretical principles, of reality as concrete fact--creates a "sheltering conception of light and order which is our refuge." Efficiency and function keep us going, as on a Musilian walk, in which one point of equilibrium leads to the next.

Seeking the Infrastructure

If this sheltering system is the superstructure, how would Conrad characterize what it shelters man from, the "real" and "naked" truth that is thus masked over? Less ratiocinative than Nietzsche and Musil, Conrad offers us no abstract exposition of reality. Even if he is more metaphysical in his reflections than most other novelists, his figural expression is so complex and subtle that conceptions of truth and reality are hard to lift out of the fictional settings of his particular works. Nevertheless, his basic vision of reality is very close to what one would ascribe to Nietzsche: a willful, passionate, chaotic, and strife-ridden play of forces.

What surfaces in Kurtz and his fellow traders in the Congo is a form of unharnessed and primitive will to power: violence, egotism, and greed. Lord Jim adds fear to the list of primal emotions. "'One is always afraid,'" reflects the French lieutenant, giving his own interpretation of Jim.

"One may talk, but . . ." He put down the glass awkwardly. . . . "The fear, the fear--look you--it is always there." . . . He touched his breast near a brass button. . . . "Yes! yes! One talks. one talks; this is all very fine; but at the end of the reckoning one is no cleverer than the next man--and no more brave. Brave! . . . I have known brave men--famous ones! Allez! . . . Brave--you conceive--in the Service--one has got to be--the trade demands it. . . . eh bien! Each one

of them . . . if he were an honest man . . . would confess that there is a point . . . when you let go everything (vous lâchez tout). . . . Man is born a coward. . . . But habit--habit--necessity do you see?--the eye of others--voilà" (LJ, 89-90).

Jim bears testimony to the weakness underlying every show of courage and individual power. Were we strong enough we might transgress all habit and all be "criminals," according to Nietzsche. Not only does Conrad acknowledge this; he takes the reality of weakness much further than Nietzsche was wont to admit: "The commonest sort of fortitude prevents us from being criminals in a legal sense; it is from weakness unknown, but perhaps suspected, as in some parts of the world you suspect a deadly snake in every bush--from weakness . . . repressed or maybe ignored more than a lifetime, not one of us is safe" (LJ, 26-27).

Conrad's major contribution to an understanding of weakness may be his insight into the fact that it originates moral action, a fact which Nietzsche was nearly the first to take note of, and certainly the one to inveigh most stridently against. One brand of weakness they both kept coming back to was sympathy, a feeling they both considered to serve self-interest and to dissolve the fiction of individual integrity. Jim deserts the Patna partly because of his involuntary sympathy with the cowardly crew; when he pardons Gentleman Brown he is pardoning himself by proxy.

In the kindness of the sailors toward the dying Nigger of the Narcissus the narrator detects the "latent egoism of tenderness to suffering" (PC, 421).⁸ "Sympathy," Conrad writes in The Secret Agent, "is a form of fear" (p. 82).

What, then, of these alternate selves which men identify themselves with, which reflect something deep inside themselves? Is the Nigger a daemon? the animus within every man? Does the secret sharer speak for the captain's unconscious violence? for his potential irrationality? It is hard to say just what these shadowy figures represent, except some uncanny and irrepressible dimension of human nature that belies one's pretense of self-control. Perhaps we cannot understand Conrad's psychological investigations without broadening the scope of our own investigation. It is only the fictional contexts that give meaning to such psychological awakenings.

The setting for the unleashing of egotistical and violent passions represented by Kurtz is the jungle. To a 19th century white European, the Congo means the absence of ethical and cultural order. The "enlightened" world is here engulfed in darkness. It is a place where "all is

⁸ But, as Watt observes, "where Nietzsche writes that 'active pity for all the failures and all the weak' is 'more harmful than any vice,' Conrad shows both sides of the problem" (p. 111).

215

permitted," as Nietzsche and Dostoevski would say.⁹ This struggle of innumerable "wills to power" knows no moral values. Could this be the truth that belies man's demand for goodness? Conrad harbors such a suspicion. "The ethical view of the universe involves us at last in so many cruel and absurd contradictions, where the last vestiges of faith, hope, charity, and even of reason itself, seem ready to perish, that I have come to suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all. I would fondly believe that its object is purely spectacular . . ." (PC, 713).

This "spectacular" chaos seethes beneath the surface of all apparent order, threatening to gush forth at unexpected moments. Conrad's is a world of fortune: he believes, like Nietzsche, in contingency rather than reason, and dramatizes in his fiction the indomitable rule of chance. The sea, of course, with its sudden and uncontrollable transformations, is Conrad's central symbol for arbitrary violence. The terra firma upon which man "founds" his life is merely a vessel in the middle of this unstabilizing power, "alone in the midst of waters, like a mighty ship bestarred with vigilant lights--a ship carrying the burden of millions of lives . . . anchored in the open sea" (PC,

⁹ Cf. Watt, p. 237.

444). Such a situation invites disaster. "Trust a boat on the high seas," writes Conrad, "to bring out the Irrational that lurks at the bottom of every thought, sentiment, sensation, emotion" (LJ, 74).

Human existence is groundless in a groundless universe. Chance, upheavals, insecurity and challenges sever man from his external and artificial securities. This is what reason itself tells us, if only we listen:

Of course reason is hateful,--but why? Because it demonstrates (to those who have the courage) that we, living, are out of life,--utterly out of it. The mysteries of a universe made of drops of fire and clods of mud do not concern us in the least. The fate of a humanity condemned ultimately to perish from cold is not worth troubling about. If you take it to heart it becomes an unendurable tragedy. If you believe in improvement you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in cold, darkness and silence. In a dispassionate view the ardour for reforms, improvement, for virtue, for knowledge and even for beauty is only a vain sticking up for appearances, as though one were anxious about the cut of one's clothes in a community of blind men (PC, 734).

It is not necessary to dwell upon the similarities between these remarks and Nietzsche's own tragic metaphysics (along with the conclusions he draws, such as the naïveté of trying to "improve" mankind). What is more important is to recognize the theoretical context of both positions. This context is one of transition: between a Schopenhauerian metaphysics of egotism and violence (with its morality of pity

and love) and twentieth century nihilism (in which even ethical decisions lose their meaning). If Conrad is to be collocated in the epoch of Nietzsche's transition rather than in that of Schopenhauer or the existentialists, it is because he makes the discoveries which cause such a shift, such as some which have already been mentioned: the artificiality of cultural mores, the protective nature of any belief, the radical contingency of human existence. Some of the epistemological foundations for these transitional suspicions show up in the remainder of Conrad's letter:

Life knows us not and we do not know life,--we don't know even our own thoughts. Half the words we use have no meaning whatever and of the other half each man understands each word after the fashion of his own folly and conceit. Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore: thoughts vanish: words, once pronounced, die: and the memory of yesterday is as shadowy as the hope of tomorrow,--only the string of my platitudes seems to have no end. As our peasants say: "Pray, brother, forgive me for the love of God." And we don't know what forgiveness is, nor what is love, nor where God is. Assez!
 . . . (PC, 734-35).

In this recognition of the fateful blindness of human understanding occurs the shift from a self-assured Schopenhauerian pessimism (assured, at least, of its own truth, of human subjectivity, of moral values) to a twentieth century sense that nothing at all can be predicated of reality. Conrad discovers absurdity. As in Nietzsche's own itinerary, skepticism leads him through a critique of conventional

truths finally to a destruction of truth itself.

The Lie of Self-Knowledge

To have a clearer idea about Conrad's view of knowledge, let us narrow the discussion to self-knowledge, a topic which has frequently been misunderstood by his critics. Again, one of Conrad's direct statements might serve as a beginning: "If one looks at life in its true aspect then everything loses much of its unpleasant importance and the atmosphere becomes cleared of what are only unimportant mists that drift past in imposing shapes. When once the truth is grasped that one's own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown, the attainment of serenity is not very far off" (PC, 733). This statement speaks of a stoical reconciliation to the tragic masquerade of personality; Conrad's art, on the other hand, dramatizes the agony of achieving such serenity, the agony of living with a sense of self-blindness.

Lord Jim offers the best example. The only reason Conrad writes of Jim's desertion of the Patna is because it makes no sense. Yes, one could make out a case for the eruption of fear, though it would tell only part of the story, one could moralize the tale, to the effect that the "false hero" recognizes his smallness at last. But these, and other readings miss the essential point: Jim's case is

undecidable. It defies logic.

Marlowe avows that he dwells upon Jim in order to "dispell the ghost of doubt." "I wanted to know--and to this day I don't know. I can only guess" (LJ, 48). The same motive spurs the sailors and waterside hands to attend the trial. "The interest that drew them there was purely psychological--the expectation of some essential disclosure as to the strength, the power, the horror, of human emotions. Naturally nothing of the kind could be disclosed" (LJ, 35). Nothing of the kind can be disclosed to Jim himself. The traditional interpretation of Jim's travails as originating in his failure to face up to what he is skirts this point. Just what is he?--that is the unanswerable question. Conrad is so much more Nietzschean than his critics--more attuned to the subtle delusiveness of conscious knowledge--that he does not allow for such a grasp on the truth of one's nature. Jim actually does face up to what he is--by standing trial, by striving to redeem his failure. But facing up to what he is only confounds him.

This is what happens with Brierly, a man who bases his "heroic" life on untested illusions only to see them suddenly for what they are and take his life. Brierly awakes to the ineluctability of self-delusion. The only logic for his suicide is that it furnishes an escape from the lie of living. Why can Brierly not simply accept himself as different

from what he thought, as not a hero, and continue to live? Because he would never be sure that his new self-image was true. He knows nothing except that his belief in himself is illusory and that he needs to believe in order to live. Thus the truly tragic irony about this man is that even at his moment of truth he is still in the grip of illusion: "Who can tell," Marlowe wonders, "what flattering view he had induced himself to take of his own suicide" (LJ, 40)? On that fateful day he committed "his reality and his sham together" (LJ, 42) to the keeping of the sea.

"No man," says Marlowe, "ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge" (LJ, 49). Just as Jim is above all else "one of us," so here the emphasis is to be placed on no man. Conrad, like Nietzsche, makes no simplistic apology for self-knowledge. The theme may not have changed since Socrates, but the assessment now is different. Self-knowledge is never luminous; it is shadowy and grim, a paradoxical vision of darkness. Jim's distinction is that he confronts this paradox. He recognizes that he does not recognize himself. He stands in the shadow of the conflict between act and thought, between fact and value which informs his life. The tension, as Yeats argued, is unsurpassable. Jim tries to dodge this shadow by doggedly pursuing his ideal. But the more he pursues the lie of his romantic

ideal, the more he increases his "inward pain" the tension causes, a pain which, according to Stein, is precisely what "makes him know himself" (LJ, 132). Jim, then, does undergo an essential disclosure--but it is a tragic one: a disclosure of the non-disclosure of his inner coherence. He sees his true nature only to make out its obscurities, contradictions, and built-in lies.

Such truth, Nietzsche warns, can kill. Indeed, it kills most of Conrad's characters. How does one account for the transformation of Kurtz? His soul, Marlowe reports, "had looked within itself, and by heaven! I tell you, it had gone mad" (PC, 586). Kayerts, in "An Outpost of Progress," also experiences such a "supreme moment of complete knowledge" and also judges, "The horror!": "He had plumbed in one short afternoon the depths of . . . despair and now found repose in the conviction that life had no more secrets for him. . . . His old thoughts, convictions, likes and dislikes . . . appeared in their true light at last. . . . He had been all his life, till that moment, a believer in a lot of nonsense like the rest of mankind--who are fools; but now he thought! He knew!" (PC, 486-87). He kills himself thereafter. Conrad's suicides refuse the lie of ennobling "truths."

Truth as Untruth

Whether the object of inquiry is oneself or life at large makes little difference. Marlowe knows full well the implications of Jim's dilemma: "It was a subtle and momentous quarrel as to the true essence of life . . . a dispute," Marlowe underlines, "impossible of decision." "It seemed to me," he continues, "I was being made to comprehend the Inconceivable" (LJ, 57). In the Congo the issue is still the uncanniness of living, and the fact that it can never be put into words. "It seems to me," Marlowe confesses, "I am trying to tell you a dream--making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey . . . the life sensation of any given epoch of one's existence--that which makes its truth, its meaning--its subtle and penetrating essence" (PC, 526-27). Indirectly Conrad is making an apology for his own aesthetic. The most he can show in his writing, he seems to be saying, is how and why the "true essence of life" remains ineffable.¹⁰ Like his narrators, who keep returning to the same problems, circling round to examine them from different perspectives, Conrad is ever on the way to truth. "We had approached nearer to absolute

¹⁰ On Conrad's poetics of ineffability, see especially James Guetti, Metaphor, and Tzvetan Todorov. "Though Conrad's stated aesthetic rested on his avowal to make the reader see," writes Said, "with few exceptions what the reader remembers is a sustained effort to make words tell" ("Conrad and Nietzsche," p. 69).

Truth," Marlowe says of his conference with Stein," which, like Beauty itself, floats elusive, obscure, half-submerged, in the silent still waters of mystery" (LJ, 132).

The closer one gets to truth, Nietzsche might say, the more it looks like untruth. Whatever idea one proposes or defends immediately collapses into its opposite.¹¹ The strength of Brierly masks weakness; the moral rectitude of Jim is corrupted by his contact with others; the security of the bourgeoisie hides insecurity; habit guards against chance; work is a type of distraction; beliefs show a lack of belief. In politics, "the most justifiable revolutions" begin as "personal impulses disguised into creeds" (SA, 77). Noble intentions like compassion and charity stem from egoism and pride. Presumably good actions, like the one which costs Jim his life, backfire. "Jim's real test," writes a perceptive reader, giving a deeper meaning to the Conradian test than most critics are wont, "did not come until the confrontation with Brown. And the perception was a tragic one: that altruism is egoism, egotism, solipsism; that excessive philanthropy is misanthropy; that truth is falsehood." (Michel, p. 104) As he ventures into the center of the earth, Marlowe's perception is the same. The deeper

¹¹ For an exposition of Conrad's obliteration of opposites, which nevertheless stops short of claiming that Conrad reinvests "negative experience" with positive value, see Said's essay, pp. 72-74.

he pushes, the more negative this "reality" appears. The jungle bespeaks disease, depravity and death. Kurtz is "hollow," a "sham," a shadow, a voice. Marlowe's wakeful experience is a nightmare. Seeming truths turn into lies and lies into truths.

The most telling instance of this Nietzschean reversal occurs at the very end of "Heart of Darkness," when Marlowe brings himself to do what he hates most: to lie to Kurtz's fiancée. Deluded about the man she loves, this woman would neither understand nor believe the horrors that Marlowe could tell her about Kurtz. Yet notwithstanding her unconscious dishonesty, Marlowe observes a "delicate shade of truthfulness" upon her features. As he sinks into despair over the lies he is telling her, the room grows increasingly darker until "only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love" (PC, 599-600). Finally, Marlow has to bow his head "before the faith that was in her, before that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness" (PC, 601). That saving illusion is belief pure and simple, although its object is an utter fiction. This, too, is why Kurtz and Jim are men of integrity, even if their views are wrong-headed. "'He was false,'" cries Jewel, when she sees Jim has betrayed her. "And suddenly Stein broke in. 'No! no! no! My poor child! . . . not

false! True! true! true!" (LJ, 213). Kurtz's fiancée unconsciously acknowledges her need for illusions. Repeat Kurtz's last words, she pleads with Marlowe, not caring whether they be true or not, "'I want--I want--something--something--to--to live with'" (PC, 603).

The human dependence on fictions has swung full circle. From condemning illusions posing as truths, Conrad now appreciates the irreproachable truth of sincerely held lies.¹² This, if anything, constitutes the wisdom which Marlowe's journey has long been recognized to produce: "I was being made to see the essential falsehood that lurks in all convention and the essential sincerity of falsehood" (LJ, 57). Conrad's work fills the tragic space of this paradox. Here negative values can be transformed into positive ones. (Thus the tragic justice of Leggatt's act of murder: "It was all very simple. The same strung-up force which had given twenty-four men a chance . . . for their lives had, in a sort of recoil, crushed a mutinous unworthy existence" [PC, 681].) Doubt such as Marlowe's may turn into knowledge, immorality such as Kurtz's may constitute a "moral victory" (PC, 593). Even more importantly, the principles and values most vulnerable to a test of hollowness by Nietzsche's hammer--faith, duty, and dogmatic tenacity--

¹² On Conrad's Nietzschean sense of the need for illusion, cf. Watt, pp. 246-48.

can reacquire meaning.

It is not surprising, therefore, that there are two times in "Heart of Darkness" when the word reality is used to refer to something other than the infrastructure.¹³ One of them concerns a book entitled An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship which Marlowe finds in an abandoned hut in the middle of the jungle. "Not a very enthralling book," he admits, "but at the first glance you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work, which made these humble pages . . . luminous with another than professional light." Marlowe feels that he has finally "come upon something unmistakably real" (PC, 542-43). True, when contrasted with the metaphysical reality of the Congo, the book and the activity it reveals represent, as one critic writes, only "a secondary reality . . . a figurative reality . . . an artificial reality by which the truly real is concealed or even replaced" (Guetti, Metaphor, p. 52). Yet it is not so cut and dry, for when engaged in with the right kind of commitment, such "artificial reality" constitutes man's truest response to the "truly real." It is to this that I now turn.

¹³ The second mention is examined on p. 258.

Embracing One's Fate

Now that we have a sense of Conrad's metaphysics, the question is, what does it imply for man's existence? How should he conduct his life? If truth is false and falseness is true, what can he put his faith in? How can he salvage belief from nihilism? By examining what Conrad has to say about existence, I hope to show that he does salvage values --values remarkably similar to those of Nietzsche. Moreover, by focusing his tragic vision on issues that Nietzsche left in the dark, he helps us understand the idea of "becoming what one is" in a new light.

As we have seen, Conrad's fiction typically presents characters suddenly undergoing a disruption of their life's stability. The storms that break out in "Typhoon" and "The Nigger of the Narcissus" are symbolic of a rift internal to experience itself. Sustaining beliefs are challenged. In Lord Jim the exposed illusion is this would-be hero's self-image. In "Heart of Darkness" what is called into question are Marlowe's bourgeois values, in a process which, Conrad suggests, replicates that which has already occurred to Kurtz, even if with a different result. "The Secret Sharer" tries the captain's command of himself as well as of his ship. Such tests--or "soundings out of idols"--shatter the characters' shelter, thrusting them into the position of perishing or constructing a life

that is more enduring. These dramatic Umwertungen, embedded as they are in the soil of experience, are gifts of destiny: They offer man the occasion to come into reality, to move from a self-enclosure toward an appropriation of some Other he has theretofore excluded. They mark the advent of a new awareness, the start of the very possibility of moral action.

The responsibility with which Conrad confronts his characters is neither that of protecting themselves from the enormities of fortune nor of reinstating their life's "sunny arrangement of conveniences" following the disruption. This understanding of the function of the Conradian crisis (along with its correlate: Conrad as moral pedagogue) would make for a most bleak and unsubtle view of Conrad's sense of existence, and, even more seriously, of his moral discoveries. The eruption of chance, of a potentially fatal Otherness, is not simply an accident, but rather the necessary result of man's will to be his own master. The destruction of values and of metaphysical certainties constitutes the self-overcoming of a life-situation and a life-awareness. In the simplest terms: the Conradian crisis reveals the protagonist as incomplete in his own system of security. It summons him to meet his truth beyond that coherent but untested ensemble of ideas, emotions and habitual procedures that characterize his superficial self. To become himself he must overcome himself; to overcome himself he must

struggle forward, into the openness of the future and of the unfamiliar, into danger and potential annihilation.

It must be recognized, then, that Conrad's tragic figures are never assaulted by abnormalcy; they seek it out. They exist on the margins of normal society--seamen and exiles, anarchists and criminals, heroes and adventurers. Whether driven or driving themselves, they venture beyond conventional shelters. Like Conrad himself, who took to sea at seventeen, abandoning his homeland and trying to abandon life itself, finally settling on a career he considered more precarious than skippering a ship (writing), they pursue the extraordinary. Neither they nor Conrad is interested in "norms" of experience.¹⁴

To prepare us for Marlowe's journey to the "uttermost ends of the earth," Conrad draws a portrait of the ethic of venturesomeness at the beginning of "Heart of Darkness." Considering the "interminable waterway" leading out of the city of London, his first narrator reflects on the men who actually followed the Thames out: "Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the

¹⁴ This logic extends to Conrad's "Nietzschean disenchantment with mass man and mass politics" (Karl, Three Lives, pp. 226-27).

sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth! . . . The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germ of empires" (PC, 492).

What is to be emphasized here is not Conrad's suppressed critique of bourgeois capitalism,¹⁵ but his portrayal of the voluntary acceptance of responsibility (suggested by the repetition of bearers, bearing), the lofty ambition of such men (fame, the sword, the torch, might, the sacred fire), and the creative energy involved in their venture (pursuers, hunters, spark, dream, seed, germs). These, Conrad says, are men "of whom the nation is proud." They are moved by a spark from the "sacred fire," a phrase which immediately echoes the feu sacré of Julien Sorel: passion, ambition, and a will to mastery; in any case a drive outward and onward toward creative achievement. If this passion may occasionally settle for gold, it is nevertheless that which discovers "the mystery of an unknown earth."

When Marlowe picks up the narrative, the reasons for this eulogy become clearer. The first Romans to invade Britain, then itself a land of darkness, may not have been

¹⁵ On Conrad's suppression of the political, see Jameson.

very clever, he admits, but "they were men enough to face the darkness" (PC, 494). In the case of a Roman commander camping in the savage primitivity of that island, Marlowe adds: "There's no initiation either into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible" (PC, 495). The experience of these men is qualitatively different from that of the burgher. It is naked and direct, unsupported by mediating conventions, comfort, and habit.

Marlowe, too, is able to face the incomprehensible. A man who "used to clear out for any part of the world at twenty-four hours' notice," he prepares this time for a trip to the jungle--where he finds Kurtz. What distinguishes Kurtz from the other traders is that he has confronted the wilderness. He has not avoided a true contact by feigning moral principles and preserving his form in a setting that has none. Whatever his despair may be, this is his authenticity. Kurtz's method is unsound, say his colleagues. But they miss the point, for he "has no method at all." He has given up method to "step over the threshold of the invisible" (PC, 593).

That existence may consist precisely in a lack of method is suggested by the example of the motley Russian at Kurtz's camp, the adventurer pure and simple. What Marlowe considers so utterly uncanny about the Russian is the fact that he seems to have no order to his life.

"His very existence was improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem" (PC, 568). Marlowe interprets this figure as a ghostly essence of living, as a bare human form: "He surely wanted nothing from the wilderness but space to breathe in and to push on through. His need was to exist, and to move onwards at the greatest possible risk, and with a maximum of privation. If the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure had ever ruled a human being, it ruled this bespatched youth. I almost envied him the possession of this modest and clear flame" (PC, 569).

Here, as elsewhere, Conrad associates existence with risk. Existence is risky not simply because any order one gives to one's life may be disrupted, but because existence is intrinsically a "pushing on" and "moving onward." Given its temporal character, it is, as Heidegger remarks, of necessity a standing-out (ek-sistere) of the provisional order and shelter of the present. We have seen how this idea works in Nietzsche's philosophy; in Conrad's work it is figured in the lives of men, from Marlowe to the Roman commander, from the precarious instability of seafaring to the tests that thrust men into the open.

Without question, there are those who shirk this risk. Conrad takes his stand next to those who go out to meet it. Like Nietzsche, he attacks the facile life. No man who seeks his ease will, Conrad suggests, amount to

anything. Foils to his courageous venturers are slothful and cowardly types leading "precariously easy lives," who "shuddered at the thought of hard work" and "would have served the devil himself had he made it easy enough" (LJ, 9). Such men as Donkin and the Nigger, the crew of the Patna, Kurtz's colleagues, the sailor murdered by Leggatt, even occasionally Marlowe's own audience,¹⁶ are described as lacking will, motivation and imagination. They are resentful and ignoble, prey to lassitude and the avoidance of responsibility. "In all they said--in their actions, in their looks, in their persons--could be detected the soft spot, the place of decay, the determination to lounge safely through existence" (ibid.). Conrad is expressing his temperament; like Nietzsche, he has a very clear idea of what "toughness" and "weakness" mean, what healthiness and decay. He doesn't try to explain what makes X healthy and Y not. If he replicates Nietzsche's prejudice about strength, however, he avoids dividing humanity into two separate camps, one soft, one hard. In fact, the subtlety of his fiction is that even the strong, like Jim, are prone to decay at an unexpected moment. But still, Conrad's general message is: Most of humanity lives closer to the soft ideal than the tough one.

16 "Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust but your minds," Marlow tells the group of men gathered to hear the tale of Jim. "I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows had starved your imaginations to feed your bodies. I do not mean to be offensive; it is respectable to have no illusions--and safe--and profitable--and dull" (LJ, 168-69).

"Tout ce qui m'était facile m'était indifférent et presque ennemi," writes Paul Valéry. Conrad would have scratched the adverb. He would also have embraced Stendhal's criterion as heartily as Nietzsche: "You want to determine the worth of a man? Place obstacles in the way of his goal." How he tackles them will reveal the nature of his will. In fact, will is what this praise of difficulty is all about--not will "to power" as such, but sheer motivation: toughness of moral fibre. There has to be some motor-drive in a man, a readiness to response, an ability to push to a goal, to move onwards at the greatest possible risk as with a task. If there be no specific task in sight, then the virtue (or power) will take the form of a "blessed stiffness before the outward and inward terrors," an "ability to look temptations straight in the fact . . . a power of resistance," in a word, an "instinct of courage" (LJ, 27). For Nietzsche and Conrad, the courage to come to a resolution is the categorical imperative, the pre-moral means to a moral end. Conrad does not envisage the goal of this courage--the moral ends it should be put to--any more than Nietzsche. He conceives the crisis of ends, then posits the means to fight for new ones. The "truth" that appears at the end of the road hazy and remote. Yet it pulls his characters on, engaging them in a battle and a process of Selbstüberwindung. Conrad figures this transcendent tug in various

ways: as the Ur-reality represented by the Congo, the unconscious self of "The Secret Sharer," and, ubiquitously, the "dream."

The Dream of Self

The assumption that guides Jim's actions is that he will not be himself until he actualizes his dream of heroism. Stein concludes from this that he is "romantic." Delusive as this dream may be, however, it represents the innermost truth of his being, his raison d'être. It is a type of ego ideal, much like Yeats's mask or a Nietzschean illusion without which life would be impossible. Better to die than to live without pursuing this dream, a decision Jim finally takes. His beloved but cynical Jewel cannot understand how Jim could give up the most real thing about his existence--namely, her love and the convenient set-up they have established together--for some remote and hazy idea. Jim, "torn out of her arms by the strength of a dream" (LJ, 212), has responded to what seems to this concrete-minded woman to be an utterly vaporous fiction.

What is this unreal reality that pulls Jim on, dividing him in two? "Is it alive?" Jewel asks. "Has it got a face and a voice. . . ? Will he see it--will he hear it? Will it be a sign--a call?" (LJ, 191-92). With these last two words she hits on the real intangibility of the thing. Conrad repeats them when Marlowe returns to the

sea after a stifling sojourn at Patusan:

I breathed deeply, I revelled in the vastness of the opened horizon, in the different atmosphere that seemed to vibrate with a toil of life, with the energy of an impeccable world. This sky and this sea were open to me. The girl was right--there was a sign, a call in them--something to which I responded with every fibre of my being. I let my eyes roam through space, like a man released from bonds who stretches his cramped limbs, runs, leaps, responds to the inspiring elation of freedom (LJ, 207).

The "impeccable world," the vastness of the opened horizon, the inspiring elation of freedom--these are what pull Jim away from his fact. "'This is glorious!' I cried, and then I looked at the sinner by my side. He sat with his head sunk on his breast and said 'Yes,' without raising his eyes, as if afraid to see writ large on the clear sky of the offing the reproach of his romantic conscience" (*ibid.*). Jim has betrayed this call of transcendence, of his ultimate truth, by jumping off the Patna. He will not be able to look up at the sky again until he goes to Doramin to be shot.

The dream, then, connotes more than delusion. It is the definite appeal of something indefinite. It is a voice which speaks from beyond the facts, evoking a transcendent possibility that defies any judgment of true and false.

Jim responds to the dream by going to Patusan; Marlow does so by venturing into the Congo. We have already seen one of his three or four apologies for his vain attempt

to relate what strikes him as a dream. When he returns to London, it is clear which faculty has been taxed in the jungle: "It was not my strength that wanted nursing, it was my imagination that wanted soothing" (PC, 599). Marlowe, too, is essentially a dreamer, a spinner of yarns, a dogged pursuer of the intangible. Even Stein, the man who utters that most famous maxim about dreams--"a man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea" (LJ, 130)--has spent his youth in no less idealistic a fashion than Jim. In the wisdom of his mature years he still pursues the fantastic--chasing butterflies. The narrator of "The Secret Sharer" falls into even more literal a oneiric experience, discovering his unconscious potential in the actions of an alternate self.

The dream harbors the promise of a hidden truth. While on the surface Patusan is a fairy-tale setting for easy romance, its symbolic implications are deeper. "Do you notice," asks Marlowe, emphasizing once more the unreality of the structured world, "how, three hundred miles beyond the end of telegraph cables and mail-boat lines, the haggard utilitarian lies of our civilization whither and die, to be replaced by pure exercises of the imagination, that have the futility, often the charm, and sometimes the hidden truthfulness, of works of art?" (LJ, 172). The lie of interpretation, responsible not only for fantasies but

also for the "self-evident" language of facts, offers the only access to possible truth. Indeed, Marlowe comes to suspect that all our illusions, evolved half-consciously, are only "visions of remote unattainable truth seen dimly." And this may be the very suspicion which "has incited me [Conrad as well as Marlowe] to tell you the story, to try to hand it over to you, as it were, its very existence, its reality--the truth disclosed in a moment of illusion" (LJ, 196). Twenty pages later in the book Conrad locates the dream at the center not only of artistic revelation but of human enterprise in general: "[Jewel] had said he had been driven away from her by a dream. . . . And yet is not mankind itself, pushing on its blind way, driven by a dream of its greatness and its power upon the dark paths of excessive cruelty and of excessive devotion? And what is the pursuit of truth, after all?" (LJ, 212-13). Here, especially in the mention of the pursuit of truth, the dream takes on the symbolic power of a metaphysical drive, performing the same function as Nietzsche's will to power.

Like the other writers examined in this study, Conrad transcribes a circular path. First he subjects idealizing processes to a dramatic "test of facts," then this critique in turn cedes to an understanding of illusion as the proper medium of truth. All told, Conrad would have to agree with Heidegger, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche that there is no

present reality at all--no existence per se--except by means of an imaginative transcendence of immediacy. "The imagination," as Kierkegaard writes, "is what providence uses in order to get men into reality, into existence, to get them far enough out, or in, or down in existence. And when imagination has helped them as far out as they are meant to go--that is where reality, properly speaking, begins."¹⁷ Whether understood as the result of imagination, will to power, or the "soundless voice of Being" as Heidegger would have it, this venture out of closure into an open field is what establishes the possibility of selfhood.

"So if you ask me--how to be? The way is to the destructive element submit yourself. . . . To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream--and so--ewig--usque ad finem . . ." (LJ, 130-31). To become what he is, man must commit himself to a possibility truer than his actual condition. By venturing in response to an appeal he encounters his destiny.

The Failure of Transcendence

Now if Conrad believes in the informative nature of dangerously following the dream, what he exposes as a mistake is the expectation of discovering oneself "out there,"

¹⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, The Journals, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 243.

in some other world or moral universe. He resists a temptation that Nietzsche occasionally succumbs to--the idea of living fully beyond, of transcending oneself in Übermenschlichkeit. While Conrad follows the first two steps of Nietzsche's strategy for self-realization--rejection of the inauthenticities of normalcy and venturesome exposure to risk--he halts before the third and final step--self-overcoming, in the sense of a full realization of one's potential. This is the ideal he questions, reevaluating its possible significance, giving it a meaning which is more modest and more tragic than appears in his predecessor.

As we know, Jim fails to achieve a viable mode of existence because he is too immersed in his dream. Like the men with qualities of Musil's novel, he is all too ready to take his self-image as his self. Kurtz presents a more obvious but more complex case of losing oneself in beyondness. If Jim tries a bit naively to overcome himself, Kurtz succeeds with a terrible directness. He has taken all the steps which, by Nietzsche's account, should result in an Übermensch: He has freed himself from his European heritage, from moral conventions, and has ventured into the wilderness of truth--into the solitude of his innermost being. He has even legislated his own values. However, even aside from the question of what kind of values he has legislated (more of the all-too-human

machinations of greed, more unmediated and unthinking ego-
 tism, more dehumanization of his fellow man with nothing
 to show for it but the conquest of ivory)--values, that is,
 which speak from under rather than over--the real problem
 posed by Kurtz is infinitely greater: to be one's own
 legislator is not to be accountable. This is the point
 the Russian hastens to make to Marlowe: "'You can't judge
 Mr. Kurtz as you would an ordinary man'" (PC, 570). It is
 clear: he is "beyond good and evil." That is the problem:
 The severance between him and humanity is too great. Kurtz
 had "kicked himself loose of the earth," Marlowe explains,
 "and I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground
 or floated in the air" (PC, 586). Marlowe concedes that
 everything belonged to Kurtz--"but that was a trifle.
The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers
 of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the re-
 flection that made you creepy all over" (PC, 559, emphasis
 added). Because of his singularity, Kurtz stands in an un-
 graspable nowhere, in a total and unappropriable Otherness.

Wittgenstein tries to refute the idea of a private
 language by means of an analogy: it would be something
 like the situation of a man who, to make sure he read an
 article right in the morning newspaper, went out to buy
 another copy. Singular cases admit of no verification.
 A private language, Wittgenstein concludes, is equivalent

to insanity. And Marlowe concludes the same: Kurtz's "intelligence was perfectly clear . . . but his soul was mad" (PC, 586).¹⁸ Kurtz testifies to a logical impasse: the inability to distinguish an Übermensch from a madman, even from an Untermensch. Of course, Nietzsche might object: What difference does it make if one's ethic cannot be verified by reference to a general standard? In fact, what relevance does "verification" have to positing values? Doesn't that usually come later, in the form of a more or less arbitrary consensus? If that is so, then why does Nietzsche himself support his own ethic--of individual legislation--with "verifiable" principles? He follows a sound philosophical method, whereas Kurtz has none at all.

Could it be, one wonders, that this "no method at all" actually attests to some strange and higher method, to a more libidinal and Dionysian mode of being? We should notice that Kurtz is described in terms befitting an artist. His cousin gave Marlowe to understand "that Kurtz had been essentially a great musician." To this day, Marlow confesses, he has been unable to say "which was the greatest of his talents. I had taken him for a painter who wrote for the papers, or else for a journalist who could

¹⁸ Cf. the difference between, and Ulrich's ambition to unify, Genauigkeit and Seele (precision and the soul).

paint. . . . He was a universal genius" (PC, 595). This rouses some hope, for Nietzsche had described his Übermensch as an artist who applies his talent to the creation of values. He cannot be subjected to established systems of morality any more than the poet can be confined to ordinary language. What seems to be no method at all (or madness) may simply be an artistic transcendence of conventional language. Nietzsche's Dionysian ethic may be dictated by a method but itself overcome all method.¹⁹ Though there may be a kinship between the artist and the madman, however, there can be no equation. I believe we can safely say with Michel Foucault (Madness, p. 287) that, even in a Nietzschean framework, where madness sets in the work breaks off. Conrad is serious but ironic about the "artistry" of Kurtz. Kurtz bears out the risk of the artistic impulse--disintegration. In its very tendency to seek new forms, artistic potential threatens to break loose from conventional languages without achieving a coherent replacement. Thus Kurtz is a "hollow sham," a man who has not found but lost himself.

And yet, one must admit that such hollowness smacks more of reality than the set of qualities (without a man) which constitutes the typical bourgeois. In Kurtz we

¹⁹ See Feder, Madness, pp. 204-13.

seem to be privy to a certain "essence" of a man--what he may look like if denuded of the constraining attributes he has acquired from culture. In a sense, Kurtz bears witness to what Musil calls "the big hole called the soul." ("If anyone had ever struggled with a soul," exclaims Marlowe, "I am the man.") Indeed, Kurtz's transformation from idealist to immoralist is a consequence precisely of venturing into this barren landscape of his soul. "The wilderness . . . had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude" (PC, 573). In him the Nietzschean project of solitary self-transcendence fails.

The Need for the Other

Conrad is deeply ambivalent about the solitary venture. He believes in its value, not its viability. He coaxes his characters into it, knowing like Nietzsche that it is a means of confronting truth. Whereas Nietzsche finds beauty and infinite potential in that vision of innerness, however, Conrad finds pure negativity. Solitude more easily breaks than makes one. Thus the narrator of Under Western Eyes affirms, "No human being could bear a steady view of moral solitude without going mad" (PC, 724). And, in Nostromo, "Solitude from mere outward condition of existence becomes very swiftly a state of soul in which

the affectations of irony and skepticism have no place. It takes possession of the mind and drives forth the thought into the exile of utter unbelief" (p. 556). Here is no mention of glamorous self-overcoming or mastery of fate. Kurtz's venture yields no affirmative wisdom or Dionysian joy, no ethical values, only despair.

Conrad's ambivalence may be put like this: He believes in solitude as a means but not an end. Espousing self-reliance, he condemns autonomy. To condemn autonomy is also to say man cannot respond to nihilism by will alone.

Conrad never forgets the larger context in which the self takes its bearings. In fact, part of the reason he writes novels is out of the need to situate man within a dramatic and historic reality. Among the many factors which inform such a context, one which Nietzsche tends to ignore leaps immediately to the eye: the existence of other selves, of witnesses to one's mode of being. In Conrad's fiction, no self ever exists fully on its own. His characters take up a relation to each other.

If on his deathbed Kurtz finally comes to a realization about his life, it is through the presence of Marlowe. This presence ruptures Kurtz's self-enclosure and provides the opportunity for a critical bond, a hermeneutic situation. Marlowe supplies the measure that Kurtz has been lacking in a life in which "all is permitted." Marlowe

contests that life, just as that life itself contests the European world to which Marlowe belongs (and which Kurtz has presumably left behind). The irony, however, is that Kurtz still belongs to it. He cannot overcome his moral heritage. If he stands as a critique of Europe, Europe also presents a critique of him.

The mutual bond between Kurtz and Marlowe, replicated in a syndrome of sympathetic identification among characters in many of Conrad's tales, ultimately belies the idea of self-mastery and autonomous choice. Just when one rejects certain values as inauthentic, they reassert themselves as irrepressibly part of oneself. The excluded "other" penetrates one's shield. Although Jim seems invulnerable to "the contagion of example," just when he has the occasion to prove his independence he succumbs to the influence of those around him. "'Jump; George! Jump! Oh jump! . . . Geo--o-orge! Oh jump!'"--his mates call. Jim jumps. But he has exchanged his identity, for George is another mate, still on board the Patna but already dead. Jim's jump is a symbolic effort to undo that death of a mate. His second fall is also a result of sympathetic identification, this time with the plunderer Brown. In fact, the very notion of honor, on which Jim places supreme value, makes sense only within a social system characterized by inter-personal recognition. He

cannot leave Patusan because that would mean losing such necessary recognition: "'I need their belief in me to feel safe'" (LJ, 203).

Identities interpenetrate and mutually determine each other's acts. There is no way around the contagion of example. In tales like "The Secret Sharer," "The Duel," and "The Nigger of the Narcissus," Conrad more fully explores this interrelation and heteronomy. In whatever terms one interprets it, it destroys the idea of simply "willing oneself." Leggatt, when he kills a sailor, seems to have severed his tie with the civilized world. Like Kurtz, he has been "driven off the face of the earth" and swims into a voluntary exile. But even he cannot do without a witness to his morals, without a communicative bond to assure him against madness. He stops to rest on a ladder of the ship where he will encounter his secret sharer. "'When I saw a man's head looking over . . . I--I liked it. . . . I don't know--I wanted to be seen, to talk with somebody, before I went on'" (PC, 667). The captain, too, needs to talk before going on with his duties, just as Marlowe needs Jim, his "familiar devil" in order to clarify his own position (LJ, 21).

Reciprocal human perspectives and identities constituting themselves in interrelation--these weave the fabric of Conrad's narration. His narratives rarely commit

themselves to a unilateral perspective of a single consciousness, implying that Conrad has little use for the summatory vision of a "completed self." The "complete" oneself is to deny the hermeneutics of experience. Marlowe, Conrad's prototypical story teller, constitutes himself as he tells his tale. The real story never concerns only the objective situation he is relating to us. Even more, it concerns his telling of it, i.e., his relation of, and to, that extrinsic situation, his appreciation of what is apparently foreign to his own identity. In fact, when Conrad's narrative is at its most subtle, as in the first half of Lord Jim, Marlowe is only one among many minds that digest the matter at hand. Lord Jim records a network of points of view, confessions and case studies, all aiming to shed light on a syndrome proper to each "one of us." Here there are no independent identities but a hermeneutic plurality of selves, of questions and undertakings--all contributing to a general and heterogeneous process of existential interpretation. If most of Conrad's characters act on the assumption of possessing a subjective, determined and closed identity, the narrative shows otherwise; the situation these characters inhabit is open, fluid and mobile.²⁰ It is a narrative correlative of a

²⁰ The hermeneutic interpretation of Conradian selves is taken furthest by Said: "Kurtz and Jim and

"being-there" (Da-sein) where man attempts to establish an autonomous identity but instead is shaped in the relation between subject and object, ego and other.

Much of this is implicit in Nietzsche's philosophy of existence. In fact, Conrad's critique of autonomy is really a logical development of some of the ideas Nietzsche counterposes to a romantic reading of the Übermensch. Let us sum up Conrad's position in the following way: Autonomy--the belief in "Thus I will it!"--may represent a more authentic goal than that of being passively determined by convention, but it too is false. It risks delivering man to moral isolation, which is equivalent to madness. Moreover, the individual is never free of external influences; he seeks them out. Ultimately, it would seem that selfhood is constituted only in the process of asserting individual freedom (or will) in the context of existent and unalterable givens. These givens, acknowledged as much by Musil and Nietzsche, are made up of a person's action in the present and past, the cultural, and historical time to which he belongs, and the other identifies in relation to which he attempts to define himself. Ultimately, it would seem that selfhood results from a "complex" (an idea explored

Nostromo are finally no more important than the meditation and the reflection and the language they stimulate" ("Conrad and Nietzsche," p. 69).

more fully by Musil), a complex characterized by tension, change, and potentiality. The human destiny seems to be a continuous "self-excession," a stepping over the boundaries of a given identity in response to the appeal of an "other." This other is therefore no Other. It is a dimension of one's own destiny that one seeks to appropriate. On the most general level, it represents the system of necessity underlying one's will and desire.

The dream that pulls into ideal territory, the venturesome excession of empty conventions--these transcendent aspects of man's existence are all grounded in his facticity, in his being as he is, here and now, whether he wishes to be so or not. Jim's problem is that he has jumped; Marlowe cannot go ashore for "a howl and a dance" because he must man his boat; Kurtz may have excellent ideas but he is cutting off heads.

If the there belies the here (exposing it as what Yeats called a "bundle of accidance") the here also belies the there. This bundle of accidance shows transcendence to be only an ideal condition. Indeed, for Conrad as for Sartre, a man's actuality is the ultimate, undeniable truth that mocks his fiction. Nietzsche, too, as we have seen, recognizes the present and the past as what is "most unbearable" on earth, for they confine the will to the limits of finitude. "To redeem the past and transform every 'It

was' into 'Thus I willed it'--that alone would I call redemption" (KSA, 4, 179/PN, 251). What Nietzsche means is that, until the will accepts its here and now, any venture it embarks on will amount to fancy, delusion, fiction and escape. Conrad expresses a similar idea like this--sooner or later the most solitary wanderer must come back home:

We wander in our thousands over the face of the earth, the illustrious and the obscure, earning beyond the seas our fame, our money, or only a crust of bread; but it seems to me that for each of us going home must be like going to render an account. . . . Even they who have neither [neither people they obey nor those they love], the most free, lonely, irresponsible and bereft of ties,--even those for whom home holds no dear face, no familiar voice,--even they have to meet the spirit that dwells within the land, under its sky, in its air, in its valleys, and on its rises, in its fields; in its waters and its trees--a mute friend, judge, and inspirer. Say what you like, to get its joy, to breathe its peace, to face its truth, one must return with a clear consciousness (LJ, 135-36).

One should neither mystify nor demystify this passage. The "spirit of the land" connotes everything that is independent of will, everything that constitutes the horizon of human freedom--one's social and historical tradition, one's finitude, unconsciousness, and concrete actions. These make up the "literal truth" to which one cannot lie without paying the price. And no one is more aware of these givens than those who are truly uprooted, for no deceptive externals stand between them and the naked facts

of living: "I think it is the lonely, without a fireside or an affection they may call their own, those who return not to a dwelling but to the land itself, to meet its disembodied, eternal, and unchangeable spirit--it is those who understand best its severity, its saving power, the grace of its secular right to our fidelity, to our obedience" (LJ, 136). Men cut off from "the mere outward condition of existence," like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, best understand that their existence is founded in facts that the will itself cannot influence. Thus the first thing that Zarathustra demands of "brothers" who would be Übermenschen is "remain faithful to the earth" (KSA, 4, 15/PN, 125).

If Kurtz's transcendence rings hollow, it is because he has betrayed the basic facts of his humanity--his belonging to the earth and a moral tradition. Likewise, Jim's actual behavior contradicts his heroic ideal. Yet it must be emphasized that Jim's tragedy is not one that could have been avoided. It represents a problem symptomatic of existence at large: that of being unable to actualize one's intentions in the finitude of the present, a present leaping out of an unseeable future. Jim understands the problem he is up against, even if he is mistaken to believe that he can prevail against it: "'It is all in being ready. I wasn't; not then. There were boats

enough for half of them, perhaps, but there was no time. No time! No time!" (LJ, 53). What Conrad dramatizes in his fiction is the tragedy that there is never time--never time to make ready for the uncertainties of existence and the inconstancies of fortune. Jim may be a hero in essence, but when it comes to concrete action, he is, as Marlowe remarks, "taken unawares" (LJ, 59). And this is his distinction: that which makes him experience the tension of existence. Captain MacWhirr, in Typhoon, presents the opposite case: He "had sailed over the surface of the oceans as some men go skimming over the years of existence to sink gently into a placid grave, ignorant of life to the last, without ever having been made to see all it may contain of perfidy, of violence, and of terror. There are," Conrad adds with enormous weight, "such men thus fortunate--or thus disdained by destiny . . ." (PC, 208). "Nothing ever came to them," Marlowe says of such people (here Jim's parents); "they would never be taken unawares, and never be called upon to grapple with fate" (LJ, 208).

Trial

The existential conflict conferred in crisis cannot be resolved. It is the destiny with which men must live. If truth is imagined as the opposite of illusion, then

man can attain no truth; if self-realization means inner oneness he cannot achieve it; if mastering his fate means controlling the course of his life, man is a slave of his fate. To live is to be on trial, a trial in which one is at once the defendant and also the prosecutor.

One must believe in one's dream, believe in one's fact --ultimately one must believe in the discord between one's fact and dream. One must, as Nietzsche conceives it, have amor fati: accept one's destiny as insuperable conflict. Fate calls man's deepest beliefs and his sense of identity into question. Responding to this challenge, man tries himself, engages in an explicit attempt to "be himself" in which he is himself. This is the trial which the Jims live out and the Donkins avoid. Jim may have betrayed some of the fundamental principles of Western morality, but the question is "whether at the last he had not confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress" (LJ, 206). The question even holds good for Kurtz, whose moral failings issue into the "complete knowledge" of his final judgment ("The horror"). "This was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candor, it had conviction, it had . . . the appalling face of a glimpsed truth. . . . It was an affirmation, a moral victory" (PC, 592-93). Kurtz achieves a victory by finally being willing to embrace "some sort of belief." This

aptitude is related to the "inborn strength" and "deliberate belief" (not "principles" or "ideas") which Marlowe says a man needs in order to confront the truth. Deliberate belief sounds oxymoronic, as if it were a conviction born on the spot: It must be born on the spot. It is not a decision one has already taken, but the power to come to a decision, to assume responsibility, to will. One can have faith, as Musil says, without necessarily having a faith.²¹ When Ulrich is asked by his sister why he bothers to search for a morality, he doesn't know what to tell her. "'I do my duty. . . . Perhaps like a soldier.'"²² For Conrad and Musil, even for Nietzsche, man's duty is to duty itself. This is all there is and it is everything. They envision man as being resolute without conviction, courageous but not victorious, honest without possessing the truth, a believer though believing in nothing.

It now becomes clear that the values espoused by Nietzsche and Conrad as means to achieve a moral end--resoluteness, courage, honesty, and endurance--are moral ends themselves. There is no credible belief awaiting

²¹ "Without doubt," Musil writes of Ulrich, "he was a man of faith, though he just happened to believe nothing [Ohne Zweifel war er ein gläubiger Mensch, der bloss nichts glaubte]" (GW, 3, 826/MWQ, 3, ch. 18).

²² "Ich tue meine Pflicht----Vielleicht wie ein Soldat'" (GW, 3, 957/MWQ, 3, ch. 30). Cf. Goethe: "Was ist deine Pflicht? Die Forderung des Tages."

man after his struggle is over; "credible beliefs" are precisely what fate always tries, exposing them as abstractions untrue to living. Man can rely only on his effort to attain moral certitude, on his knowledge of "being on the way" to truth, on tentative action sustained by hypothetical ethical goals--guiding directives, relative truths, prejudicial hunches, and working hypotheses--guaranteed of no final success. Conrad's man of virtue has no rational basis for his ethical hopes (no religious belief or metaphysical certainties) but only faith--faith that if moral assurance can ever be achieved, he is using the right means to do so. Hence the ultimate faith of Nietzsche and Conrad is in these pre-moral imperatives themselves: courage, honesty, and resolution. Arete--the valorous conduct of the contest--is their moral end. If man cannot win his contest, he can equal it. And it may even be that "what doesn't kill me makes me stronger."

But the cynic will respond: the epoch of heroes is over. Unless caught in a storm at sea, man achieves nothing through arete. Indeed, that is precisely why Conrad does not speak of glory but only of the "vast silence of pain and labor . . . the dumb fear and dumb courage of men obscure, forgetful, and enduring" (PC, 375). That, too, is why the tone in which the contest is described is so different in Conrad and Nietzsche. But Nietzsche, too,

is resigned, and Conrad defends his passion. They come together at the "stillest hours" of tragic perception and come out together with a vision of quiet, private, moral heroism.

At the moment when "fate compels recognition"--recognition, that is, of its tragic nature--"a man's moral existence begins," writes Morton Dauwen Zabel (PC, 20). Existence means choosing. It is moral only when caught up in a critical situation, in the insolvency of an indomitable present.²³ The test occasions a stance, an assumption of responsibility, a readiness to be unready, a standing out in groundless self-exposure. And only in such an essay can man be said to be moral. (To act morally, Musil suggests, is to base none of one's decisions on morality.) Conrad's trials occasion willfulness--the readiness to make a decision. Isn't Brierly's suicide his one moral act? Man would rather will nothing than not will at all, according to Nietzsche. Meaningless labor might thus be the most meaningful method for man to

²³ "Action is authentic only insofar as it is recognized that no action is authentic. True action must be based on that which denies it . . . its meaning [is] its meaninglessness" (Miller, p. 35). Needless to say, this tragic understanding of moral responsibility annuls the standard earlier readings of Conrad, represented, for example, by André Gide, who writes that Conrad's central concern is "with that irresponsible act of the hero, to redeem which his whole life is subsequently engaged" (Journal [Paris, 1941], p. 971).

appropriate his existence. "I don't like work--no man does," says Marlowe, but in work lies "the chance to find yourself. Your own reality--for yourself, not for others--what no man can ever know" (PC, 529). Behind this apology for what is potentially a strategy of evasion is something much deeper than what Guerard calls a "Victorian ethic," by which one stays busy to guard against despair (cf. Watt, pp. 148-51). The productivity of work is that it locks man in his struggle of existence, committing him to a trial in which he discovers his own potential. Conrad's adventurers, wanderers, seamen, and exiles labor on behalf of a goal which is never within their reach. Whether a dream (Jim), a superhuman ethic (Kurtz), a knowledge of self and of others (Marlowe), or simply security in a storm at sea (the sailors and captains), this goal is a desideratum ever deferred. Their existence is a moving toward such a goal, a contest and essay whose ultimate achievement is the effort it elicits.

"And so it is with the workman of art," Conrad writes in the preface to "The Nigger of the Narcissus": "There's neither inspiration nor hope in my work. It's mere hard labour for life" (PC, 748). His vision arises from an absence of vision, from a tragic inability to believe. When the artist starts to suspect that there is no "ethical aim of creation," he begins to appreciate the "spectacular"

nature of the world--"a spectacle for awe, love, adoration, or hate, if you like, but in this view . . . never for despair!" (PC, 713). What Conrad is trying to say--that ethical tragedy may be sublimated into aesthetics, into a wider "seeing" out of which ethical decisions may perhaps then grow--is capsulized some twenty years later by Albert Camus in "The Myth of Sisyphus." By recognizing the absurdity of his fate, Sisyphus is automatically lifted above it. He becomes free to attend to "the myriad wondering little voices of the earth," to see that "each grain of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain in itself forms a world" (p. 51). Nietzsche, too, claims that honest, conscious nihilism restores innocence to becoming. Whether "delicious or poignant," the visions one then may have, writes Conrad,

are a moral end in themselves. The rest is our affair. . . . And the unwearied self-forgetful attention to every phase of the living universe reflected in our consciousness may be our appointed task on this earth--a task in which fate has perhaps engaged nothing of us except our conscience, gifted with a voice in order to bear true testimony to the visible wonder, the haunting terror, the infinite passion, and the illimitable serenity; to the supreme law and the abiding mystery of the sublime spectacle (PC, 713).

The artist makes no judgment. Rather, his task is "to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere

mood . . . to . . . reveal the substance of its truth--
disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion
within the core of each convincing moment" (PC, 708):
Each of these moments is potentially passionate, stressful,
critical, actively convincing, trying, eliciting a choice
one can never master. The artist's duty is to hold up this
fragment from man's willful life unquestioningly--in tragic
understanding. This is the faith with which Conrad, like
his characters, gives himself over to trying situations.

Conclusion

The essayism examined in this study marks a transition from a somewhat romantic idea of man as master of his destiny to a view of destiny as master of man. Nietzsche, read carefully, transcribes this turning: Man masters his destiny only by submitting to it; the Übermensch exists in amor fati. Conrad, Musil, and Nietzsche all straddle this difference between a humanistic interpretation of existence and one in which history, unconsciousness, environment, language, tradition, and culture become the primary terms. All three writers wish precisely for a world of individual heroism in which by the strength of his own efforts man might succeed in justifying his existence; the truth they acknowledge is that the individual can neither control nor justify this existence. Hence, their exceptionally acute perception of nihilism represents both an accomplishment of their "will to truth," as Nietzsche would have called it, and also an impediment to it. Their writing occupies a paradoxical space between the act of description and a desire for prescription, between the fact of nihilism and the need to posit value.

With his dissolution of the "anthropocentric attitude," Musil looks forward to Heidegger, the philosopher of destiny

(Geschick) and of being-in-the-world (in-der-Welt-sein).

Conrad shows the demise of the hero: the definitive rupture with the heroic ideal within which Nietzsche still, at times, labors. He says the unsaid of Nietzsche's texts: that "individuality" is a concept which has lost its meaning. In this move from a philosophy of man to a philosophy of destiny and existence, Nietzsche, Conrad, and Musil parallel the developments of existential literature (Camus, Sartre, Gabriel Marcel, and Jaspers) at the same time that they outgrow the existentialist faith in man as creator of himself. Man is, and is not, the maker of his own destiny; he authentically is only insofar as he appropriates the absurd or nihilistic conditions to which he is destined and acknowledges the impotence of his will.

The position of these writers must also be distinguished from the movement which has succeeded existentialism: what might variously be called the philosophy of difference, the ethic of play, or deconstructive literature. I am thinking of a general literary-intellectual methodology from the 1960s onwards, inspired, in quite different ways, by four French thinkers: Jacques Derrida, Giles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault. Aside from the differences among these four and among the numerous interpreters who attempt to bring them together, aside even from what each of these thinkers may be trying to

accomplish, the metaphysical implications of their work are quite different from those of the writers treated in this study. The new ethic of play (practiced more than expounded) generally consists in the deconstruction of earnestly held Western truths abetted by the detection of differences at the heart of ostensible identities. Language--the paradigm of all systems of human significance--is considered to be marked by discontinuities and ruptures of logic which the writer, speaker, or thinker tries to hide, pass over, or overcome in each of his articulate statements.

The result of this contemporary acceptance of rupture and discontinuity at the basis of language is an abandonment of the attempt to discover the Real (in Lacan's usage) and to achieve a morally coherent life. The ensuing ethic of play represents the heritage of a new type of Nietzscheanism, which would view the Nietzscheanism described in this study as representing the last gasp of the traditional metaphysical desire to obtain truth, understanding, and the ultimate nature of Reality. Conrad and Musil would be seen as facing up to the immanent contradiction in the idealistic goal of the West, forced finally to admit that man can only attempt the coherence he dreams of achieving. The ethic of play, on the other hand, picks up on Nietzsche's dismissal of the questions Western history has tended to

take most seriously, on his irony, on his standing outside the tradition and mocking it, dispelling the spirit of gravity with laughter. This Nietzsche restores the "good conscience" to appearance, to the play of veils maligned by the Platonic-Christian tradition. The Nietzsche of Musil and Conrad, on the other hand, is the philosopher who seeks the reality behind the appearance, in the appearance, beyond the appearance--and knows he cannot do it.

To develop this mischievous Nietzsche, contemporary thinkers must abandon morality as an issue. The questions of how to be (with the full ontological weight of the word be) and of authentic action, so popular among the existentialists twenty years ago, suddenly become non-issues. On these matters, as the positivists might have said, one must fall silent. The philosophy of play drowns out this silence with a Saturnalia, which devotes itself to exploring strategies of illusion and delusion, discovering lies where truths have been. In so doing, it dares to run the risk of treating the silence as if it did not exist--that is, not treating it.

The question Nietzsche might have addressed to his late twentieth century heirs (to deconstruct their deconstruction) is whether ignoring nihilism is not itself an act of nihilism, a symptom of an extremely refined sort of nihilism, comparable to the attitude of the madman's

audience in The Gay Science (#125) when they hear that God has died. What is it, Nietzsche might have asked, that wants to "deconstruct"? A new health or a new denial? Or both? "And if they learned to laugh from me," Zarathustra says of his disciples at the end of Book Four, "it still is not my laughter that they have learned." Yet I do not wish to make a moral issue out of contemporary lack of interest in morality; I wish simply to point it out and to distinguish the positions of Conrad, Musil, and the antinihilistic Nietzsche from it. Nietzsche, Musil, and Conrad are deconstructionists in their own right; the unmasking of postures is a necessary step in their project. But the aim of this project is the reconstruction of truth and value. These three writers try to make language coherent. Hence they take up the problem of having no language as a problem. Deconstruction takes the analysis of the facts that produce the silence of Nietzsche, Musil and Conrad, of Wittgenstein, Rilke and Yeats (indeed, of all Western culture, insofar as this culture has been a contest with chaos) further than many people have wished to go into it. The problem, however, is to overcome this silence.

The essayistic interpretation of existence posits both the need and the absence of a solution to silence. It locates man's destiny in the tension of this paradox. The question that remains is whether there is a coherent language

in which this search for language may express itself--a language which is not the language of full presence at which the essay aims, a system which is not a system, a mode of evaluation which is both flexible and universal. Essayism hints at such a language--with Nietzsche's transvaluation of values, Musil's technique of "taking things from many sides without comprehending wholly" and living after the manner of art, Conrad's continuous trials and immersion in the destructive element. Yet essayism succeeds better in describing the existential reality to which such a language must be suited than in dictating the rules of the language. Today, philosophers who have heard Nietzsche and the description of existential destiny, who have heard deconstruction and the hermeneutic analysis of cultural historicity, are turning precisely to the task of articulating a viable moral language for an essayistic life. Whether it be Gianni Vattimo's idea of an ethic of values rather than imperatives, Reiner Schürmann's notion of measure rather than standard, or Richard Rorty's return to the pragmatic criterion of value, philosophy today picks up where the essayists leave off--with the need for an ethical program capable of lending practical directives to the essay of existence.

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