Although known principally for his modernist masterpiece, *The Man without Qualities*, Robert Musil (1880–1942) was also a playwright & drama critic. Musil’s plays and theatrical investigations, written between 1921–1929, are inseparable from his later literary work and from his lifelong commitment to art as a social & cultural activity. His brilliant plays and critical writings are not minor aspects of his artistic life, but essential works, preparing the way for and intrinsically connected to his great, unfinished novel.

In the theater of the fraught period between the two world wars, Musil recognized a crisis that was symptomatic of larger social, political, & aesthetic problems. He levelled piercing critiques at the commodification, conformity, and commercialization of the Culture Industry of his time and pointed the way toward a living, transformative theater.

As an observer & researcher of the psychology of aesthetic experience, a student of anthropology & mysticism, and a writer who sometimes practiced the art of literature like an essayist and scientific experimenter, Musil saw in theater the ideal testing ground for questions about perception, reality, and the effects of ritual practices like formal variation, repetition, and the suspension of normal consciousness. In contrast to the mostly shallow entertainment on offer, Musil saw the potential of theater — and all of art — as a force that could initiate an existential shattering of received ideas and a renewal of “motivated” existence.

Theater Symptoms constitutes not only the first volume in English to gather Musil’s finished plays and a selection of play fragments with a large body of previously untranslated critical work, including manifestos of his utopian theatrical vision. His theoretical essays & reviews elucidate the symptoms of and possible cures for the dangerous decline, not only of theater and art, but also, in Musil’s view, of social relations: a fall from an ethical-aesthetic and “motivated” conduct of life to that of an uncritical, ethically lazy, aesthetically insensitive, & consumer-driven society. Musil’s reviews of Stanislavski’s Moscow troupe, cabaret performances of Yvette Guilbert, the Yiddish theater, Expressionist stage innovations, productions of Shakespeare, Shaw, Schnitzler, Chekhov, and others, reveal Musil as a perceptive and visionary analyst of what theater was and what it could be.

This is the third volume of Musil’s writings translated & introduced by Genese Grill and published by Contra Mundum Press.
Ahnung in der Wetter: Jeder fühlt sich im Winter.

In der neuen Stadt an der Uferstrecke!

Da war's noch keine Schnee so an der Uferstrecke!

Die junge Frau: Herr, ich bin zerrütt! (Stube) 

(Alas man Monot!) 

Die junge Frau: Herr, ich bin zerrütt! (Stube)
Facsimile of Musil’s draft for the play fragment, The Stylite, from the Klagenfurter Ausgabe.
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## THEATER SYMPTOMS

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to find his place among or above the throng; he is both inside and outside his era.

In these pages, we see the innovations of the time through his own eyes, as if we were seeing them ourselves: Stanislavski’s Moscow Art Theater, the Yiddish troupes, the Jessner staircase and other Expressionist innovations in stage design. We experience the stirring atmosphere of Weimar Berlin and the burgeoning Viennese café society, with its dilettantes, playwrights, positivists, sexologists, anthropologists, musicologists, con-artists, and nymphomaniacs. Its bohemians and its Bohemians. We sense the fallout of Russian revolutionary activity — exiled aristocracy and the foreshadowing of bloody, interne-cine party struggles; hear the grumbling agitation of the workers’ movements and the rattling of militaristic sabers. We even glimpse the “young people of Christian-Aryan worldview” who break up a controversial production of Schnitzler’s La Ronde, with “Nibelungen-brass-knuckle-rings in their pockets.”

We sense the still-echoing shocks of World War I — palpable in the wounded bodies of soldiers, in the shattered idealism of a generation. We take the temperature of the encroachment of advertising, the cinema, and the commodification of the “culture industry.” Psychoanalysis, Relativity, the “New Woman,” jazz music, “Primitivism,” Cubism, Dada, and Cabaret are all here — some

1. Theater Symptoms, 83.
strands initiated before the war and some after — seen through Musil’s exceptionally clear eyes.

And since this is a moment in between, when many of the personages, cultural artifacts, and ideas of the old world still linger, as relics and ghosts of the pre-war period, we see Musil looking backward too, trying to understand what happened to art, to education, to society, and why; trying to salvage what is vital and to re-evaluate those values that no longer seem meaningful.

This is a pregnant moment. About to give birth to horrors. All the people who animate the reviews will have their lives turned upside down in what seems like the blink of an eye. Many, who in Musil’s reviews exhibit extraordinary verve and spirit, will perish in concentration camps in the next decade. Others, like Musil himself, will go into exile and find their creative and personal lives in shambles. Others still will collaborate with the Nazi party or with the totalitarian Communist state.

Musil is advocating in these pages for an intellectual and emotional aliveness, a freedom and openness — in artistic and ethical experimentation — which the coming era would brutally crush. Perhaps we are at the juncture of a similar moment even now. Hopefully not. May his words, in any case, written with such urgency and passion on the eve of catastrophe, remind us of the important role of art as irreducible æsthetic and ethical experience.
INTRODUCTION
The planets spin, the elements unite according to laws that are themselves connected to other laws; but in every law that we know, something exists, just as it does in ourselves — a law that is precisely just the way it is, some kind of constant, a fact, an irrational, once-in-a-world, reckless self-persisting something, and the irrationality of mimicry and of the world touch each other through this pantomime; adventure and ignorabimus meet in the moment of a felicitous gesture. (Theater Symptoms II, 31)

A critic as artist and artist as critic, Robert Musil maintained that “there could be no such thing as significant criticism that would not be literature, and, aside from pure lyric poetry, no significant literature that would not be criticism.”¹ In his 1929 response to attacks on a pirated and recklessly adapted premiere of his play, The Utopians, he addressed his own critics, simultaneously leveling an attack on the state of contemporary literary criticism.

“I have been called an unraveller,” he wrote, “but I struggle to achieve synthesis.”

Elsewhere, he lamented “the breathtaking non-intellectual spirit that fills not only the atmosphere of the theater, but our literature as a whole.”

The years 1921 to 1924 constituted the height of Musil’s participation in the world of theater as both critic and dramatist. He had plans to collect his writings on theater into a book, which he considered calling Pathology of the Theater or Theater from the Outside. In one notebook entry, he writes that “A pathologist would be able to diagnose a great deal about our time through the theater.”

Marie-Louise Roth, whom we thank for reviving an interest in Musil’s theater writings with her 1965 collection of the original German theater reviews, notes that criticism was central to Musil’s character, and that, despite some admired models such as Alfred Kerr, Franz Blei, and Alfred Polgar, even as a critic he considered himself an outsider. Comparing himself to Thomas Mann, he notes that he is Mann’s extreme opposite in his critique against “almost everything,” concluding:

2. Theater Symptoms, 222.
3. Ibid., 69.
“partially that signifies my untimeliness; partially a kind of naughtiness! It suggests: autism, negativity, fanaticism and its variants ....”6 In addition to these tendencies, the reader should further be warned that Musil is likely to critique writers, such as Karl Kraus and Thomas Mann — who had achieved the sort of popular success that eluded him — more harshly than seems justified.

But, as Oliver Pfohlmann writes, “Neither before Musil nor after him was there an author who demanded more than he from literary criticism as an institution of the literary world. Parallel to his praxis as reviewer, he developed his critical conception against the backdrop of a utopian understanding of literature, wherein literature was considered responsible for the ethical progression of humanity.”7

Thus, even though Musil may have taken up his various assignments as a theater reviewer out of naughtiness or negativity, or for practical reasons, i.e., to earn much-needed cash, his commitment to the questions involved, including work on the plays and play fragments he wrote during the same period, was profound. In his “Author’s Afterword” to the forthcoming volume 10 of his Robert Musil Gesamtausgabe, Walter Fanta directs

6. GW II, 569.
us to a contemporary assessment of Musil as critic in a theater magazine, under the headline, *Viennese Critics. The Younger Generation*. After noting that Musil’s work as literary writer, mathematician, and engineer schooled him for criticism, the 1925 article concludes: “He is easily the most objective of the local writers and he writes a German which is no fluff and all core […] He always has something to say. Musil is not a born critic; he has a calling. That he currently has no steady position as critic in Vienna is lamentable, but is really more evidence of the exceptional quality of this brain.”

In the 1920s, Musil was on the staff of the *Prager Presse* for one year as theater and art reviewer, and worked for other papers in Czechoslovakia, as well as in Austria and Germany. He reported almost exclusively on Viennese theater, which included guest appearances from Berlin (Vienna’s rival in the German-speaking theater world), from Eastern Europe (sometimes via troupes who had emigrated to the United States), and translations from European and British productions.

Pfohlmann tells us that Musil wrote 56 reviews for the *Prager Presse* between March 1921 and August 1922 (sometimes up to three a week). He wrote for the *Deutsche*

8. See Walter Fanta’s “Author’s Afterword” to the forthcoming Vol. 10 of the *Robert Musil Gesamtausgabe* (Salzburg: Jung und Jung, 2020), not paginated at the time of this printing. Hereafter *Gesamtausgabe.*
Zeitung Bohemia (also in Prague) from September to December 1922 and began to write more for Viennese papers beginning in 1923. Between November 1923 and January 1924, Musil wrote five theater reviews for the Viennese Abend; but the fact that reviews had to be written at night, immediately after the performances, was excessively tiring. Another short stint was at the Viennese paper, Der Morgen, where he was laid off due to complaints about the severity of his reviews; and he published his more extensive theater-critical essays, the series referred to as Theater Symptoms, in his friend Ephraim Frisch’s Der Neue Merkur.

As Roth notes, Musil’s reviews, “are written in a lively, scintillating, sarcastic, intellectually-immaculate language, in a precise, bellicose style…. [R]eminiscent of [Alfred] Kerr, this language shatters in terse formulations the apparent shimmering of non-art, eviscerates in exacting analysis the scaffolding of simulated values, to clear a place for true art.”

The writing style, although elegant, light, graceful, and often extremely humorous, may occasionally seem dense in its English form, since even in German Musil’s writing — made up of complex intellectual puzzles, puns, subtle irony, and sheer brilliance — sometimes seems to burst the bounds of what language can do. His tendency to remain objective,

one of its strongest economic supports, that going to the theater, that oft-mentioned seeing and being seen, is understood as the most insouciant form of social assembly.

As a social amusement, it is also obvious that the theater has contributed to the transformations associated with contemporary late capitalism. The social nimbus of the theater does, indeed, still have its force, but one no longer meets up with people in the theater, one simply goes there or drops in; the performance is reduced to a quantified option on the amusement market, which one purchases, when one wants. (There remains a vestige of earlier times only at great premieres; but even in these cases one marks the change all the more, since at least three-fifths of those present are there in professional capacity.) And since the social circle of those who are interested in the theater has widened, taking on a more or less shapeless structure, changing the theater performance from a predominately obligatory to a predominately advertised amusement, it has adopted the essential characteristics of a business. There is a notable conformance between the psychology of theater and that of business. The psychological technique of the poster emphasizes two qualities, which every adroit advertisement should have: it must not merely be noticed, but it must take advantage of a feeling of familiarity; an aggressive poster annoys the passerby for weeks, but the object of irritation is suddenly surrounded by a feeling of warm intimacy, if one accidently comes across it as reality in a shop.
We find both features reflected in our theater business today; the greatest possible sensationalism alongside the greatest possible intimacy, i.e., banality. Thereewith we find an explanation for a contradiction that is not often seen to be one. This contradiction rushes with greater and greater force toward its main cause. It seems, namely, that amusement requires a certain sense of compulsion. I am no sociologist, but I have noticed that all ceremonies have their occasions and nowhere in the world do people gather together solely for amusement. Even the famous sexual excesses of ancient and primitive times wrap themselves around religious dictates; the courtly festivals gathered people together to serve the princedom; the days when Christians gorge themselves the most are the most serious celebrations. It very much appears as if amusement requires a certain compulsion, in order to suppress the opposing forces of boredom and tedium. One can thus understand that even in theater, the more it tends toward a pure amusement, the more lukewarm it becomes. And this condition between laughing and yawning, stimulation and apathy, indeed, precisely this latent condition of an enduring decline wherein our theater has made itself so comfortable, has inspired these reflections. We are approaching a condition of pure amusement that reduces the need for variety to a thoroughgoing boredom. Our epoch has created this condition. We appended a social-hygienic moment to it — as “diversion” — but apathy is
the reigning feeling in the public sphere; the public still accepts the theater as amusement. But the psychological effects of such a condition are the same as with all conditions of relaxation. They rock back and forth on a small swing above an empty space for a long time, which is tolerably pleasant. But if they happen to be interrupted, they want to be shaken up.

This is the reason why the theater audience is sleepily satisfied with minor variations of what has already been there for a long time, but also expresses gratefulness for stronger attractions, without taking them seriously. I believe that this condition is thus correctly described, and now we can see that the apparent contradiction between the most banal and the most sensational, which has been proven to be no contradiction at all when it comes to business, is also the psychology of amusement.

But now we have arrived at the two paths upon which the current evolution of the theater moves. On the one hand, theater becomes increasingly levelled, dull, and flat. All of the French and pseudo-French romantic comedies, all of the so-called problem plays and masterly theatrical conceptions, the plays enjoying serious acclaim — in other words, none other than the amusement and cash-register plays — can be described as a maximum of insignificant gags to a minimum of significant ideas. Thus, fundamental infertility is just as important for success as the fertility of superficial variations; or, in other words, the ability to gain a new perspective on a thing is by no means more important than the ability
to not gain more than one new one. The more tepid and stale the whole, the more unique the one idea upon which the clever presentation of the piece lives; such works are often charming, but with each one, our general distaste for the theater grows. On the other hand, the development of theater demands that everything become ever more brash and garish. One plays the wild man on the stage, whether as sexual lout or as apostle; one appears as a representative of an age or a tendency. In order to overcome the public’s inertia, the directorial circus brings actors onto the stage like tame beasts, who are made to perform feats that our simple animal natures reject. In the end, we more or less eviscerate the intestines of the theater when we make an instrumental element such as space itself the bearer of an intellectual emphasis. Without a doubt, certain values are achieved thereby and, in any case, these performances are much more enjoyable than the culture of stardom, which also should be mentioned here. But it is unquestionable that they too are derived from the requirement to constantly increase the level of stimulus; if one judges them by their success, they are strong rousing attractions, pistol shots in the silence. But the public, who knows everything ahead of time, already knew that the shots were blanks,\textsuperscript{18} even though they played along a bit.

\textsuperscript{18} See Musil’s farce, *Vinzenz and the Mistress of Important Men*, (229), where shooting blanks is one scenario of many used to parody theatrical clichés.
What is less well-known than this nexus — and I don’t imagine it could ever be emphasized crudely enough — is that our critical evaluation also reflects nothing more than a dramaturgy of amusement, a business dramaturgy, a dramaturgy of exhaustion. Of course, we have some excellent critics with personal perspectives about all of these problems — they are not the ones I refer to here. But if one were to analyze the touchstone by which influential mediocre criticism judges, it appears to be at bottom nothing but instructions about how to keep people awake who are threatening to fall asleep. This is done, for example, with suspense, that childish, transparent technique of letting someone guess something that is no longer a riddle from the very first moment. The requirements of dramatic clarity, whereby, to the greatest possible extent, everything that happens must happen, end in the catchy simplicity of the illustrated children’s primer. One praises this if one immediately falls, in the first scene, as if through a hole in a picture window; if very much happens; if the characters swiftly change; and elegant entanglements — ones one had already expected — provide surprising outcomes to small complications. If one goes to the theater tired, one wants something to happen on the stage to counteract this tiredness — a tiredness that is simultaneously taken into consideration. Almost everything that is called dramatic technique is of this sort. A good playwright works like a manufacturing engineer, who knows
that in the first third and shortly before the end of the working day the number of accidents is the smallest; he instinctively takes into consideration that the attention wavers, which is why three peaks are more intellectually stimulating than a flat plain, because the man with three ideas — by contrasting himself with the accumulated elevations — knows best how to take advantage of his own empty expanse. (This relates to the journalistic style.) But the critic falls for it and heralds such factory knowhow as a dramatic law, which the theater is proud to have cribbed over the course of the years. It is uncommonly rare that one finds in our criticism a remark about the cultural-intellectual significance of a play, a discussion of its ideas, passions, or even atmosphere; in contrast, very often we do find emphasized the conception that dramatic literature was written for the theater and ends in theater or that it has no deeper source and no higher goal than to meld together in some appealing weave and woof. One finds this sort of wool-ware-critic\(^{19}\) always busy remembering other characters and plays that have appealed to him, and since he has no will or ability to grasp intellectual form, he compares them by their most obvious elements, most external similarities, and the crudest possible typological summaries of

\(^{19}\) The weaving/wool metaphor and pun is smoother in the German, where Musil uses the word “wirken,” which means both to have an effect and to weave, in the first sentence, and then goes on to talk about “Wirkwaren,” i.e., knitted goods, in the second.
characters and scenes. The apparently positive “appeal” displaces everything else into a secondary sphere. That which is suspicious in life is thus transformed into the highest requirement of theater: to be concerned with appearance, rather than with the central, original cause.

Naturally everything that has gotten confused within these people’s heads does have a kernel of truth; but they make themselves servants of this uncertain bit of truth instead of its master. From stockholder to costumer, everyone talks about the theater with a ceaseless enthusiasm, as if they were speaking about a mysterious world, exempt from the usual rules of life, at whose threshold all experiences of the usual world recoil. And the critic doesn’t mind going along. “Technique” no longer plays the same kind of role in the novel as it does in theater criticism (although it is technically at least as difficult as is drama), but the novel does play a greater role today in the mind of humanity. Probably the reason for both of these things is that the novel is not as good a business as theater.

*Cultural Education Crisis* 20

One can naturally counter, against this attempt to understand our theater experiences through the concept of a commercial amusement transaction, that there are also other explanations. We are, after all, used to explaining

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20. In German, *Bildungskrise*. The German term, “Bildung,” which I have translated in this passage sometimes as “cultural education”
the conditions of art as a battle and exchange of principles and the appearance of certain personalities. But that goes along quite well with the former abstract observation, since the process of the emergence and coming into prominence of influential persons of a particular kind is largely caused by social conditions.

And that a social moment plays an important role here, at least when it comes to what is stigmatized, is evidenced by the fact, already mentioned, that such things are a great deal less apparent in the novel than in drama, even though almost the same people come into question in both cases. Further, that the phenomena in drama and painting are similar, even though the circle of people is different, while the social requirements — business and so-called collective consumption — are practically the same. Even more compelling is the argument that the condition diagnosed for the theater is, perhaps, not only applicable today, but was not much different in Goethe’s time. The intellectually third-rate in those days certainly had its provincial, folksy traits, but these took about as much hold as a certain metropolitan intensity has caught on in all the performances of our times.

*and other times just as “culture,” is a central, but untranslatable, word in German literature and social thought, a part, of course, of the term “Bildungsroman,” usually translated as “novel of education.” It is important to understand that the sort of education implied is a wide-reaching cultural education of the whole person, in the tradition of Goethe or of Schiller’s “æsthetic education.”*
It is probably true, too, that there is not much difference. But this leads directly to the second part of this observation, which has treated the theater as much under the rubric of amusement as cultural education. To say it outright: even if the incongruity between the two components has always been just as large, there still remains a larger difference today, in that the developmental directions of each one have switched places since that time. “Cultural education” — or, more precisely, the desire for it, the disposition favoring cultural education — was in youthful ascent at that time and today it is in descent, dissolution, or at least has fallen into a state of precarious crisis. At one time, the bourgeois society laid claim to the theater — with us, through the great minds of the classical past, and even today, a distant holy obligation seems to still play a role, but this panacea of cultural education itself has shared theater’s fate. A “culturally-educated person” was originally more or less someone whom a modern literary school today would call a logosocrat; it is a matter of an assertion of power based on intellect, an idea, which developed later in bourgeois liberalism, so that today the term “culturally-educated” is frequently used synonymously with wealthy. Culture itself is only protected to a certain extent — in the manner of good housekeeping. In general, it is left to its own devices by the capitalist society and the free market. The symptoms exhibited by the theater today are only one part of the widespread crisis of cultural education, or,
if one will, the twilight of culture in which we live. A comparison with the history of the English theater of the nineteenth century — where the influence of the metropolis and the sociology of their amusements was apparent a few decades before us²¹ — exhibits some of our symptoms (the banal sensationalism) in an even cruder form; but the counter forces that overcame this condition were not as vitiated by cowardice and doubts as they are today.

It pays to summarize some findings from relevant research about the fate of our “cultural education” and to compare the example of the theater against the whole.²²

The term “cultural education” in its current meaning arose around the middle of the 18th century. General education meant, in those days, universal education; to educate oneself, to form oneself; Kant used the word culture for it; with Herder, then with Goethe, the meaning of paideia and erudition were added to the term. But in the main, from that time until the end of the 19th century, “cultural education” was the same as spiritual independence or enlightenment. Formed in the age of


²². [Musil’s note.] I take this from a work by L.v. Wiese in his Sociology of the School System (Munich-Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1921), a work that I mentioned in this newspaper.
Enlightenment, this conception encompassed the opposition to clerical and political bondage and was originally rational — including a belief in the trinity of nature, reason, and freedom. Later, as the belief in the autonomy of reason suffered considerable losses, this concept was partially displaced by the belief in natural scientific realistic thought. An important factor — one decisive for our difficulties — was, furthermore, contributed at the very beginning under the influence of Herder: the ancient ideal of general human wisdom. The ancient ethos was recommended as an exemplar for direct and absolute imitation. “One becomes a culturally educated person in the fullest sense, above all, through intercourse with the Ancients, these ancient fathers of human spiritual and intellectual cultural education, these eternal models of the correct, good, and practiced taste and of the highest accomplishment in the use of language; we must form our ways of thinking and writing in imitation of them; in imitation of them, we must model our reason and our language. The meaning of humanity, i.e., genuine human reason, is revealed to that man who has done this; he becomes a culturally educated person and proves himself to be one in both small and grand ways” (Herder: *On the True Meaning of the Liberal Arts and Primary School Education, 1788*).

One need only read this quotation to see how far behind we are in the organization of ideological transformations, to what extent we have been stalled at a phase
Imagine some familiar thing with one or the other characteristic missing. Then develop the remaining characteristics to their highest possible perfection. Then you will get an impression that is, at once, strangely under-and also extra-real. Remove, for example, the life-size quality of a horse, its ability to move, and the indefinable essence of its realness, and it remains a small brown papier mâché pony, with a swan’s neck, tiny black hooves, gracious little leather straps; it stands behind the magic window of a pastry shop and it penetrates, along unreal passageways, into the soul of a child, shining with a glittering splendor that is never again attainable.43 Perhaps the strange magic of primitive sculptures and drawings, the enjoyment of sketches or extreme stylizations, the overwrought ornamentation of our fashions, yes, the whole essence of human art and artificiality, is based on nothing more than such internal amalgams of the under-and the over-real.

43. This miniature toy pony is a recurring motif for Musil, which plays a significant symbolic role in The Man Without Qualities, along with the cut-out cardboard figures Ulrich remembers from a childhood circus poster.
Now do the same with a cabaret song; let go entirely of the little bit of sense that it may have. And, instead of that, sing nothing for many minutes except, “Ach, that is the little hunter,” or “Occarina-Macaroni,” and you will arrive at the same borderland. On the far side of this border lies idiocy; on the nearer side, however, the little hunter spins — blond, merry, round, and as green as an illuminated billiard table — around three singing farm girls, who prod him around in circles with a melody that shimmies from their hands and their hips; and right there on that border, exactly in the middle, you are sitting, and are so happily sad as if you were sitting in water and wanted to make puppets out of it. Out of an extraordinary fantasy of design and a disciplined power of coordination of the many details, this Dadaism truly reflects a magical stupor, in which sense and non-sense blend in a wonderful way. A non-sense of a higher sort ensues; perhaps it is the ultimate sense of our Dasein [existence], which really, for damned sure, mirrors a Da-Dasein.

To be truly accurate, the “Blue Bird,” the best of the Russian cabaret theaters that have opened in Berlin, is the only one which holds itself suspended on this fine line; the two others, the “Carousel” and the “Russian Cabaret,” slip down, sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other. In the “Blue Bird,” the spirit of Stanislavski and the Moscow Theater Collective — where nothing was considered minor — still lives on most
palpably. This spirit transforms itself from theater into a playful theatrical, but not like something that just happened to fall under the table of art; instead it becomes a non-Euclidian world of illusion, wherein one gropes about for one’s bearings like a newborn. The two other theaters haven’t achieved this yet, although the program is mostly the same and their production is indeed astonishing; they are just a nuance more tame in their interpretation of their task; not sloppier, but less spiritual. And the fairytale splendor of their costumes and musical tableaux almost seem like a sort of artistic military campaign; instead of Stanislavski, the weaker moments have an expressionistic Makart as their demiurge; but it is mostly a matter of the surprise of the first impression and the critical mood of the second, and I really do not mean to quibble.

A preface to one of the programs explains that these cabarets evolved out of private entertainments of actors, singers, and dancers; one need only think of our own Operetta-mélanges, which evolved out of similar occasions and which have achieved a certain modest critical success. Just the same, I do not believe something else that the program professes: that these little theaters have sprung up because the days of great dramatic art are over.

44. Hans Makart (1840–1884) was an Austrian painter and ornamental interior decorator; the sensual and luxurious grandiosity of his paintings and home décor is representative of the Ringstrasse-era in Viennese art and design.
Instead, I believe that such theaters can only evolve to such a high level in cultures that have also brought forth the best serious contemporary theater, and that the Russian cabaret separates itself from the performances of Fritz Grünbaum in Austrian and German cabarets because — and in the same way that — Dostoevsky is to be differentiated from [the homeland writer] Waldemar Bonsels.
They call her a “diseuse,” from the French dire, to say, which can also mean to recite, and which we German speakers have translated into the clumsy “Vortragskünstlerin.” But what it really is, is neither to say nor to recite, but rather to say what you mean, to “tell them” — the ones who are clattering their plates down there, and who have forgotten to eat for the length of one moment, with their mouths agape. For Guilbert was already a European celebrity when she performed at the Parisian tingle tangles. This separates her from her trained sisters and daughters, these performers of Lieder, these grand-piano horses and ponies of Germanic upbringing. She was a battle cry, and she came from below.

What made her famous in those days, when she first became the “Divine Yvette,” were street songs; original, you understand, for the street has no poem before the downtrodden human with his more fruitful intellect, the artist and bohemian, manages to loosen its incendiary tongue. It was about the same time when Aristide Bruant performed those broadside ballads in brothel-bistros for his cash-rich audiences, those songs that also
became very famous in book form. “I don’t know if I’m from Grenelle (from Montmartre or from La Chapelle), from here, elsewhere, or below. I only know that idle people without a rudder found me one morning in the dirty gutter.” Such songs had an effect as if one were to suddenly throw an Ottakringer Heferlberg at the sideboard of a fancy restaurant; even if they were no more than a titillation, the pleasurable shock of a saucily-coiffed world of sin and misery, they still contributed a great deal to an airing-out of views, which has made the life of morals slightly more enjoyable since the nineties.

In those days, Yvette Guilbert stepped before the public with red hair, red flowers, red lips, and black eyebrows; her simple dress, with deep décolletage, on her angular-flexible body, was white; she wore long, black gloves, a black belt, and black shoes. Her face and her songs were ugly-beautiful. What enraptured the people was the laughing effrontery with which she recited the sauciest verses, and the fury that occasionally flared up behind the most pleasant ones. It was the contrast between what was considered not-beautiful and not-moral, and a persona wherein such things became beautiful in a new way. This same contrast was to be found in her large mouth, which could fold itself into the sweetest expressions, and in her nose, which was in reality what the Viennese call a “croissant,” but which in moments of anger appeared to be like the bolder inversion of the boldest eagle’s beak. I saw her for the first time years later, when
she already performed only in black. The program, too, was no longer that of the young Gilbert; already in those days she mostly just performed old chansons. But the power of her presence was palpable even then at the very first verse. A ringing energy, like when bronze drums are touched, sometimes reverberated suddenly from a sweet playfulness. It was the power which the offensive once had to give offense, the power to stimulate.

Today, after some wanderings, she lives in Brussels, where she recently founded a school where young girls are trained for opera, drama, cabaret, and film. She presented some of these students here too, and she performs with them now, no longer on an empty stage, as before; for she has added the charm of colorful scenery, simple backdrops, and bright costumes. The demi-theater that presents these young girls is a bit like the Russian Cabaret; they too sing little dressed-up songs with droll gestures; perhaps with a bit less sophistication and a bit more natural charm. It seems at first as if Guilbert’s direction is like a loose bouquet of wildflowers; but the amount of work it really requires can be appreciated in a little vignette based on an old Catholic church, in which the early Gothic wooden images of holy virgins awaken; while the conception and the staging are not particularly original, the production of this scene reveals an admirable discipline and precision in every detail.

Stronger than the director Guilbert, is Guilbert the singer, and truly, she has become a new singer altogether,
although she still performs “songs from all centuries.” She has grown broad, the lithe one, and when she comes on stage, she does not hide her age at all. Her singing is mellow and measured. The performance is understated and of an incomparable artistry and maturity. She does not make her face young with makeup, but when it begins to move, a miracle occurs. As the feeling that she is expressing travels across her face in a richness of infinite forms, one believes suddenly that one is looking at the face of a young girl. The City of Brussels has dedicated a piece of land to this great artist for her school, and Cardinal Mercier has presented himself as a patron of this new enterprise. Guilbert’s whole life has been proof that it is not what a person says and does that makes her worthy, but how she does it. It seems that a nation which cares to educate spirited diseuses also necessarily wins spirited Cardinals.
ERNST TOLLER’S *LAME MAN*

Matinee at the Viennese Raimund Theater

*Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (February 23, 1924)*

When Wilde first saw, once again, the light and shadow of the open air brightly contrasted with each other, when the meaningless, delightful whir of sounds reached his ears, the faint scurrying of a world, that was, despite everything, brilliant and precious, with Reading Jail still very close at his back, he turned around to look once more at the torment. But the walls that had castigated him lay in the same light as everything else and were a part of the whirring beauty. Wilde never managed to turn this moment into a paradox, and I think that he ultimately collapsed precisely because his gracefully-dancing mode of thought could not overcome this simple contradiction. Something similar — but without the added *de profundis*, instead rather, packed with a youthful, resistant spirit — is at the root of Toller’s drama, *The German Lame Man.*

45. Ernst Toller also spent time in jail, for his participation in Munich’s 1919 Soviet Republic. He wrote this play during his imprisonment. According to Fanta, this is “one of the most thorough and thoughtful” of Musil’s theater reviews. Fanta, *Gesamtausgabe.*
This lame man was a healthy, well-behaved factory worker before the war, a worker, who, like thousands of others, led his life with the faithful trust that, “as is scientifically proven,” the materialistic historical development will one day give birth on its own — “from the womb of the historical development of circumstances” — to a happier existence for us all. He then went to war, like everyone else, proud of his brave manhood, which placed him on the same level as everyone else, and returned — to his wife, castrated by a bullet. The tragedy slips into this clearly-prepared noose. The noose, above all, of the war cripple. Why it is called the German Lame Man, I could not discover; I take the German-part to be a post-hoc glued-on allegory or a repressed second motif, that never was developed, but that still remains meaninglessly in the title. The lame man could also have lost his legs or his eyes; every mutilation (consolidated as a deformity of the sexual organ!) is repulsive to the peacefully gossiping person. As long as it is not overcompensated for by the mood of war victimization and heroism, and the feelings remain in their usual place, the emotional atmosphere of horror or also of ridicule rises up once more around the altered person, as around everything unfamiliar. The inherent tragedy of betrayal or the farce of oblivion is not German, but rather cultural-human! Toller carries it off as if it were a legend. In the woman, disgust and sexual desire fight against love. A friend of the man reaps the benefit. While the
lame man is forced to bite off the heads of rats and mice at a side show to afford bread (to at least be a manly nurturer), his wife enjoys herself with his friend. She regrets it later and jumps out of the window, since he cannot get over the thought that she also laughed at him for lowering himself to the level of an animal for her sake. And the lame man just lets them both be reduced to a fatal despair, because he no longer has the strength to understand their coexistence. The fatherland had celebrated him as a hero, a fine specimen of a man, before he could even show that he really was one, but as soon as something happened to him that is as much of a hero's fate as any other, he became ridiculous, and then the fatherland would permit his wife to divorce him? He still believes in the future nation, where everyone will have his rights, even those carrying heavy burdens and the sick, but when he despairingly tries to find support for the belief from his friends, when it is a matter of his own case, there is no longer any room for it? It is as incomprehensible as that his wife loved him and then laughed at him. As incomprehensible as the fact that she didn't really laugh at him — but even if she had done so, she would also have to have been a good person; for he only needs to look into her eyes to see: “Where is the beginning and where the end? Who can say this of a spider’s web?” — So, the world gets mixed up in his brain. This is no longer the tragedy of the war cripple, also no longer of the unmanned, but rather the suffering of Everyman,
PLAYS
THE UTOPIANS

A Play in Three Acts
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THOMAS

MARIA, his wife

REGINA, her sister

ANSELM

JOSEF, Regina’s husband; university professor and high-standing official of pedagogical administration

STADER, owner of the detective firm Newton, Galileo, & Stader

MISS MERTENS, doctoral student

A SERVANT GIRL
The play is set in a country house that Thomas and Maria have inherited, near to a city.

All characters in the play are between 28 and 35 years old; only Miss Mertens is perhaps a bit older, and Josef is over 50.

With the exception of these two, all the people in the play are beautiful, however one may imagine that.

The most beautiful of them all is Maria: tall, dark, heavy; the movements of her body are like a melody, played very slowly. In contrast, Thomas is almost small, thin, and wiry, like a beast of prey; likewise, his face almost escapes notice under a masterful, strong brow. Anselm’s brow is hard and low, wide like a fanatically-tightened belt; the sensual part of his face is fascinating. He is taller than Thomas. Regina is dark, indefinite; boy, woman, a fluttering dream whatnot, mischievous magic bird.

Miss Mertens has a kind face that is reminiscent of a school satchel, and a backside grown wide from long listening in the halls of wisdom.

Josef is lean, haggard, and has a large, angular Adam’s apple, which moves up and down over a collar that is too low, and also a wan, brown, fin-like mustache.

Stader was once a pretty boy and is now a capable person.
ACT ONE

The scene is a dressing room, connected to the bedroom by a large closed sliding door. Entrance door on the opposite side. Large window. Ground floor. View of a park.

The scenery must be designed with as much fantasy as reality. The walls are of cloth, doors and windows cut out, their frames painted; they are not fixed, but fluttering flexibly, within bounds. The floor is painted fantastically. The furniture suggests abstraction, like wire models of crystals. It must be real and usable, but as if it resulted from that process of crystallization whereby, for a moment, sometimes the flow of impressions freezes, separating out a single impression, unmediated, alone. Above, the whole room flows into the summer sky, where clouds swim. It is early afternoon.

Regina sits on a chair, hastily pulled up against the bedroom door, a letter in her hand, drumming on it softly with her knuckles. Miss Mertens, baffled, stands more toward the middle of the room, facing her.

REGINA: You mean, you are really not superstitious? You don’t believe in occult personal powers?

MISS MERTENS: What can you mean by that, really?

REGINA: Nothing at all. As a child, and still as a young girl, I had an ugly voice — as soon as I spoke out loud — but I knew that one day I would surprise all the world with a marvelous song.
MISS MERTENS: And did you receive the requisite organ?

REGINA: No.

MISS MERTENS: Well then.

REGINA: I don’t know how I should answer you. Didn’t you ever have an inexplicable feeling about yourself? So mysterious that you had to take off your shoes and sail through the room like a cloud? In the old days, I often came in here when Mama was still asleep next door. (She points to Thomas and Maria’s bedroom.)

MISS MERTENS: Yes, but for heaven’s sake, why?

REGINA: (Answers with a shrug of the shoulders and bangs loudly on the door.) Thomas! Thomas! Why don’t you come already?! Joseph’s letter is here!

THOMAS: (From inside) Coming, little crow; a moment. (One hears the door open; he sticks his head in and notices Miss Mertens.) All right, then another moment; I thought you were alone. (He closes the door again.)

MISS MERTENS: (Goes warmly toward Regina.) Tell me, just what do you hope to prove with all of this?

REGINA: Prove? But love, how could I prove something? It’s all the same to me.

MISS MERTENS: (With tender persistence.) I mean, when you say that you sometimes see your first husband, who died here years ago.
REGINA: Then tell me, why shouldn’t I see Johannes?

MISS MERTENS: (With persistent compassion) But isn’t he dead?

REGINA: Yes. As certain as we stand here. Officially confirmed.

MISS MERTENS: Well, then, it’s impossible!

REGINA: I don’t want to explain it to you! I just have powers that you don’t have. Why not? I also have faults you don’t have.

MISS MERTENS: I get the feeling that you don’t really believe what you are saying.

REGINA: I don’t know what I believe! But I do know that all my life I have done everything in opposition to what I believe!

MISS MERTENS: You don’t really mean that. Here everyone talks about powers that only people who are here have! That’s the spirit of this house: a revolt against something that is good enough for all the rest of the world.

(Thomas has entered. Not yet fully dressed; what he is wearing is fitting for a beautiful summer’s day. He busies himself with all sorts of morning duties, since, for the moment, no one pays him any attention.)

REGINA: Oh, I’ll tell you something: All of us come into the world with capacities for the most unimaginable
experiences. Laws do not bind us. But then life always makes us choose between two possibilities, and always we feel: one possibility is not there; always one, the undiscovered third possibility. And we do everything that we want, yet we’ve never done what we wanted. In the end, we have lost our talents.

**MISS MERTENS:** May I see the letter again? It must be this letter.

**REGINA:** *(Gives it to her; in the meantime, to Thomas)* Josef is going — to come here.

**MISS MERTENS:** What are you saying?! Really?

**REGINA:** With Joseph, everything is real.

**THOMAS:** *(Very — but apparently not unpleasantly — astounded)* When?

**REGINA:** Today.

**THOMAS:** *(Looks at the clock)* Then he might be here before midday? *(Takes a deep breath.)* This — is all happening rather quickly.

**MISS MERTENS:** I am convinced that His Excellency Josef wants nothing more than openness and a little compromise. You will communicate your grounds for divorce peaceably *(with a palpable barb at Thomas)*, without insulting him. And when the last remaining bit of dishonesty toward this man — whom you never really thought of as your husband — has been cleared away —
this spook that haunts your nerves will disappear all by itself. You were a saint! You have no need whatsoever for the fiction that you deceived your husband with a dead man! (She turns with fervor back to the letter. Thomas and Regina step slightly to the side.)

**THOMAS:** You two were talking about Johannes again?

**REGINA:** She thinks I’m lying.

**THOMAS:** She doesn’t understand; she takes it for real.

**REGINA:** It is real!

**THOMAS:** (Lays his arm around her shoulder and taps her on her brow) Little crow, little crow! Little, nose-picking dream princess, insulted like a child who has lied or stolen sugar and gotten punished by Mama.

**REGINA:** It’s practically real. It’s probably much more real than —

**THOMAS:** (Doesn’t let her finish) You are wrong; that’s the whole thing! You are wrong; and it’s just the same, whether one has done wrong or suffers from it. (He has sat himself down in front of her and has unconsciously wrapped his arm around her knee in a brotherly fashion.) Nowadays, I too am always wrong. But the more one feels this way, the more one exaggerates. One pulls one’s own skin ever tighter around one’s head, like a dark cowl with a pair of eye holes and openings to breathe. We should be the siblings now, Regina.
REGINA: (Half turning away) Truly, you have always been heartless like a brother, no matter what happened to me.

THOMAS: Distant feelings, Regina; like yours.

REGINA: (Setting herself free) I like that; (bad-tempered) but what does it mean?

THOMAS: (Pursuing her persistently) Not immediately graspable, like Anselm’s feelings! Branching out over the whole sky like sheet lightning! Better to be apparently lacking in feeling. (He notices that Miss Mertens, having finished reading, wants to join the conversation. To her) Well, what does Josef write? Is His Excellency, the Master of Knowledge and its servant, very angry at us?

REGINA: He threatens to destroy your career and future if you don’t throw us out of the house.

MISS MERTENS: Master Josef has no right to do that! No one can raise objections to the fact that Dr. Anselm brought you to your sister’s and his friend’s house, where you all spent your childhood together. He only has a right to the truth. Well then, you will receive him with the truth; you really don’t have to tell him that, privately, you plan (again, with a palpable barb aimed at Thomas) to marry Dr. Anselm after the divorce.

REGINA: Josef can’t just be re-tuned like a piano.

MISS MERTENS: Your long dutiful self-sacrifice, justice, love, all human feelings are on your side. He is a
human being. Trust in that which all humans have in common, and you will not have done so in vain! But I fear that this must all sound rather pedestrian to Herr Doctor Thomas.

**THOMAS:** (Sanctimoniously) On the contrary, I agree with you. If we had behaved like that immediately, we would have been able to avoid all of this.

**MISS MERTENS:** (Warmly opening herself up) But why didn’t you always think this way??! Why did you write that letter, in which you merely made fun of all of it, and angered Master Josef — obviously the cause of his answer?!

**THOMAS:** Because I was an idealist.

**MISS MERTENS:** Excuse me, Herr Doctor, I dare not doubt that you are an idealist — a scholar with your achievements must be one. But every human being is good and can be won over to noble feelings, His Excellency Josef too, and I would have imagined, that an idealist would have to do that, would have to try to do it; by a — I imagined an idealist — in a word — with ideals!

**THOMAS:** (Laughing out loud) But dear Miss Mertens, ideals are the worst enemies of Idealism! Ideals are dead Idealism. The dregs of rotting — —

**MISS MERTENS:** Oh, oh! Now I don’t need to hear anymore; I see that you are making fun again, and this time of me! (Previously she had tapped on the door while
waiting for an answer. Now she exits with an aggrieved, but restrained expression.)

THOMAS: (He is suddenly transformed.) You are the only person here I can talk to without being misunderstood: tell me, what is wrong between you and Anselm?

REGINA: (Refractory) Why wrong?

THOMAS: You both know that something is wrong between you. Don’t you trust me anymore?

REGINA: No.

THOMAS: Right you are! … We once believed we were new human beings! And what has become of it? (He grasps her shoulder and shakes her.) Regina! How ridiculous; what has become of it?!

REGINA: I made no plans for a new world order. That was you others.

THOMAS: Yes, fine. Anselm and Johannes and I. (Still moved by the memory) There was nothing that we would have accepted without reservation; no feeling, no law, no greatness. Everything was connected to everything else, and interchangeable; we leapt over abysses between contraries and tore apart things that had grown too close together. All that was human lay within us in its total, vast, fresh, eternally creative possibility!

REGINA: I have always known that whatever one thinks would turn out to be wrong.
THOMAS: Yes, alright. Those thoughts that make you sleepless from happiness, that drive you, so that you run in front of the wind for days like a boat, must always be wrong.

REGINA: In the meantime, I prayed to God for something especially beautiful for myself alone, that you all couldn’t even think up!

THOMAS: And what has come of it?

REGINA: What do you mean! You have achieved everything that you wanted!

THOMAS: Do you have any idea how easy it was? First slowly, but then: the accelerated fall upwards! On the sloping plain, it is just as easy to go up as down. — In a half year I will be a full professor, if I don’t let this thing with Josef ruin me beforehand. In my whole life I have never come across anything as shameful as success. But quickly now: what is the meaning of this Johannes story?!

REGINA: You can all talk and help yourselves with words. I don’t care to. With me, things are only true as long as I do not speak of them.

THOMAS: We don’t even know if it’s already a honeymoon or just an engagement trip, and you both invite a dead man along!

REGINA: I don’t want to talk about Johannes!!
THOMAS: But in the old days you never even — liked him that much!? And today!? Today he has advanced to the level of an ideal! — Anselm connects the story with a particular intention. What is it!?

REGINA: Anselm connects everything that he does with a particular intention.

THOMAS: Yes, that’s how he is now?! It wasn’t like that in the old days, was it? But now, whenever Maria is listening, he becomes simply unbearable. Everything that he does is somehow a kind of soul betrayal!?

REGINA: (Softly) Yes, that’s it.

THOMAS: (Looks at her uncomprehending. Then restraining himself by force) Fine. But what does it mean?

REGINA: And you will see that he retreats when Josef gets here. He will insist that we are only here with you because this is where Johannes died.

THOMAS: Well, we’ll see whether he carries it to such an extreme.

REGINA: He never wanted it to go this far.

THOMAS: But what did he want, then?

REGINA: (With an undertone of contempt that Thomas does not notice) I seduced him!

THOMAS: You him:? But God knows that you have never run after anyone in your life! You took Josef, after all, as one takes the veil!
VINZENZ AND THE MISTRESS OF IMPORTANT MEN

A Farce in Three Acts (1924)
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ALPHA
BÄRLI (A rich businessman)
THE SCHOLAR
THE MUSICIAN
THE POLITICIAN
THE REFORMER
THE YOUNG FRIEND
THE GIRLFRIEND
DR. APULEJUS-HALM
VINZENZ
A room at night. Partially and weakly illuminated by a streetlight. A second room, like an alcove, slightly raised and separated by a half pulled-back curtain, where a lantern burns very dimly. An ottoman and some indistinct dark objects can just be made out in the front room. About three in the morning. Alpha and Bärli enter from the side. Both in evening dress and opera cloaks. Alpha turns on the lamp of a vanity table in the foreground; with a screen standing alongside it, so that only a small surrounding area is illuminated. Bärli stands beside her.

BÄRLI: This can only have one end!

ALPHA: Tell me, why can it only have one end? Look at this brush; it has two ends. No, it has as many ends as it has hairs. Count its ends. I would like to know, once and for all, where people get such certainties!

BÄRLI: You must marry me!

ALPHA: Your mind has less fantasy in this regard than my hairbrush.

BÄRLI: My mind is completely without fantasy in this regard. But I have seen men get down on their knees before me, begging for mercy for their business and their family —

ALPHA: And — ?
BÄRLI: And I have never granted it to them.

ALPHA: I think that’s something I like about you.

BÄRLI: I have had women shown out, who pleaded for their husbands —

ALPHA: Were they proud women?

BÄRLI: Yes, there may have been beautiful women among them, even crying mothers.

ALPHA: I think I really do like that about you. I’m the same way. A crying mother wouldn’t move me either.

BÄRLI: I dare say, I am, with my business dealings, an economic factor in this nation. And more than once, I have wagered all of this power on one card, only to throw it into the air and win it again. In this regard, I have fantasy, Alpha, a sufficiently wild fantasy!

ALPHA: And?

BÄRLI: (Despairingly) But why, why do I do it?! Alpha, it has no meaning for me anymore! I have produced, just to produce. You sense that I have something more to offer than these gossiping cripples who surround you: I can do what I want. But what do I want, for God’s sake? What in the world do I want?!! You have made me unsure about this; you must marry me.

ALPHA: As I have said already, my hairbrush has more fantasy.

(Bärli makes a desperate gesture.)
**Alpha**: Well?

**Bärli**: Don’t think that I will put up with such resistance from a woman.

**Alpha**: But what are you going to do?

**Bärli**: I will kill you and myself!

**Alpha**: Kill — ?

**Bärli**: Yes.

**Alpha**: You adore me that much?

**Bärli**: I only see these two possibilities: either you marry me or I kill us.

**Alpha**: Say that more beautifully.

**Bärli**: How?

**Alpha**: Wouldn’t you rather say: “United, either in life or in death”?

**Bärli**: Don’t mock me!

**Alpha**: *(Standing up)* But this is really tasteless. Your association with business and your lack of literary culture have given you the feelings of a serialized romance novel!

*(Bärli attacks her. The little lamp goes out. Brief shadowy struggle. Alpha falls. Bärli binds her hands and feet with a rope, which he pulls from his coat, and carries her to the illuminated ottoman in the alcove.)*
**ALPHA:** Oh! Oh! You are shameless. You are so terribly shameless! And old!

**BÄRLI:** Will you marry me, Madame?!

**ALPHA:** No!

**BÄRLI:** Marry me, Alpha?!

**ALPHA:** It’s shameless of you to get so familiar, just because you are pretending to think about death. Ooooh! *(She sticks her tongue out at him.)* With this farce, you have forfeited everything! *(She turns around, with her back to him.)*

**BÄRLI:** I only pretended to send my car away. It is waiting downstairs. There is enough gas for three days. Write a letter to our friends, with some excuse or other, about why we have to depart to suddenly, and we will flee to my estate in the mountains.

**ALPHA:** *(Looking over her shoulder)* Why do I have to write a letter to do this?

**BÄRLI:** It’s the way I thought it up.

**ALPHA:** And then?

**BÄRLI:** I have arranged for a minister, so we can get married immediately. I am abducting you. I am stealing you away for my own!

**ALPHA:** And then? You can’t possibly abduct me all your life, or incessantly steal me away for your own: what will happen next?
(Pause)

BÄRLI: (Somewhat meekly) We will be wordlessly happy.

ALPHA: Wordlessly?

BÄRLI: Certainly! We will be wordlessly happy!

ALPHA: You have thought this out imprecisely. Again, you are at a loss for words.

BÄRLI: Yes, Alpha, I lack the words. I have always lacked the words when I wanted something. That’s why I just take it for myself! That is why I don’t speak like the others, but just take! I will treat you with such respect! I will remove every stone from your path. I will worship you. We will love each other. You will have all my riches at your disposal. I will not bother about them at all —

ALPHA: Now that’s the first thing you’ve said so far that wasn’t banal.

BÄRLI: To possess something, which you do not possess, no — obsess over — this is the way I am — has no meaning for me anymore —. I have accumulated a lump of clay. My possessions mock me. (Both fists pressed against his temples) Ever since you said I was an idiot, I have begun to think about myself for the first time. Even though you say it gently, it doesn’t matter; what matters is that I have begun to think about myself. And I can’t think about myself! I never learned how to. Or I have forgotten. That is why I live helplessly — like an animal.
But if I could hand the world to you, piece by piece, I think I could create the whole thing all over again!

**ALPHA:** You are actually quite nice when you talk like this. You seem important.

**BÄRLI:** Shall I untie you?

**ALPHA:** No, not yet. *(Pause)* Kiss me! *(Wild embracing until Alpha loses her breath.)*

**ALPHA:** *(Reflecting)* But you still haven’t told me what will happen afterwards. I can’t possibly sit in your castle forever, like a stone in a ring?

**BÄRLI:** I can’t even live without your sharp little tongue anymore. I feel as if you were melting me like a pointing, thrusting flame melts a block of iron. You torment me. I am making myself ridiculous; I run about, bumping into things — which I only just noticed were there.

**ALPHA:** That is certainly true, but I wouldn’t be able to look into a mirror after a while without seeing you there next to my image.

**BÄRLI:** I am going to carry you down now. I’ll untie the rope in the car.

**ALPHA:** No, it won’t work; don’t do anything stupid, Bärli. Today is my name day, the others will be here soon.

**BÄRLI:** *(Wildly)* They don’t deserve you!

**ALPHA:** Why not?
**BÄRLI**: I can’t say exactly why not! Enough! I’m going to carry you off now.

**ALPHA**: *(Defending herself)* No! I don’t want to go! I will scream! I will scream so loud that everyone in the house will come running! *(She knocks over a vase and water flows out. Bärli becomes momentarily sober and lets go. His voice changes.)*

**BÄRLI**: Okay. You disdain me. I am in no mood to humiliate myself further in front of you. So, now the other thing must happen.

**ALPHA**: What?

**BÄRLI**: Do you have any last wishes to dictate to me?

**ALPHA**: *(Nervously)* Why are you looking at me so earnestly?

**BÄRLI**: *(Pulling a pistol out of his pocket)* Because I am going to shoot you now. You can be sure that I will kill myself right after I kill you.

**ALPHA**: *(Trying to strike an attitude of superiority)* If you were a cavalier, you would know that you must kill yourself first. *(Then, overcome by fear)* Put it away! …

**BÄRLI**: *(Laughing and shaking his head sadly)* No, Alpha, I am not joking; now I am going to take you with me. *(He looks at her and raises the pistol slowly.)*

**ALPHA**: *(Screaming)* Help!
BÄRLI: It's no use.

ALPHA: Vinzenz!! …. Help! …. Vinzenz! Vinzenz!!

(The unexpected and never-before-heard name makes Bärli put the pistol down. He looks around, looks at Alpha inquisitively, and notices that someone else is in the room.)

BÄRLI: What is the meaning of this?

(He takes a few steps in the dark and turns on the lights. Discovered behind a distant chair, Vinzenz — tall and thin — rises. He is a man in his late 30's, not without elegance, but clothed modestly. He laughs nervously.)

ALPHA: (Turning toward him) Coward! Betrayer! Coward!

BÄRLI: (Angrily, threatening with the pistol) What are you doing here??

VINZENZ: (He lifts his arms, half in defense, half in a ‘hands-up’ gesture. Quickly) Dear friend, dear friend! I didn't want to increase the catastrophe. You probably would have shot me right off. But I only got here an hour ago. I have nothing to do with this business.

ALPHA: He's my childhood friend.

VINZENZ: Alpha wanted to speak with me alone.

BÄRLI: (Looking at him disdainfully) Him?… !

ALPHA: Yes. Shoot him down! The little coward wouldn't have moved!
VINZENZ: I believe that the mood has been spoiled for the time being, or else I would gladly retreat again, if you would rather …?

BÄRLI: (Again) Him! .... (He throws the pistol onto the table.) You have no cause to fear.

VINZENZ: (To them both) I was, of course, too little informed about your private affairs to have allowed myself to interrupt such a moment. — By the way, you wouldn’t have anything against me loosening Alpha’s shackles now, would you? (He does it.)

ALPHA: (Emphasizing every word calmly and matter-of-factly, while she allows Vinzenz to massage the parts of her body that were chafed by the rope) Coward! Betrayer! Egoist!

VINZENZ: (Carefully massaging) You could just as well have demanded of me that I should have jumped onto a train traveling at full speed.

ALPHA: (Standing up and walking toward Bärli) We are through! (Bärli nods absentmindedly.) I am going to rest for a while; I can no longer bear your presence; go! Go, the both of you!

BÄRLI: (Bolting the pistol and putting it away) Go and rest, Alpha, but allow me to sit here quietly and write a few farewell letters while you sleep next door.

ALPHA: Vinzenz! Show the gentleman out! And go with him!
VINZENZ: No, Alpha, how can I do that? I am on this gentleman’s side here. You must give him time. Can’t you just close the curtain while he orders his thoughts a bit?

ALPHA: (Extending her hand to Bärli) I liked you very much! But you will leave in an hour, and after I have awoken, I will never — see — you — again. (She goes behind the curtain, which she pulls closed. Sticking her head out once more.) Vinzenz! Send the guests away! (Movements of undressing, then her head comes out once more) No, the gentlemen can wait. But I will not be woken. (Once more, the same) You two gentlemen can talk without concern; it comforts me to hear your voices. (Exits.)

VINZENZ: Have you bolted your pistol? (Bärli checks.) Would you have anything against it, if I put it in this iron case here for safety’s sake?

BÄRLI: (Giving it to him) Keep the cowardly thing. It mutinied at the shooting of an “innocent” bystander, when you unexpectedly appeared. That was weak. I will never use this pistol again! Something like this can only happen in one rush.

VINZENZ: I understand and honor your position.

BÄRLI: You heard everything. I have exposed myself as ridiculous in front of you! Who are you, really? (They sit down.)

VINZENZ: In what sense do you mean?
PLAY FRAGMENTS
TEMPORA MAIER 67

Dramatis Personæ

TEMPORA MAIER, Time. (Loves boxers — not without a bad conscience — engineers, enterprising merchants, the Clemenceaus and [Romain] Rollands,68 etc. When it comes to writers, with condescension, the type of [Kasimir] Edschmid.69 — Loves health.)

TRUSTY MAIER, Wholesale Merchant

67. Draft from Musil’s Notebook, volume 19 (1919–1921). Written above the title, in pencil, presumably by Martha Musil, are the words: “Draft for a satirical drama.” See TB II, fn 142, 368. Although the passages are reproduced here as if they came one after the other, in the original hand-written text some of them have been inserted to the side of and parallel to the main text. I have also made some minor orthographical changes for consistency’s sake. While the German version in TB I includes words that have been crossed out by Musil, they have not been included here.

68. Romain Rolland, who was an outspoken pacifist during and after WWI, is compared here with the exemplary nationalist, anti-pacifist Clemenceau. See TB II, fn 143, 368.

69. Edschmid was a German writer, who initially allied himself with the Expressionists, but who took a turn back toward Realism in the mid-1920’s. At the time of this writing, Musil would probably have associated him with Expressionism.
FAUST BELLYPUNCH, World Master of Boxing

FOUNTAINMOUTH, Writer (possibly a second writer named TINCLANK)

DUMBEST and PARROT, National Assemblymen

FIEND and THINK, Satyrs

PASTOR OBSTIPATIUS SEIGERT

FAITHLEIN SEIGERT, His Daughter

EUGENIE BELLYPUNCH, Faust’s Grandmother

EGYDIUS GANTER, University Professor of Feuille-tonistics

(An idea that is held onto for longer than five minutes is already a compulsion. Except in economics.)

70. The word “Faust” in German does not only suggest the famous Dr. Faustus, but is also the word for “fist.”

71. On a loose sheet of paper, inserted into Notebook 19, Musil has written, under the title, “Satyrs”: “A socially-minded collective that is rich in models worthy of imitation and praise, that is rife with the spirit of harmony and spiritual sympathy, that is enlivened by intellectual interests and ruled by a spirit of justice and a love of beauty that provides from the outset every normal personality with a psychophysical attitude, etc.

The stimulation and the inspiration, the appreciation and the sympathy, the presentation of opportunities must always be accompanied by deliberate repression of misleading seductions, by conscientious warnings, by vivid antipathy for the unethical, the immoral, and the ugly…” (Appendix to Notebook 19, TB II, 1135).
A love story, on the second level. On the first, a satire [satyr play] about conditions that will come.

The butt of the satire is not Eugenics, but that which wants to be made eternal with the help of eugenics.

Journalistic writing: Perutz, Höllriegel,\textsuperscript{72} etc. has already created a dry, exact narrative style that has replaced the family magazine novel in the newspapers, for which they may, indeed, congratulate themselves. But they would say: we influence the people through the newspapers; more than can be said for you Ethico-Æsthetes. We have created the novelistic style of the times, which is precisely the newspaper style: intelligent, curious, chopped up into bits, etc.

One compares it to Dostoevsky, etc.

\textbf{ACT I}

\textit{Nature preserve near to a futuristic metropolis. View of a vast, delightful field, surrounded by trees. To the right and the left of the stage, the forest crowds in. On the right side, upfront, stands a single old tree; under it, a bench.}

\textbf{TEMPORA MAIER:} Well, this could be the place. I must admit that I feel a bit frightened. One hears such incredible stories about these satyrs.

\textsuperscript{72} Reference to Leo Perutz (1882–1957), playwright, short story writer, adventure fantasy novelist; Arnold Höllriegel (1883–1938) was a Berlin journalist and sometime editor of the Viennese newspaper, \textit{Der Tag}, travel writer, and short story writer.
**FAUST:** You couldn’t have chosen a better companion, Tempora. My right hand can knock down a two-year old bull. I can also dispatch a three-year old bull with five blows to his skull. (*They make themselves comfortable.*) It only took me 23 minutes to win the world championship and I can calculate that my hand (*wooing*) is worth 25,000 marks a minute.

**TEMPORA MAIER:** (*Changing the subject*) I am indescribably excited to find out who will win the Schiller Prize tomorrow for the best feuilleton of the last two years.

**FAUST:** Pschaw! Two thousand marks!

**TEMPORA MAIER:** That is only symbolic. You must know that spirit cannot be compensated with money. The choice is between Fountainmouth and Tinclank.

**FAUST:** On the occasion of my world championship fight, Tinclank wrote that my blows revealed more intuition than Goethe’s poems. — By the way, who was Goethe? — I think Tinclank is the better of the two. He has the modern spirit. But basically, all of them are merely imitative people, who only write words about other people’s actions.

**TEMPORA MAIER:** I must repeat to you again that you lack the proper understanding of spirit. I could never do without ingenious men like Fountainmouth and Tinclank. Only just consider, what it meant to all of
us, when Fountainmouth, in the Whitsuntide edition of *The Steelyard*, established how much our contemporary spirit, under the tutelage of the feuilleton, has become so much sharper and sprightlier than the ponderous breadth of former times.

**Faust:** That’s why we have a Professor of Feuilletonistics at the university. That’s more than enough.

**Tempora Maier:** You are a despiser of spirit, Faust Bellyblow.

**Faust:** Tempora, if I say university professor, I mean it in earnest. That is where these things belong. That is where they are put in order. It is calming to know they are there. But they have as little to do with me as a corpse in the anatomy department: excepting, of course, if I had hit him myself. The only thing that is alive is action; without thoughts!

Moreover, you interest yourself more than I like for this professor, Egydius Ganter. I assure you, when I see this man’s chest, I have to hold my nose. (*They both are silent; enraged.*)

**Tempora Maier:** (*After a while, sheepishly*) I am afraid, Faust Bellyblow. I have heard that these satyrs defile virgins.

**Faust:** In truth. But you are insulting me again! I have promised you that I would catch one of them live. Then *you* can defile *him*, or do whatever you want with him.
TEMPORA MAIER: You are crude, Faust!

FAUST: Forgive me. I was careless, and something that I read in the morning paper just flew into my mouth.

TEMPORA MAIER: Is it true then, that people want to apprehend these creatures, if they really exist, before the eugenic medicinal court?

FAUST: Of course, this is true. There is even supposed to be an expedition going out soon. And I think that they definitely should go before the eugenic medical tribunal.

TEMPORA MAIER: You are an expert on the higher Health Court?

FAUST: Precisely. There are few people among us who would be more competent to rule on questions of our healthy progeny.

TEMPORA MAIER: And what is really known about these satyrs?

FAUST: I must admit that I have never interested myself too much in the question. It is said that they once were important for poets. I mean, for people who, themselves, were like them. They are indecent.

TEMPORA MAIER: Oh! Horrors! Indecent!

FAUST: I must admit, I never was too interested in them. A relict of the bygone life of the mind.
(Some writers even today. They go searching in the woods. Blei and ... fall from a branch. The girl pleases him. Nostalgia. The party comes. Exits.)

(Faust and Tempora turn back. Engagement to be married. In fury, he catches one from a tree.)

FAUST: They are unhealthy.

TEMPORA MAIER: Pfui! Unhealthy?

FAUST: Yes, they are a repulsive remnant of an uncivilized past. (He takes his jump rope out of his bag and begins to jump over it like a child at play, swinging it from behind over his head and jumping over it with his feet.)

TEMPORA MAIER: What are you doing, Faust?

FAUST: I am training the flexors and the extensor muscles of my legs.

TEMPORA MAIER: I mean, why are you doing it so savagely, without culture? (Faust stops, questioningly.) You must practice body-spirit: in between every jump, one must raise one’s eyes to the sky, while thinking deep thoughts about Hellenic culture. This is the Greek form of pilgrimage. Soul and physical strength grow at the same rate.

FAUST: That bores me. (Weighs the rope in his hand before packing it away.) With this rope, I will catch one of the satyrs for you.
TEMPORA MAIER: You know, I passionately adore decency and health. But tell me: what actually does unhealthy and indecent mean?

FAUST: (After reflecting a while over this new question) I should think: whatever is neither decent nor healthy.

TEMPORA MAIER: That’s circular logic, Faust. Our strict, logical education does not allow for that.

FAUST: Perhaps you are right. But what counts as healthy is decided every year by our parliament, no? And what is decent simply need not be questioned by any healthy person.

TEMPORA MAIER: Yes, but what do these satyrs do?

(The whole society arrives. Egydius Ganter also, etc. Trusty Maier — pokes at Faust’s muscles: You are so enchantingly healthy, whole, etc. — Milrath from the World Evening Post. Socialistic wait-and-see battle plan. Capitalism gets increasingly stronger. But Socialism has become an institution of the Capitalistic world. The poor man lives badly and expensively — the rich man well and cheaply. The poor man gives evidence of great bravery, but does not have the civilian courage for a revolution. Thus, the rich man believes that the organization is good, because it makes the poor man manly.)

FAUST: Tempora, I must admit that I really have no idea about what they do. I simply do not know. One has never crossed my path nor insulted me, so that I might
take notice of him. But we shall go into the woods and I will catch one for you. Then you can ask him about anything you wish to know. I give you my word that the fellow will deliver his last truth to you. May I take your arm?

TEMPORA MAIER: It is too early. It is disobedient to go on, before the elders arrive.

FAUST: We will just go a little bit ahead; in fifteen minutes we will be back. (Tempora lays her arm upon his. Enamored, Faust continues) If a man hits me in the arm with a sledge hammer, its shaft will fly out of his hand, but if your arm lays upon it like a down feather, it trembles: I am neither a politician nor a scholar, but I am willing to bet that decent and healthy mean nothing more than this. (Both exit in the direction of the woods.)

(—? Men and women. Offspring of Harlequins and Columbines? Come out of the woods; not from the trees. Even libertinage is dull without resistance from society. —)

(Think and Fiend climb down from an old tree. Dark, strange, somewhat worn clothing. Fiend, the older one, looks like a gaunt man-about-town; Think, lyrical, spiritually passionate, young. They sit down, emotionally and physically exhausted, upon the grass.)

(Also: one of the satyrs is caught, the other one sneaks in disguised, and learns thus about this whole world. Fantastically checked clothing, tight trousers, a sort of waistcoat.)
Fiend very tall and lean. Think: a childish face with a little pointy nose .... Have you ever heard of such roguery? They are murdering spirit!)

FIEND: They will only stop spirit from being bred. Pitiful ....

THINK: They want to send out an expedition against us. Did you hear?

FIEND: Yes, my dear Think, they want to nip it in the bud. Poor boy — you haven’t even had much chance to make use of it yet.

THINK: Pathetic! This health sniveling! They want to treat the writers and intellectuals like robbers, alcoholics, and the terminally ill, to keep them from reproducing!

FIEND: The operation is not at all brutal and doesn’t hurt. — The operation doesn’t hurt and is spiritually very liberating. —

THINK: But consider the infamy!

FIEND: My dear young friend, I would not see it so terribly. Just think how far we have fallen in general, even without this. We had to remove ourselves into the woods and had to publish the newspapers, The Tree-Monastery and the Treetop from here. Well and good. We debate fiercely in these two newspapers about the meaning of the world. But we are not allowed to show ourselves in the world, beyond the woods or beyond these two
newspapers. The university and the daily papers are there for the intellectual. In school, one learns how to make verses. Morality is firmly established, and any ambiguities are handled by the Health Court. We have no social function. We also have no income. And for the last hundred years we are treated like a vacuum on all official public occasions. So that we did not starve, we have become accustomed to this animalistic life in the trees. But I admit to you that I am sick of living off the gifts of crazy women, who read our books because they have not found the right man. Am utterly sick of it. I couldn’t care less if they castrate me. On the contrary, that would free me from these women readers and it would all be a part of the world order. Did you, by the way, see the beautiful lady who was sitting here?

**THINK:** A giant calf with an even more gigantic butcher!

**FIEND:** Ach, I miss the world. It is what it is, but in any case, it is steady, warm, and eventful material. I am going to give up writing and become the manager of this boxer.

**THINK:** We’re too passive. We are the exceptions, the unique cases, etc.

**FIEND:** We have already let it go too far. In the law there is no exception, only a monstrosity.

**THINK:** We will finally make the people think about their private affairs, etc., just as I always vainly hoped to do.
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Although known principally for his modernist masterpiece, *The Man without Qualities*, Robert Musil (1880–1942) was also a playwright & drama critic. Musil’s plays and theatrical investigations, written between 1921–1929, are inseparable from his later literary work and from his lifelong commitment to art as a social & cultural activity. His brilliant plays and critical writings are not minor aspects of his artistic life, but essential works, preparing the way for and intrinsically connected to his great, unfinished novel.

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This is the third volume of Musil’s writings translated & introduced by Genese Grill and published by Contra Mundum Press.