

NIETZSCHE AND THE SELF: THE 'DISSOLUTION OF THE SUBJECT' IN
THE MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES BY ROBERT MUSIL
AND
THE DISCONNECTED BY OĐUZ ATAY

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Nietzsche and The Self: The ‘Dissolution of the Subject’ in
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and
The Disconnected by Oğuz Atay

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis discusses Nietzsche's critique of the constitution of the modern self and explores the ways in which this Nietzschean theme appears in literature. I will focus in particular on the Nietzschean theme of the dissolution of the subject as it appears in *The Man without Qualities* by Robert Musil (1880-1940) and *The Disconnected* by Oğuz Atay (1934-1977).

In the first chapter I investigate Nietzsche's critique of the modern constitution of the self and his own account of the self. In Chapter II, I treat Nietzsche's account of the self as an important background to *The Man without Qualities*, and in Chapter III, I do the same for *The Disconnected*. In doing this I not only attempt to indicate the positive meaning of the dissolution of the subject in these novels, but also seek to demonstrate how even experimental or exploratory approaches to the living of a life set limits to such an idea.

KISA ÖZET

NIETZSCHE VE 'BEN' KAVRAMI: 'ÖZHENİN ÇÖZÜLÜMÜ':

NİTELİKSİZ ADAM, ROBERT MUSİL

TUTUNAMAYANLAR, OĞUZ ATAY

Zeynep Talay

Bu tezde, Nietzsche'nin 'Ben' kavramına yaklaşımını ve bu yaklaşımın edebiyatta nasıl ele alındığını göstermeye çalıştım. Nietzscheci bir tema olan 'öznenin çözülümü' temasının Robert Musil'in *Niteliksiz Adam*'ında ve Oğuz Atay'ın *Tutunamayanlar*'ında nasıl ele alındığını vurguladım.

Birinci bölümde Nietzsche'nin 'Ben' kavramına getirdiği eleştiri ile kendisinin bu kavrama yaklaşımını, ikinci bölümde 'Öznenin Çözülümü' temasının *Niteliksiz Adam*'da, üçüncü bölümde ise bu konunun *Tutunamayanlar*'da nasıl işlendiği üzerinde durdum. Ancak bunu yaparken, bu temanın her iki yazar tarafından da sadece olumlu olarak ele alınmadığını, aynı zamanda eleştirildiğini de vurgulamaya çalıştım.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Martin Heidegger, the modern age 'is defined by the fact that man becomes the measure and centre of being.'¹ It began when Descartes posited the cogito as the foundation of being, and ended with Nietzsche's critique of it. It is this end, and its consequences, that will be of concern here. In this thesis my aim is not only to discuss Nietzsche's critique of the constitution of the modern self, but also to explore the ways in which this Nietzschean theme appears in literature. I will focus in particular on Nietzschean motifs in the writings of Robert Musil (1880-1940) and Oğuz Atay (1934-1977). In both writers, the theme of the 'dissolution of the subject' is central to an understanding of their work.

I begin with a brief overview of Nietzsche's position. According to Nietzsche, Descartes' formulation of the thinking 'I' and his formulation of the *a priori* belief in the 'I' as a substance is based upon a mistake. Descartes argues that 'if there is a thought there must be a thinker' and consequently, the existence of the 'I' is certain. Substance is given an *a priori* status and it is conceived as something beyond experience. Thinking, which is the basic ground of existence, is inseparable from the 'I', so that the 'I' can be found with certainty in its act of thinking. In the *Second Meditation*, Descartes states: 'I *am* a thinking thing, which is real, which *truly exists*.' Nietzsche criticizes the Cartesian account of the nature of 'I' which gives priority to the 'thinking act' of the knower over what is known; he also rejects the term *true existence*, for such an ontology is merely a projection of language:

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1991), p. 28.

Language everywhere sees a doer and doing; it believes in the ego, in the ego as being, as substance and it projects this faith in the ego substance upon all things –only thereby does it first create the concept of a “thing”...the concept of being follows and is derivative of the concept of ego.²

In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche writes: ‘There is no such substratum; there is no being behind doing, effecting, becoming; the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed- the deed is everything.’³ The subject is a mere fiction or an addition; it becomes merely a product of the conceptual structure of philological, psychological, ontological and epistemological frameworks. Correspondingly, Nietzsche rejects the idea that regards the self as something that has an idealized unity and an identity.

As is well known, the basic problem that Nietzsche deals with is ‘how one becomes what one is’, that is to say, becomes a creative individual who wills his\her will. This is not obviously an ethical question but – despite the *Übermensch* - in Nietzsche’s hands it is. But ethics here does not primarily rest on our relation with others, but on our relation with ourselves, on the art of self-mastery and self-governance. In that sense, becoming what one is means being engaged in a constant process of affirmation of one’s own experiences and actions; of enlarging the capacity for assuming responsibility for oneself; this Nietzsche calls ‘freedom’.⁴ Moreover, his critique of the constitution of modern subjectivity is inseparable from his critique of the bourgeois-Christian subjectivity of his era.

In *Daybreak* Nietzsche draws our attention to the tension between culture and the individual, yet, his understanding of the ‘dissolution of the subject’ in his

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), I, 5.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 13. Hereafter *OGM*

⁴ Nietzsche, *Twilight*, p. 38.

criticism of culture is also the positive definition of the overman. The elements of the ‘dissolution of the subject’ – of the Ego, of form - which constitute the key to Nietzsche’s work as criticism of culture are not pure symptoms of decadence. While it is true that Nietzsche regards culture as a tyranny against nature, he also believes that there is a selective object of culture which functions as forming a man capable of making use of the future, a free and powerful individual who is active. Moreover, he writes ‘any custom is better than no custom.’⁵ In that sense, Nietzsche does not simply reject culture; nor does he suggest going back to nature. He criticizes a particular culture; bourgeois-Christian culture which regards the subject as the centre of meaning and which is inseparable from the Cartesian conception of the self. According to Nietzsche, the aim of the modern project is to tame the ‘human animal’ and to give birth to a certain type of modern subject: a rational human being who has freedom of the will, where this freedom means being able to subjugate oneself to a universal moral law. It also entails an *agential self* who can be separated from its actions.

According to Nietzsche his era is lacking in true philosophers, free spirits who will transform the culture, who will revalue the values. In that sense, the overman is not coming in an unknown future, she is precisely the individual without a centre, or, to anticipate the discussion in Chapter 2, the individual without qualities. Gianni Vattimo insists that ‘dissolution is what positively characterizes the overman.’⁶ Nietzsche’s overman is the result of liberating our potentialities for life from the restrictive concepts of man or human essence.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 16.

⁶ Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 160.

Now ‘dissolution of the subject’, of the Ego or ‘form’, is an important theme of early 20th century avant-garde literature, and it is no accident that Vattimo refers to Robert Musil as an example. Musil, born in Klagenfurt, in 1880, who was almost unknown except to a small circle of readers, is one of the great figures in German literature and one of the most remarkable in the history of the modern novel.⁷ His major work *The Man without Qualities* was begun early in the twenties, and the first volume was published in 1930. Although Musil died before he could finish the novel, it is one of the longest in literature.

The Man without Qualities is set in Vienna in 1913, and presents the pains and conflicts of the individuals and the degenerated morality of the bourgeois order through the eyes of its central character, the 32-year-old Ulrich. A synopsis of the novel is made difficult not only by its length and complexity, but also by the fact that the ‘action’ does not take place so much in the conduct of the characters or through events, but within the minds of the protagonists, so that we read of their emotions, the conflicts between their thoughts and behavior, and their relations to each other, especially to *The Man without Qualities* – Ulrich - himself. I will focus on one central aspect of this complex web of representations of subjective reality in the novel: the ‘dissolution of the subject’ as a condition of becoming a ‘man without qualities’. By means of this focus, I will also attempt to explore Musil’s critique of the bourgeois order of his era since, like Nietzsche's, his critique of the constitution of modern subjectivity is inseparable from his critique of the culture and morality of his era.

Like Nietzsche, Musil criticizes the Cartesian conception of the self and he supports the notion of the infinite possibilities of existence, which demands the

⁷ Ernst Kaiser, and Eithne Wilkins, foreword in Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (London: Picador, 1982), viii.

‘dissolution of the subject.’ On the other hand, what makes Musil different is that he realizes his critique through literature. The positive meaning of the ‘dissolution of the subject’ and the corresponding understanding of the subject in the process of ‘becoming’ is also encountered in Musil. As a faithful follower of Nietzsche, he suggests the recognition of a new understanding of morality, what he calls ‘a trying morality.’ The protagonist Ulrich rejects the morality of his era, seeks ways of creating his own values and wishes to experience his individual freedom. Ulrich, who is ‘a man without qualities’, claims that people have to live ‘hypothetically.’ Such a person ‘suspects that the given order of things is not as solid as it pretends to be; no thing, no self, no form, no principle is safe, everything is undergoing an invisible but ceaseless transformation, the unsettled holds more of the future than the settled, and the present is nothing but a hypothesis that has not yet been surmounted.’⁸ Ulrich refuses to become a professor, he refuses to take sides or indeed ‘be’ anything. His neutrality is stressed by the fact that his surname is never mentioned throughout the novel.⁹ Such a person wishes to free himself/herself from the world in which the rules are ready-made. Ulrich appreciates an experimental life which enables one to be open to new experiences – or as Nietzsche calls them, the ‘possibilities of life’. As Ulrich’s friend tells his wife Clarisse:

‘He is a man without qualities.’

‘What is that?’ Clarisse asked, with a little laugh.

‘Nothing. That is the point- it is nothing!... You cannot guess at any profession from what he looks like, and yet he does not look like a man who has no profession, either.....Nothing is stable for him. Everything is fluctuating, a part of a whole, among innumerable wholes that are presumably part of a super-whole, which, however, he does not 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, and whatever a thing is, it does not matter to him what it is, it is

⁸ Vattimo, p. 269

only some accompanying ‘way in which it is’, some addition or other, that matters to him.’¹⁰

As I mentioned earlier, Nietzsche’s ‘dissolution of the subject’ is one of the main themes in Musil’s novel. Just as Vattimo refers to Musil as an important yet oddly isolated figure in 20th century avant-garde literature, so does Berna Moran refer to the Turkish writer Oğuz Atay.

According to Moran, *The Disconnected*, written in 1968, was written in an atmosphere in which realist novels which aim to enlighten and inform people were respected and ‘formalism and individualism were counted among aesthetic crimes.’¹¹ Considering the general atmosphere and the trends in Turkish literature of this era *The Disconnected* can be regarded as an avant-garde novel for 1968 in terms of its style and its subject, which handles the inner conflicts of individuals. As Moran says, *The Disconnected* is a novel ‘which has turned its back on the realism of the 19th century, with one foot in modernism and the other in post-modernism.’¹² As Chapter 2 will suggest, Musil’s novel, written half a century earlier, might be said to have one foot in modernism and one in realism.

Like the Musilian subject, Atay’s subjects suffer from being groundless. As we have said, according to Heidegger, the modern age ‘is defined by the fact that man becomes the measure and centre of being’¹³ and this era began when Descartes posited the cogito as the foundation of being. Suna Ertuğrul draws our attention to the critique, in *The Disconnected*, of the Cartesian account of the subject, which

¹⁰ Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, trans. Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike (London: Picador, 1995), pp. 62-63.

¹¹ Yıldız Ecevit, “Ben Buradayım....”: Oğuz Atay’ın Biyografik ve Kurmaca Dünyası (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005), p. 235.

¹² Berna Moran, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1992), V;2, p. 199.

¹³ Heidegger, p. 28.

regards the subject as a fixed identity and which assumes a human essence. She states that the impossibility of subjectivity as the ground of meaning is revealed in the works of Atay and as opposed to the modern project that grounds meaning in the unity of the subject, Atay's novel indicates the limits of this supposed unity.¹⁴

The Disconnected begins with the protagonist Turgut receiving the news that his friend Selim has committed suicide and left a letter for Turgut behind him. The death of Selim and this letter shatter the everyday order in which silence and acceptance are dominant and lead Turgut to question his own situation. We encounter the protagonist Selim as impersonal, freed from fixed identities and fixed ideas. He is in a position of lack and imitation, in other words, of non-position, which provokes the question of human essence and identity. This groundlessness leads Selim to a constant search for identity; yet, this is a search for something which is not there. Throughout the novel the reader follows Turgut's becoming disconnected by following the traces of Selim. In other words, Turgut learns how to be in a position of lack and imitation by imitating Selim. The 'dissolution of the subject' is an important theme in *The Disconnected*; but it has different consequences from those that face *The Man without Qualities*.

Like Musil's Ulrich, Selim and Turgut are constantly questioning the artificiality of the bourgeois order and of the identities reproduced by it. Both reject it, yet, both seek ways of experiencing their individual freedom within it. In *The Disconnected*, the critique of the modern project that grounds meaning in the unity of the subject and human essence and the critique of the bourgeois order is also a commentary on Turkey in the 1960s, as is Musil's novel on Austria in 1913.

¹⁴ Suna Ertuğrul, "Belated Modernity and Modernity as Belatedness in *Tutunamayanlar*" *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, No. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2003), pp. 629-645.

In the first chapter I will focus on Nietzsche's critique of the concept of the 'self' in the context of western metaphysics. Nietzsche claims that the constitution of the modern concept of the 'self' is inseparable from the context of culture, particularly bourgeois-Christian culture – morality - of his era. However, before the discussion of this, I will present Nietzsche's critique of the distinctions between subject-object and cause-effect, since this provides the theoretical foundation for the modern conception of the 'self'. Then, I will focus on the positive meaning of the 'dissolution of the subject' since according to Nietzsche it is imperative to create our own future.

In the second chapter I will explore the influence of Nietzsche's account of the 'self' on *The Man without Qualities*. Through the relationship between the antagonist Ulrich and the other characters in the novel, Musil questions the taken-for-granted morality of his era and searches for new possibilities of life. In that sense, the Musilian subject in general - Ulrich in particular- is the one who does not simply say 'No' but who is engaged in a process of affirmation of life; of enlarging the capacity for assuming responsibility for oneself, which Nietzsche calls 'freedom'.¹⁵ Musil's subject is the one who attempts to create his/her own will.

In the last chapter, I will focus on *The Disconnected*. Atay's Selim and Turgut, like Ulrich, reject the existing order of society, yet, compared to Ulrich, they never appear to be in control of the processes of exploration that they undertake. Ulrich's search for the other condition is a kind of experiment and he, as a trained scientist, knows it to be an experiment from which he may withdraw; Selim and Turgut are involved in something that, once begun, seems difficult to stop, except by means of suicide (Selim) or escape (Turgut).

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight*, IX:38

The two novels were written in different times and different places, and so it is no surprise that, although they may have themes in common - the critique of the constitution of the modern 'self' and the 'dissolution of the subject', the creation of values and individual freedom – they are handled differently. While Ulrich does, to a certain extent, manage to live his life hypothetically, Selim and Turgut cannot realize that aim in their society. The cultural and historical differences that might have influenced the attitudes of the characters cannot be explored here. Instead, I will attempt to explore both Atay's and Musil's critique of the modern conception of the subject, in other words what it means to be a 'man without qualities' or to be 'disconnected'.

CHAPTER 1. NIETZSCHE: THE 'DISSOLUTION OF THE SUBJECT'

I. The 'Self'

A central feature of Nietzsche's philosophy is his account of the constitution of the modern 'self', and at the heart of this account is the link between this 'self' and the moral context in which it arises. This is more than a 'link', for Nietzsche fastens on what he calls the 'moralization of the self' that begins not in the modern age but with the constitution of the 'agential self' in Christianity; moreover, this moralization represents the triumph of what he calls 'slave morality', central to which is the idea of the self as a unique identity or essence. This idea of the 'self' is the object of Nietzsche's critique, a critique that provides the basis for his own ideal of selfhood.

However, before we inquire into this, we should say something about conceptions of the 'self' in different eras. It is clear that ancient philosophers had accounts of 'self'. The 'self' in the ancient philosophers is seldom identical with the soul. Sometimes it is connected with only one aspect of the soul or a part of the soul to be distinguished from the shade or ghost. Sometimes it is the body, or includes the body along with the whole person. The idea of a true 'self' goes back as far as Homer. For Plato, the true 'self' is the reason or intellect.¹⁶ Michel Foucault famously argued that the 'care of the self' was a fundamental attitude throughout Greek, Hellenistic and Roman culture. Socrates, for instance, is always associated with the notion of 'caring for oneself.' The notion of the 'care of the self' was

¹⁶ For further discussion about the concept of the 'self' in ancient philosophers see Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life and Death*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

important for Plato, as well as for Epicureans, Cynics and Stoics. This notion of the ‘care of oneself’ is also found in Christianity.¹⁷

Although our aim is not to discuss these accounts of the ‘self’ in ancient philosophy in any detail but simply to acknowledge their existence, it is important to observe some distinctions. Foucault asserts that the notion of ‘taking care of oneself’, which is the basis of the constitution of morality in the first century B.C. and the first century A.D. (Stoic, Cynic, and to a certain extent Epicurean morality), signifies for us either egoism or withdrawal. But the precept of ‘care of the self’ was a positive principle which was the matrix for strict moralities. This notion reappears transposed in Christian morality or in a ‘modern’ non-Christian morality. However, it reappears only within a context of a general ethic of non-egoism, taking the form either of a Christian obligation of self-renunciation or of a ‘modern’ obligation towards others.¹⁸ Although we cannot explore Nietzsche’s critique of Christian morality in any detail, it is important to understand that this critique has a crucial place in Nietzsche’s own account of the ‘self’. Nietzsche claims that the constitution of the modern concept of the subject or the Cartesian conception of the subject has its roots in Christian morality.

Nietzsche rejects the idea of the ‘self’ as an idealized unity. He criticizes ‘idealism’ for ignoring the claim of the body and neglecting the impact of psychological factors upon our apprehension of the world. In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche writes: There is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming. In order to understand Nietzsche’s own account of the ‘self’, we should focus on his

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) pp. 8-10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

critique of Western metaphysics and correspondingly, the Cartesian conception of the self.

II. Subject-Object and Cause-Effect

In Nietzsche's view, western rationality presupposes a distinction between subject and object, and interprets events according to this distinction. Nietzsche claims that our activity in the world is separated into operations of the 'self' as 'subject', and the world as 'object'. Underlying these distinctions is the false belief in an *I* that does something, *has* something and *has* a quality. In the modern conception the 'subject' is considered as given and it is abstracted from all contingencies. However, according to Nietzsche, the distinction between subject and object is simply the projection of the subject–predicate relationship that characterizes the grammar of our language onto the structure of the world: 'The inference here is made in accordance with the habit of grammar: thinking is an activity, to every activity pertains one who acts.'¹⁹

Nietzsche argues that the projection of the distinction between subject and predicate onto the world is a consequence of the mistaken belief that the 'will' is something that produces effects.²⁰ From the perspective of the subject, it is believed that in every event there is an aim that is regarded as its cause. This cause-effect pattern can be found in the framework of the Cartesian tradition. Thus, in the Cartesian method of doubt, the belief in subjective introspection leads to the belief in 'thinking'. Correspondingly, the same causal relationship is transferred to the

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: prelude to a philosophy of future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), p. 17.

²⁰ Nietzsche, "Reason in Philosophy" *Twilight*, 5.

interpretation of every action within the model of the distinction of doer and deed.

All deeds are caused by a doer.

In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche claims that human beings have a need for such causality; finding a cause for an event stabilizes experience, replacing something changing and indefinite with something unchanging and predictable. Yet rather than being a search for the circumstances on which the emergence of an experience or an event depends, this tendency to establish a cause and effect relationship is nothing but a way of giving meaning to the present. There are two psychological tendencies that lead human beings to impose a cause-effect formula on or seek a cause-effect relation in events. The first is a belief in the subject as doer, as the causal agent performing deeds:

That is not the great habit of seeing one occurrence following another but our inability to interpret events otherwise than as events caused by intentions. It is belief in living and thinking as the only effective force - in will, in intention- it is belief that every event is a deed, that every deed presupposes a doer, it is belief in the 'subject.'²¹

The second is the desire to familiarize experience and overcome anxiety and danger:

The supposed instinct for causality is only fear of the unfamiliar and the attempt to discover something familiar in it- a search not for causes, but for the familiar and the attempt to discover something familiar in it.²²

Taken together, the need to believe in the existence of a subject, and the need to render events familiar, express nothing more than a desire for the self-preservation of the human being and for the preservation of the existing order. Moreover, 'The *calculability of an event* does not reside in the fact that a rule is adhered to, or that a necessity is obeyed, or that a law of causality has been projected by us into every

²¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 550, p. 295. Hereafter *WP*.

²² Nietzsche, *WP*, 551, p. 297.

event: it resides in the *recurrence of identical cases*.²³ In this regard, Nietzsche attempts to disrupt the division of subject and object by exposing what drives philosophers to make this division in the first place:

In order for a particular species to maintain itself and increase its power, its conception of reality must comprehend enough of the calculable and constant for it to base a scheme of behavior on it. The utility of preservation –not some abstract, theoretical need not to be deceived– stands as the motive behind the development of the organs of knowledge– they develop in such a way that their observations suffice for our preservation. In other words: the measure of desire for knowledge depends upon the measure to which will to power grows in a species: a species grasps a certain amount of reality in order to become master of it, in order to press into service.²⁴

From the perspective of the subject the explanation of an event goes through two steps: First ‘through mental images of the event that precede it (aims); secondly: through mental images that succeed it (the mathematical-physical explanation).’²⁵ We assume that in every event there is an aim that is interpreted as the *cause* of that event. In other words, we seek a doer in every event. Concepts such as the thing as effect, the subject as doer, the will as something that produces effects are all inherent in the concept of ‘cause’, and lead to the creation of the ‘effective subject’, or the self of Western rationality and metaphysics, who is ‘agential’ and has ‘reason’ and ‘free will’. Cause and effect are transformed into other distinctions such as doer and deed, agent and action.

Nietzsche criticizes the distinction between subject and object, cause and effect since these distinction serves as a theoretical foundation for the modern conception of the ‘agential self’. According to Nietzsche, the constitution of modern subjectivity is inseparable from the morality of his era; 19th century bourgeois-Christian morality. The standards of evaluation in Christian morality are such as to

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 480, p. 266, 267.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 562, p. 303.

impose an *unconditioned ought* and the *universality of the law of reason* which apply to all human beings. This is coupled with the idea that only free human action, action performed with the freedom of the will, can have moral value. Considering these assumptions, the actions of human beings are evaluated as ‘good’ or ‘evil,’ depending on human choices. As a result the agent is regarded responsible for his or her choices. As a whole, this kind of morality applies to a free, rational human being: a *moral agent*. Nietzsche claims that the aim of the modern project is to tame the ‘human animal’ and to give birth to a certain type of modern subject: a rational human being who has freedom of the will, and who can be subjugated to the universal moral law; an *agential self* who can be separated from its actions. In his book, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche writes: ‘the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed- the deed is everything.’²⁶ The subject is a mere fiction. In other words, the ‘dissolution of the subject’ is imperative to ‘become what one is’. This raises the question: what does the ‘dissolution of the subject’ mean in Nietzsche’s philosophy?

III. Self-Mastery, Negation and Affirmation

As we have seen, Nietzsche criticizes the modern notion of the ‘self’ which is comprehended through the concept of the subject (having an idealized unity underlying all its attributes) and of substance (as an entity with an ontological privilege). On the other hand, for many commentators, Nietzsche does not suggest a final message or maintain a philosophical doctrine, although he criticizes Western metaphysics and the concept of the ‘self’ in this context. Nietzsche, in fact, is

²⁶ Nietzsche, *OGM*, p. 13.

generally occupied with the problem of ‘higher humanity’, in other words, he asks: ‘how can we reverse the decline of modern culture?’ If his texts are read systematically, one can hardly fail to see the persistence of certain themes. Sometimes Nietzsche frames his question in terms of master and slave moralities, sometimes in terms of overman and its opposite, the last man. Yet, the basic problem that he deals with is ‘how one becomes what one is’, that is to say, how the human being can be a creative individual who wills his/her own will. He attempts to liberate our potentialities for life from the concept of man or the human essence, which hinders us. In that sense, it is not surprising that Nietzsche does not suggest a systematic philosophical principle. Rather, he aims to overcome the fixed oppositions, whether they are between mind and body, subject and object, ‘free will’ and determinism, which constrain our philosophical thinking.

In that sense, Nietzsche is concerned with ethics, but it is an ethics which does not primarily rest on our relation with others, but on our relation with ourselves, on the art of self-mastery and self-governance.²⁷ Nietzsche claims that in order to learn to ‘become what one is’ one should first learn to destroy oneself. In other words, one should lose his/her belief in Cartesian subjectivity, that is to say, the ‘dissolution of the subject’ is the imperative on the art of self-mastery.

In *Daybreak* Nietzsche argues that morality is obedience to custom. According to this approach, a moral person is the one who abides by the rules and traditions, and makes his or her own evaluations within these traditions. A common moral understanding has a function of bringing the members of a society together as

²⁷ It was this aspect of Nietzsche’s thought that was taken up by Foucault who, in his analysis of the art of governance, turns to the Greek understanding of self and Christian morality. In antiquity, training to achieve self-governance was not different from the training necessary to govern others. Such training was not separate from the process of constituting oneself as a free person. Foucault argues that in antiquity, the work on the self is not imposed on the individual by means of civil law or religious obligation, but is a choice about existence made by the individual. In that sense, people decide for themselves whether or not to care themselves.

well as ensuring the integrity and continuity of that society. The individual obeys tradition not because what it commands is useful to oneself but because it simply commands. The most moral man is the one who obeys for the sake of the society, in other words, the one who sacrifices himself. It is against this background that the idea of self-overcoming makes sense:

Self-overcoming is demanded, not on account of the useful consequences it may have for the individual, but so that the hegemony of the custom, tradition shall be made evident in despite of the private desires and advantages of the individual: the individual is to sacrifice himself- that is the commandment of the morality of custom.²⁸

Nietzsche draws the obvious conclusion:

The free human being is immoral because in all things he is *determined* to depend upon himself and not upon a tradition: in all the original conditions of mankind, 'evil' signifies the same as 'individual', 'free', 'capricious', 'unusual', 'unforeseen', 'incalculable'. Judged by the standard of these conditions, if an action is performed *not* because the tradition commands it but for other motives (because of its usefulness to the individual, for example), even indeed for precisely the motives which once founded the tradition, it is called immoral and is felt to be so by him who performed it: for it was not performed in obedience to tradition.²⁹

Vattimo draws our attention to the two lines of the critique of culture – morality - that Nietzsche proposes in *Daybreak*, which converge on an outcome of dissolution. On the one hand, custom – morality - is unmasked as a set of principles intended not for the good of the individual but for the continuity of the society. In that sense, morality asks the individual to sacrifice him\herself. Does it mean that Nietzsche attempts to appreciate individuality over the group or the society? The answer is no, since in the second line of his critique Nietzsche proceeds to negate the individual as an alternative to set against the claims of the collectivity. According to Nietzsche, 'morality is negated not on the basis that whoever claims to act for certain motives is

²⁸ Nietzsche, *Daybreak* 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

really driven by others (interests, passions, hopes of reward), but on the basis that nobody can indicate the true motives of their actions even if she wished to, because actions are too complex to know, even by those who perform them.’³⁰ This amounts to denying the modern conception of the self – Cartesian self - which regards the subject as an idealized unity, in other words, to demanding the ‘dissolution of the subject’. This raises the question of how it is possible to affirm life in a society in which self-denial is demanded, how one can become a creative individual who wills his/her own will, how one can be his/her own master.

For some commentators, Nietzsche appreciates nature over culture and his criticism of his era does not offer a solution. Yet, we should note that Nietzsche does not simply reject culture; nor does he suggest going back to nature. In *Daybreak* he draws our attention to the tension between culture and the individual; yet, his understanding of the ‘dissolution of the subject’ in his criticism of culture is also the positive definition of the overman. The elements of the ‘dissolution of the subject’ – of the Ego, of form - which constitute the key to Nietzsche’s work as criticism of culture are not pure symptoms of decadence. While it is true that Nietzsche regards culture as a tyranny against nature, he also believes that may be a form of culture that can give rise to, or ‘select’ a human being capable of making use of the future, a free and powerful individual who is active. He criticizes a particular culture, that is to say, bourgeois-Christian culture of his era, which is inseparable from the Cartesian conception of the modern self.

So culture creates the individuals, yet, it is the individual who will overcome culture. In a section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* entitled “On the Three Metamorphoses”, Nietzsche offers a dynamic relationship between the individual

³⁰ Vattimo, p. 161.

and culture by pointing to three moments symbolized by the camel, the lion, and the child. The spirit incorporates the tradition before he/she finds the strength to challenge it, then through the incorporation of the previous stages, he/she creates a new perspective. In symbolic terms, the lion says ‘no’ to life, before being transformed into a child capable of saying ‘yes’: affirmation is preceded by a negation: ‘*Destruction as the active destruction of the man who wants to perish and to be overcome* announces the creator.’³¹ What does Nietzsche mean by ‘active destruction’?

Nietzsche defines nihilism as a historical and cultural process in which the highest human values reach a point of devaluation: ‘*That the highest values devalue themselves*. The aim is lacking.’³² But Nietzsche thinks that nihilism is also an attitude, and that there are two types. The passive nihilist is one who recognizes the process of devaluation but interprets this to mean that, if the old values have devalued themselves, no new values can be imagined that might take their place. He or she says ‘No’ once his or her existence – the belief in subject - has lost its meaning. People like this experience a dissolution of the subject in the same way that some Christians experience the rise of science, as a sign that their world has collapsed. Active nihilism not only says no to taken-for-granted values, but sees this as a relief from a burden and says ‘Yes!’ to the life. Active nihilism represents a new beginning and a new way of thinking associated with the affirmation of life. ‘Becoming what one is’ means being engaged in a constantly continuing process of affirmation of one’s own experiences and actions; of enlarging the capacity for assuming responsibility for oneself. Nietzsche says: ‘My formula for this is *amour*

³¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: The Athlete Press, 1983), pp. 177-178.

³² Nietzsche, *WP*, p. 9.

fati' because 'what returns, what finally comes home to me is my own self.'³³ This implies a particular attitude to the past. No longer is the past something to be rejected or feared, something that is filled with things that simply 'happened' as the inevitable order of things. The revaluation of values is 'to redeem the past and to transform every 'It was' into an 'I wanted it thus!' – that alone do I call redemption!'³⁴ But this redemption, as the absolute affirmation of life is also the acceptance of the idea that 'the subject is not' and there are only becomings, 'possibilities of life'.

What Nietzsche attempts to introduce is a new moral understanding and only as a result of such an evaluation can a person free himself or herself from accepted morality, from the molded and frozen moral concepts, and finally put forward what he called a 'trying morality' and a 'self-targeting' moral understanding. I will employ this term when 'trying' to understand the idea of possibility as it is discussed in Musil. This idea of possibility is not an intertextual matter for the interpreter to notice. Musil describes Ulrich as a man of possibility on many occasions and he does so because of his own engagement with Nietzsche's ideas.

IV. The 'Art of Living'

As opposed to Cartesian metaphysics Nietzsche claims that there is not such a thing as 'the-thing-in-itself'. Nothing in the world has any intrinsic features of its own and each thing is constituted through its interrelations with everything else. This means 'in the actual world, in which everything is bound to and conditioned by everything

³³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), III: 1.

³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 275.

else, to condemn and to think away anything means to condemn and to think away everything.³⁵ Of course this naturalist understanding is not a new issue in history and science, yet, Nietzsche goes one step further by applying his understanding of ‘a thing is sum of its effects’ to the case of the human subject. To be a ‘subject’ who can say ‘I’ is a continual process of integrating one’s habits and actions with one another. It is the awareness of the fact that the world is a dynamic whole and one must be capable of interpreting new actions and of becoming part of this whole. This activity in Nietzsche’s term is the ‘art of living’.

In this understanding ‘what one does is’ is an expression of one whole ‘self’. This view denotes a new understanding of morality which can be called the ‘ethics of creativity.’³⁶ This means the ‘self’ is the creation and interpretation. The creation of the ‘self’ is to develop the ability and to accept the responsibility for everything we have done since what we have done constitutes us. Nietzsche’s ethics goes beyond the limits of morality and in fact, this is where Nietzsche’s ethics and aesthetics come close to each other. The ‘self’ is not something that must be discovered but be created. It is due to this understanding that life and art becomes the two sides of the same coin.

According to Nietzsche the discovery of our true life can be made through the creation of a work of art and this view captures his view of ‘to become what one is’. Literary and artistic models were always important for Nietzsche to understand the world:

We should learn from artists while being wiser than they are in other matters. For with them this subtle power (of arranging, of making things beautiful)

³⁵ Nietzsche, *WP*, p. 584.

³⁶ Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge: Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1995), chp. 7.

usually comes to an end where art ends and life begins; but we want to be the poets of our life – first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters’.³⁷

Alexander Nehamas draws our attention to Nietzsche’s understanding which conceives the world as a text and the self as a literary character. In narratives, literary characters are nothing, more or less, than what is said of them. Any change in one action of the character results in changes to the character and to the story as well, thus, creating a different story and a different character.³⁸ The idea of regarding the world as a text and the self as a literary character blurs the distinction between fiction and fact.

Nietzsche says that we should learn from artists while being wiser than they are in other matters. Of course, Nietzsche could only be referring to artists and writers who had preceded him. The writers who came after Nietzsche could not avoid being aware of some of his ideas even if they did not entirely understand them. Nietzsche’s work and his blurring of the boundaries between ethics and aesthetics were a challenge to writers in the German speaking world immediately after his death and became a challenge to writers throughout the world after his work became more widely available.

One of those German speaking writers was the Austrian Robert Musil. When Musil said that the problems he was trying to solve could be solved better by literature than by philosophy he was speaking with a Nietzschean voice. To take one example: one important chapter of *The Man without Qualities* discusses the idea of ‘essayism’; essayism in philosophy already has Nietzschean overtones, but Musil takes this further and treats this style of writing as a model for a style of living. I will

³⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 299.

³⁸ For further discussion of the relation between literature and Nietzsche’s philosophy, see Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Harvard University Press, 1985), chp. 5.

attempt to indicate that there is an affinity between ‘essayism’ as a way of writing and living and what I will call Nietzsche’s ‘trying morality’.

Another who takes up Nietzschean philosophical themes and adapts them to literature is the Turkish writer Oğuz Atay. *The Disconnected* depicts a process in which the central character Turgut reads the manuscripts – diaries, plays, essays, letters – of his friend Selim who has recently committed suicide. These manuscripts contain numerous references to artists and writers of the past from whom Selim has tried to learn. However, it is doubtful whether he is wiser than them – in Nietzsche’s sense a philosopher. Whether Turgut is wiser than Selim is equally doubtful. But in so far as both Selim and Turgut become writers without becoming philosophers they learn how to be disconnected and with it a certain sort of creativity: Selim becomes a creator in spite of his efforts to discover a stable basis for his subjectivity; Turgut becomes a creator through understanding the ultimate futility of Selim’s efforts. But Turgut’s creativity is something more: Turgut makes both his and Selim’s voices heard: *The Disconnected* is apparently a novel by the philosopher-writer Oğuz Atay, yet, it is a sign of his understanding of Nietzsche’s point about the relative possibilities of philosophy and literature that the first chapter of *The Disconnected* contains a scene in which Turgut presents a journalist with a copy of a book he has written. Its title: *The Disconnected*.

CHAPTER 2. *THE MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES*

I. Introduction

In *The Man without Qualities*, the events take place on three levels: on the first level, the decline of the Austrian Monarchy; on the second, the decadence not only of Austria but of the whole world and the situation of the people in such a world; and on the third philosophical level, the problem of reality. Musil addresses each of these levels separately but also connects them by means of problems and events that recur throughout the novel. The novel also contains many characters, just as one might find in a realist novel. But the experimental or avant-garde character of Musil's work consists in the fact that the action and the characters have been selected to emphasize that, behind the order that seems to be working when seen from the outside, nothing works properly, the individuals do not have anything to hold on to, and this corruption generates ailing individuals.

Perhaps the most prominent recurring event or action is the symbolic project called the Parallel Campaign. The novel is set in 1913 and, partly in response to the German celebrations of the one hundredth anniversary of the defeat of Napoleon at Leipzig, a project has been announced to celebrate the jubilee of the Austrian Emperor. The problem is that the Habsburg Empire, which in the novel is referred to as *Kakanien*, lacks the integrity of a nation or a multinational empire.³⁹ Musil describes in an ironic way how the characters in the novel gather around the Parallel Campaign, and how the individuals of a country which lacks a central willpower try

³⁹ *Kakanien* is a play on words that takes the semi-official phrase 'Kaiserlich und Koniglich' (imperial and magisterial) and turns it into a means of satire. The first part of 'Kakanien' is 'kaka', which in Italian and also in Turkish means 'shit' or 'rubbish'.

to generate a purpose and a leading idea in order to provide social cohesion. The hero of the novel, Ulrich, is able to see the absurdity of this, but also the social decadence that it represents.

Ulrich learns about the Parallel Campaign from a letter he receives from his patriotic father, who explains that the Austrian Year will be the year of a great peace jubilee, a great irony considering the conditions of the world in general and especially the situation of Austria. The starting point of the Parallel Campaign, which is administered by Count Leinsdorf and the Head of the Department Tuzzi's beautiful wife Diotima, who is a cousin of Ulrich's, is that 'something must be done.' However, nobody knows anything about what is to be done. According to the Count, this action will not only demonstrate Austria's peaceful approach to the world, but at the same time, it will prove the trust of the people in the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. Besides, Diotima claims that the true Austria was the whole world and 'the world would find no peace until its nations learned to live together on a higher plane, like the Austrians in their Fatherland.'⁴⁰ Contrary to the thesis that 'the will to peace of Austria shall be proven', the German nationalists regard this action as anti-Germanic, and the Slavic nationalists consider it as anti-Slavic and organize demonstrations. The Count, who is far from seeing the future, watches these events in astonishment. On the other hand, during all this turmoil, there are two men who are not surprised and are even pleased: the German industrialist Arnheim, who wants to buy the oil fields in Galicia and the Austrian General Stumm von Bordwehr, who wants to provide money for the army.

A second theme is the case of the murderer Moosbrugger, who has brutally murdered a prostitute in one of Vienna's parks; like the Parallel Campaign, it reveals

⁴⁰ Musil, p. 185

the degenerate character of the Austrian legal system and of bourgeois morality. Thus when Moosbrugger appears for the first time in the novel, his case is described as ‘finally something interesting for a change’;⁴¹ his case is much in the news and fascinates many people. In contrast to the other characters - especially Ulrich - Moosbrugger’s appearance is described in detail. Here Musil emphasizes the exhausted character of legality and morality, writing that Moosbrugger’s face is ‘blessed by God with every sign of goodness’⁴², and that most people are unable to match this honest and innocent face with the horrible crime he is accused of. This incompatibility prevents both the reporters and the psychiatrists from displaying a clear position and decision. According to some psychiatrists, the murderer that should be regarded as a normal person should be held responsible for the murder he has committed, while according to some, due to his mental state he should not be arrested but should be treated. Ulrich is not interested in the Moosbrugger case because he wants to prove him right or to assist justice. What he is really interested in is how such an event brings people together and why the people show an interest in this case that they never show towards their neighbors.

However, the fundamental function of both events is to introduce the characters, especially Ulrich. Besides, both the Moosbrugger case and Parallel Campaign become instruments for Ulrich to question and develop his own thoughts and the reader can follow his approach to morality.

Part three of the novel is an attempt to think about morality and the world via a treatment of love. Ulrich has a twin sister Agathe, whom he has not seen for years. Their relationship is the focus of a third theme: how to undergo a different kind of participation in the world, one which is beyond any cultural and ideological grounds.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

As David Luft puts it, ‘they enter into a relationship of intimacy and trust which is otherwise entirely presuppositionless and open to risk.’⁴³ This experience rejects a conventional morality which aims to give meaning to the present by regulating feelings. The story of Ulrich and Agathe is an attempt to overcome the extreme polarity in Western culture between male and female, feeling and intellect.

Through these three themes Musil tries to show that dissolution of the empire, of reason, and of morality are not a threat but an opportunity for a new understanding of politics, of reason, and of morality. But this new understanding will only be possible if these processes of dissolution are followed to their conclusion. This is what Nietzsche meant by active nihilism. Chapter 1 showed that, following his critique of the modern conception of the ‘self’, Nietzsche attempted to introduce a new moral understanding; only after a reevaluation of values can a person free himself or herself from accepted morality, from the taken-for-granted moral concepts, and finally put forward a ‘trying morality’ and ‘self targeting’ moral understanding. Musil’s central character, Ulrich, in so far as he recognizes the idea of infinite possibilities of existence, is doing a similar thing. I will try to show this below.

II. Arnheim and the Parallel Campaign

From his background - his family, education, and social environment - one might have expected a man like Ulrich to be striving to be a man of substance or even a ‘great man’ who is recognized as such through his deeds. Indeed, by the time he is 32, he has begun three careers: as a mathematician, a soldier and an engineer. Each of these was an attempt by ‘a man of possibility’ to become ‘a man of reality.’ None

⁴³ David Luft, *Robert Musil and The Crisis of European Culture 1880-1942* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 250.

of these has provided a ground for him and each has rapidly become meaningless. In addition, just as he fails to commit himself to any profession, so he fails to become a passionate supporter of any particular idea. On the other hand it is precisely his failure to be a mathematician, a soldier and an engineer, that can be seen as a condition for his self-development; he realizes that to construct one's identity through universal values and beliefs - which might have lost their validity - and to behave according to this identity makes people indifferent to their potentialities. Eventually, as a man of intellect he starts questioning the order of bourgeois life and of taken-for-granted moral values, and does so in order to find new and better ones.

The Man without Qualities contains many passages that describe, or attempt to describe, the internal workings of Ulrich's mind. However, as I said earlier, Musil does not focus exclusively on this, and the first part of the novel introduces a series of characters many of whom have a position in life, a career, as well as characters who are committed to their own ideas. What makes Ulrich different is his detachment. At first this is presented by means of a contrast with these characters. The world of professions and social positions is represented by Count Leinsdorf, an Austrian civil servant and the co-ordinator of the Parallel Campaign, Count Tuzzi, at whose house the meetings of the campaign are held, Ulrich's father and his brother-in-law Hagauer, both legal scholars, the simple-minded General Stumm von Bordwehr, the Austrian imperial army's representative at the meetings of the campaign, the bank director Leo Fischel, and the domestic servants Rachel and Soliman. The world of ideas is represented by the young radical Hans Sepp and his friend Gerda, daughter of Fischel, Count Tuzzi's wife Diotima (Ulrich's cousin), and by Ulrich's friends Walter and Clarisse. Ulrich's conversations with Walter and

Clarisse - who is described as a reader of Nietzsche - are an important way of presenting his view of the world.

Each of these characters represents either the social world or the world of ideas. But there is one who embodies both. The figure of Paul Arnheim, a German industrialist, who appears to move effortlessly between the pursuit of profit and the writing of influential books, between, as Ulrich puts it, capital and the intellect. Arnheim is also German, and so represents not only different areas of knowledge and action but different countries. If all the other characters are Austrian, Arnheim represents Europe.

Arnheim becomes part of the Parallel Campaign too. Unlike Ulrich, he is the man with all qualities, and has something to say about everything: philosophy, art, economics, and the world. He is the man of action and he 'has accepted Goethe's 'Denken um zu tun, Tun um zu denken!'⁴⁴ as his motto, and his life seems a realization of the aphorism.'⁴⁵ Arnheim seems able to unite and synthesize all contrasts, and is the perfect expression of intellectual unity for the participants of the Parallel Campaign. He can combine the opposite poles such as economics and soul, or ideas and power. In an era where the old economic and political methods and rationality are doubted, this approach of Arnheim creates an effect as if the expected messiah has arrived. As a man of action, Arnheim is a savior for those who believe that Parallel Campaign will be successful even though they do not know which approach to take. Some participants claim that, as an outsider, Arnheim will have a negative impact. However, exactly for the same reason, Diotima believes that Arnheim is the key person in this action; the presence of the European Arnheim

⁴⁴ Believe to act, act to believe. Trans. by the author.

⁴⁵ Braun, W, "The temptation of Ulrich: the problem of true and false unity in Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaft*," *The German Quarterly* 29, No. 1 (January 1956), pp. 29-37.

whom everyone respects ‘would prove that the intellect as such was at home in Austria.’⁴⁶

His activity spread over terrestrial continents and continents of knowledge. He knew everything: philosophers, economics, music, the world, sports. He expressed himself fluently in five languages. The world’s most famous artists were his friends, and he bought the art of tomorrow when it was still green on the vine, at prices that were not yet inflated. He was received as the Imperial Court and knew how to talk with workers. He owned a villa in the latest style, which appeared in photographs in all the publications on contemporary architecture, and also, somewhere in the sandiest wastes of Prussia, a ramshackle old castle that actually looked like the decomposed cradle of Prussian chauvinism.⁴⁷

In other words, ‘what all others are separately, Arnheim is rolled into one.’⁴⁸

According to Ulrich, on the other hand, the philosophy of irrationality adopted by Arnheim, his tendency to connect his investments and initiatives to mystic reasons, his references to Goethe and Hölderlin while talking about the price of oil are nothing but his ability to exhibit his encyclopedic knowledge. Ulrich who lacks any visible characteristics, and depreciates the real in favor of the possible, becomes a threat for Arnheim. Arnheim is important because while Ulrich behaves towards the other characters with skeptical detachment and good humor, Arnheim appears as a rival, an opponent who has to be challenged. Ulrich does not admire his thoughts, and he usually criticizes him.

One reason why he does not admire Arnheim is that Arnheim plays with ideas from different fields without really understanding them. Ulrich, by contrast, trained as a scientist. Of course he did not become one. He did not become anything in particular. In one chapter we see him close the curtains of his house, sit down at his desk and solve a mathematical problem that had been worrying him for months – but

⁴⁶ Musil, p. 185.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

he only does it as a leisure activity, to show that he can still do it. Because he has a rational mind but is not a professional scientist, Ulrich is able to view science and scientific culture from both inside and outside. *The Man without Qualities* contains many sections in which the position of science and rationality in the modern world are criticized. I will discuss this in the next section.

III. Critique of Rationality and of Morality

Musil depicts an era which lost its faith in the 19th century's emphasis on reason. In that sense, Musil, like Nietzsche, questions the value of scientific knowledge. He also, again like Nietzsche, questions the moral values of his era. However, he is not anti-rationalist or amoral. The attitude of Ulrich, the man without qualities, is one of ambivalence, and he appreciates that scientific rationality can be criticized from the point of view of morality, and that morality may be criticized from the point of view of science.

In one pivotal chapter, Musil reflects on the 'peculiar predilection of scientific thinking for mechanical, statistical, and physical explanations that have, as it were, the heart cut out of them':

The scientific mind sees kindness only as a special form of egotism; brings emotions into line with glandular secretions; notes that eight or nine tenths of a human being consists of water; explains our celebrated moral freedom as an automatic mental by-product of free trade; reduces beauty to good digestion and the proper distribution of fatty tissue; graphs the annual statistical curves of births and suicides to show that our most intimate personal decisions are programmed behavior; sees a connection between ecstasy and mental disease; equates the anus and the mouth as the rectal and the oral openings at either end of the same tube—such ideas, which expose the trick, as it were, behind the magic of human illusions, can always count on a kind of prejudice in their favor as being impeccably scientific.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Musil, pp.327-328.

Scientific rationality in this sense is both disillusioning and dehumanizing. It replaces the living texture of experience with a skeleton of ‘causes,’ ‘drives,’ ‘impulses,’ and the like.

But that texture also includes the ‘violence of reality’ that breaks through the surface throughout the novel. Indeed, the first chapter illustrates this, by means of an accident: a man is hit by a truck, and a crowd gathers around him as he lies on the sidewalk. A couple makes comments on the accident, and an ambulance arrives. The lady feels disturbed by this sudden violence; her male companion then explains to her that such trucks have a breaking-distance that is too long. This expression, ‘breaking distance’, calms the lady down. As Musil says, she does not know what a breaking-distance is, but it does not matter because these technical terms are a way of putting things into a pattern. The desire to do this, to have a ground, to put the irrational into a rational order is emphasized throughout the novel. When the world and the experience of it are brought under absolute conceptual categories, the violence is legitimized and bearable. In that sense, a distance is put between the people and the violence of reality. Ulrich himself, in contrast to some of his female acquaintances – such as Bonadea, his mistress for a while – is particularly skilled at putting reality at a distance in this way. Only towards the end of the novel, in his relationship with his sister, does he really change this attitude.

This episode shows how the language of science can become part of everyday reality and be accepted uncritically by people who do not understand it. Ulrich, on the other hand, although he does not depreciate the intellect, is skeptical about science and scientists who demand objective knowledge. Individuals are objectified for the gaze of the positive and social sciences through the statistical data which reduce people to numbers to reach generalizations:

It is called the law of large numbers, a bit nebulously. Meaning that one person may commit suicide for this reason and another for that reason, but when a great number is involved, then the accidental and the personal elements cancel each other out, and what is left... what is left is what each one of us as laymen calls, simply, the average, which is a “something,” but nobody knows exactly *what*.⁵⁰

As events and experiences are evaluated with an impersonal attitude, people are distanced from themselves and become indifferent towards their own lives.

Violent events like the traffic accident can be accepted through the generalizations of science. Something more violent and shocking is needed to shake people out of their indifference. Musil provides this in the story of the sex-murderer Moosbrugger, which recurs throughout the novel. As Musil says, this case is of interest to both rationalists - criminologists, psychiatrists, lawyers - and moralists, and he describes the weak efforts of both of these groups to make sense of it. The moralists can see only a murder, the guilty subject (guilt and subjectivity were closely connected for Nietzsche) and the obvious punishment, the death penalty, which is in fact handed down. But at the trial Moosbrugger gives an account of himself and how he came to commit the murder to which he has confessed, and this leads the rationalists to try – and fail - to make sense of what he says, to ‘explain’ his behaviour. Neither failure surprises Ulrich, however, who learns about the case from the newspaper and becomes fascinated by it.

Moosbrugger was born as a poor devil, an orphaned shepherd boy in a hamlet, and could not have any relationship with girls because of his poverty. He was a lonely shepherd during most of his life. He is described as someone whose abnormal upbringing had made him extremely shy towards women. This state later developed into an insane fear which made him behave in a sadistic way towards prostitutes. Moosbrugger claims that he did not intend to kill the woman, and in

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 532

addition to refusing the accusations, he also rejects the dishonor of being labeled as a mentally retarded man. The committed murder, in Moosbrugger's words, is a murder he drifted into due to the doubtful behavior of 'this woman's caricature' and according to his approach he insists that instead of focusing on the murder as a concept, the conditions leading to this event should be considered. However, the judge – like the man who witnesses the traffic accident - tries to fit this event under the frame of previously witnessed murder cases and consequently asks the same questions asked previously many times. Moosbrugger has an expression as if he is challenging the system of law and he is proud of himself. As he himself declares, he 'may have lacked only the education and opportunity to make something different out of this impulse, an angel of mass destruction or a great anarchist.'⁵¹

Ulrich believes that Moosbrugger is unique and fascinating because of these circumstances. They were unique, not Moosbrugger's 'personality' or his 'subjectivity'. These circumstances might have been totally different and so he might have been a totally different person. He believes that circumstances are the conditions of subjectivity but also that they should be treated as only conditions. In this connection he says that 'immoralists' such as Luther and Eckhart would have judged the case in a more profound manner, understood Moosbrugger and set him free.

The case of Moosbrugger connects all the characters who are searching for order and who believe that traditional ideas and institutions failed to give security to the feelings of people. In that sense he is what the others can only dream of; he sums

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

up their inability to give expression to their feelings. Ulrich cannot stop himself from thinking: 'If mankind could dream as a whole, that dream would be Moosbrugger.'⁵²

If somebody can say this it suggests that he has little faith in human progress. And indeed, Ulrich says: 'every step forward is also a step backward. Progress always exists in only one particular sense. And since there is no sense in our life as a whole, neither is there a thing as progress as a whole.'⁵³

At the same time, this is an important passage. Although Ulrich does not believe in progress 'as a whole', he does believe that there is technical progress. In a chapter called 'The Ideal of the Three Treatises, or the Utopia of Exact Living', he writes that 'all the knowledge that has led our species from wearing animal skins to people flying, complete with proofs, would fill a handful of reference books, but a bookcase the size of the earth would not suffice to hold all the rest...'⁵⁴ 'All the rest' includes the history of moral and political philosophy, religious doctrines and so on, where there is no progress. This leads Musil to consider another idea: 'The thought suggests itself that we carry on our human business in a most irrational manner when we do not use those methods by which the exact sciences have forged ahead in such exemplary fashion.' This does not mean that moral questions would become technical questions, but that 'it would be a useful experiment to try to cut down to a minimum the moral expenditure (of whatever kind) that accompanies all our actions, to satisfy our selves with being moral only in those exceptional cases where it really counts, but otherwise not to think differently from the way we do about standardizing pencils or screws.'⁵⁵ I will show later that this experimental

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 528.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

attitude is not the only one possible, and that Ulrich's attitude takes him beyond this attempt to establish a division of labour between rationality and morality.

So far I have discussed Ulrich's attitude to two things: the attempt to unify Austrian society by means of a grand idea, and scientific rationality. He is skeptical about the Parallel Campaign, whose members are described as having various sorts of qualities, while he is a man without qualities. However, does a 'man without qualities' represent the 'dissolution of the subject'? Why doesn't Ulrich represent the Cartesian subject who stands apart from the world? We can answer this question if we focus on a very important chapter that follows the chapter on exact living. Here Musil discusses the idea of essayism. Essayism is important for understanding Ulrich's approach to the problems of rationality and selfhood.

IV. Essayism

'Essayism' usually refers to a style of writing; but Musil asks whether it might also be a way of living. This is indicated by the title of the chapter, which includes the phrase: 'the Utopian idea of essayism.' What is an essay? Musil's definition of it also says something about his strategy as a novelist.

The translation of the word 'essay' as 'attempt', which is the generally accepted one, only approximately gives the most important allusion to the literary model. For an essay is not the provisional or incidental expression of a conviction that might on a more favorable occasion be elevated to the status of truth or that might just as easily be recognized as error...an essay is the unique and unalterable form that a man's inner life takes in a decisive thought. Nothing is more alien to it than that irresponsibility and semi-finishedness of mental images known as subjectivity; but neither are 'true' and 'false', 'wise' and 'unwise', terms that can be applied to such thoughts...and yet the essay is subject to laws that are no less strict for appearing to be delicate and ineffable. There have been more than a few of such essaysists, masters of the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

inner hovering life, but there would be no point in naming them. Their domain lies between religion and knowledge, between example and doctrine, between *amor intellectualis* and poetry; they are saints with and without religion, and sometimes they are also simply men on an adventure who have gone astray.⁵⁶

In the following paragraph Musil writes that the mountain of commentary on the work of such essayists tends not to produce anything worthwhile, and so I will mention only the important claim that ‘essay’ means ‘attempt’. There is an important connection here with Nietzsche’s ‘trying morality’.

The reader learns that when he was younger, Ulrich supported the idea that people had to live ‘hypothetically.’ Someone who does so ‘suspects that the given order of things is not as solid as it pretends to be; no thing, no self, no form, no principle is safe, everything is undergoing an invisible but ceaseless transformation, the unsettled holds more of the future than the settled, and the present is nothing but a hypothesis that has not yet been surmounted’.⁵⁷ S/he wishes to free himself/herself from the world in which the rules are ready-made. He is not clear about his ideas and actions; indeed there is no certainty. Such an attitude makes one open to new experiences. Later on, Ulrich replaces his expression of ‘living hypothetically’ with ‘essayism’ since he believes that he can live a better life in the way of an essay: as an essay deals with many issues in its successive sections, not covering any of them within a unified, encompassing perspective. Since anything that is covered comprehensively would get lost and be absorbed into a concept, Ulrich believed the essay form to be the best way of leading his own life.

Although such an attitude seems to be an uncertainty, according to Ulrich, it is nothing but the lack of adapted certainties. In that sense, he does not trust moral

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.273.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

values since he believes that the value of a quality depends on its surrounding circumstances and ‘the significance of all moral events seemed to him to be the function of other events on which they depended’:⁵⁸

An open-ended system of relationships arises, in which independent meanings, such as are ascribed to actions and qualities by way of a rough first approximation in ordinary life, no longer exist at all. What is seemingly solid in this system becomes a porous pretext for many possible meanings; the event occurring becomes a symbol of something that perhaps may not be happening but makes itself felt through the symbol; and man as the quintessence of his possibilities, potential man, the unwritten poem of his existence, confronts man as recorded fact, as reality, as character.⁵⁹

Regarding his belief about circumstances, he concludes that most people do not realize how they got to be what they are, how they had their qualities, professions, and habits, yet they feel that their lives will not change much anymore. In their youth they tend to be skeptical towards what life offers and feel that they can control it.

This attitude changes when they get older:

In their youth, life lay ahead of them like an inexhaustible morning, full of possibilities and emptiness on all sides, but already by noon something is suddenly there that may claim to be their own life yet whose appearing is as surprising, all in all, as if a person had suddenly materialized with whom one had been corresponding for some twenty years without meeting and whom one had imagined quite differently. What is even more peculiar is that most people do not even notice it; they adopt the man who has to them, whose life has emerged with their own qualities, whose experiences now seem to be the expression of their own qualities, and whose fate is their own reward or misfortune.⁶⁰

When people get older, they are identified with their qualities, and indeed, are composed by them. It is quite normal that these people, who identify themselves through the actions of the outer world, lose touch with themselves. Ulrich, who refuses to identify himself according to his deeds and missions in the existing order,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

is in the same distance to all these qualities; accordingly, none of these qualities is more valuable than the other. Regarding his education and deeds, indeed, he is ‘a man with all the qualities, but he is indifferent to them’.⁶¹

A character who is not committed to any qualities, and about whose appearance we do not have any clue, but who nonetheless seems to see more clearly than others what is going on around him, embodies the ‘dissolution of the subject’ in the positive sense. In his first novel, *Young Törless*, Musil had already emphasized the theme of the ‘dissolution of the subject’. His subject matter is the adolescent child, adolescence being a critical period in the development of the individual. Törless is neither a child, nor an adult; he is ‘wordless’ and ‘worldless’. Although other characters are physically described, we are not given any description of Törless’s appearance. The in-between situation is a strange, but also emblematic human state for Musil. It is a larval period of existence which is left behind when entering the world of adulthood. In both novels we encounter the Musilian ‘subject’ as a man without qualities, as a man without references, as formless and shapeless; as a child who is, as Gilles Deleuze would say, a ‘becoming-child’.⁶²

What does such an expression mean? How much freedom does the dissolution of Ulrich’s subjectivity allow him? What sort of relationship to reality does it imply? Musil does not give a definitive answer, but he does have a word for

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁶² In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze refers to Musil as a distinctive figure who achieved Nietzsche’s project through his literary works. According to Deleuze, the Musilian ‘subject’ is impersonal, freed from fixed identities and fixed ideas. See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* trans. Paul Patton (London; New York: Continuum, 2001) chp. 3. In *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze argues that Nietzsche ‘explored a world of impersonal and pre-individual singularities, a world he then called Dynosian or of the will to power, a free and unbound energy.’ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (London: Continuum, 2001) p. 122. Following Nietzsche Deleuze introduces the ‘nomadic subject,’ which is open to the infinity of singularities through which it passes. The ‘nomadic subject’ loses its centre, its identity as a concept and as a self. ‘Nomadic singularity’, in Deleuze’s words, is free and anonymous. No form, no shape, and no quality can define the nomadic singularity.

it: he calls it 'the other condition'. He does provide some definitions of 'the other condition'. For instance, he says that: 'The categories of truth and falsity do not apply in 'the other condition', what matters is whether it produces an ascending or descending feeling.'⁶³ The world is experienced in its wholeness as a 'unity of all things' that cannot be experienced unless one releases oneself from the fixed identities that are dictated by society. As Paulson writes, for Musil, experience 'is as though one is set in motion by something, but the stimulus cannot be identified with particular external objects, rather it is an amorphous cause, which, seen outside of 'the other condition' is both internal and external to the individual; it is life itself.'⁶⁴ In 'the other condition', openness to new experiences and to the world, all dichotomies like subject and object disappear. 'The other condition', then, takes us beyond the utopian idea of essayism.

Essayism is itself discussed by Musil essayistically, that is, he considers what it would be to live essayistically from several angles rather than showing Ulrich or anyone else 'living' essayistically. On the other hand, he tries to show what 'the other condition' might mean in his description of the relationship between Ulrich and his twin sister Agathe. Musil believes that it is a state commonly achieved in former times by religious mystics; yet, in post-Enlightenment bourgeois civilization the average man can achieve it only through erotic experience. 'The other condition' also challenges one of the most important dichotomies of modern life, the one between man and woman.

⁶³ Ronald M. Paulson, *Robert Musil and The Ineffable* (Stuttgart: H. -D. Heinz, 1982), p. 16.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 4.

V. 'The Other Condition'

Ulrich and Agathe meet each other for the first time in the novel in the house they grew up in, as they prepare for their father's funeral. They have not seen one another for many years, and when they do, they realize that they resemble each other very much; indeed, when Agathe enters the room and Ulrich notices the similarity, he feels that it is he himself who has come in through the door and his sister is a dreamlike repetition and alteration of himself. Agathe has the same feeling: 'I had no idea we were twins!'⁶⁵ This awareness of similarity registers straight away the idea of dissolving fixed gender positions. But Musil challenges these positions in a particular way. For instance, Ulrich realizes that there is something missing and disturbing in Agathe's face; it lacks expression and gives no clue about her character. This means that the two of them are similar, but this is not because of any definite features or because of their social positions; Ulrich and Agathe have not seen each other for years, and the only things that they know about each other have been learned from their father. In fact, Agathe is similar to Ulrich because she is a 'woman without qualities' just as he is a man without qualities. Both of them represent the 'dissolution of the subject'.

In the first part of the novel we do not always know whether Ulrich or Musil is speaking. This is because, as I have said earlier on in this chapter, several of the chapters are like essays, and many of Ulrich's 'own' ideas are only expressed as internal monologues. In the scenes involving Agathe, these thoughts which have not gone beyond monologues pour into speech, and although there is no more 'action' here than in the early parts, the novel becomes more dynamic and fast-flowing. After

⁶⁵ Musil, p. 734.

the funeral of their father, they spend time in the house, and an extraordinary dialogue takes place between them. The siblings who have become two strangers constantly talk during the long walks and the time they spend at home. Here we learn that Agathe is not only physically but also mentally similar to Ulrich. As the dialogues and sharing continue, Agathe realizes that what she intuitively accepts to be true is transferred into thoughts in Ulrich and her feelings are articulated thanks to their communication.

However, these feelings do not remain mere feelings. In the chapter titled ‘A Family of Two’, Ulrich discusses family roles, the division between individualism and collectivism, between ‘Me’ and ‘We’. To him, people’s ‘bond with others or the self’s bruised recoil from that bond into the illusion of its uniqueness’⁶⁶ are the natural impulses of individuals and ‘they are both entangled with the idea of the family’; for him life in a family is not a full life and one cannot feel fully at home within the life of family. Agathe, too, resists conventional rules whether they are rules of individuals in a family life or in marriage, but although she is not happy in her own marriage, until she meets Ulrich again - who helps her to articulate her feelings – her resistance to these determinate institutions is passive. Now, she decides – instantly - not to return to her husband, Hagauer, to whom she has remained married for many years:

... suddenly, she had realized that how carelessly she had always behaved, like the time she had simply thought things would “somehow” work out with Hagauer, because he was a “good person”. When was it, for example, that Ulrich had said that under certain circumstances it might be possible for him to love a thief but never a person who was honest from habit?...but it had not been Ulrich but she herself who had said it. As a matter of fact, much of what he said she had been thinking herself, only without words; all on her own, the way she used to be, she would never have made such bold assertions.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 778.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 793.

Musil depicts something transgressive in her attitude, and then explains how this happens in terms that point towards the consequences of the 'dissolution of the subject'.

Agathe decides to leave Hagauer, but then she becomes bolder. Their father, whose body is lying in the library, has stated that he wishes to be buried wearing all of his decorations as a civil servant. In his will he says that these medals are a symbol of his rejection of the individualist theory of the state. The law states that when he dies his heirs should give the medals back to the authorities. He has therefore bought copies of them, but has insisted that they be exchanged for the originals only at the last moment, when the coffin is closed. When Ulrich reads this and explains it to Agathe, she immediately finds the copies and exchanges them for the originals on her dead father's chest, thus defying her father's last will. This breach of trust between the living and the dead is more serious than leaving her husband. It breaks the relationship between father and daughter. The chapter in which it happens is titled: 'They Do Wrong'. Later on, Ulrich and Agathe will not only break with conventional relationships like this. They will start an unconventional relationship of their own.

At this point I should discuss the relationship between rationality and gender in the relationship between the siblings. Although when they meet again they are said to be similar, Musil still depicts them at this stage in terms of an opposition between rationality (Ulrich) and feeling (Agathe). This is especially true when he talks about the way in which their thoughts converge. When Agathe shows a willingness to act, Ulrich is said to appreciate her 'in spite of her lack of principle, with the remarkable feeling that it was his own thoughts that had gone from him to her and were now returning from her to him, poorer in deliberation but with that balsamic scent of

freedom about them like a creation of the wild.’⁶⁸ Although he thinks that one thought can go from one person to another in a mysterious way, Ulrich is still the rationalist and Agathe the ‘wild’ woman; he is culture and she is nature.

Despite this, Agathe has plenty of chances to use her non-rationality to criticize Ulrich. For instance, she is attracted by Ulrich’s understanding of morality, yet, she is impatient for Ulrich to come to a conclusion in their dialogues, since as a person who has lived ‘with complete disharmony’ with herself, she wishes to act to change something in her life; Ulrich ‘always arrives quickly at the moral story his sister is talking about, sums things up in formulas’,⁶⁹ yet always stops at the last step. She accuses Ulrich of avoiding turning his thoughts into action. Although Ulrich supports the ‘rule of free spirits’, according to Agathe he does not let things be and attempts to formulate general principles:

In the short time we have been together, you have given me such wonderful guidelines for my life, but then you always end up wondering whether they are really true! It seems to me that the truth the way you use it is only a way of mistreating people!⁷⁰

This masculine/feminine opposition continues for a while, but as the dialogues between them progress, they become more and more free individuals, and less and less representatives of a ‘position’ or ‘worldview’, ‘rationality and feeling’, ‘man and woman’.

In the chapter entitled ‘Holy Discourse: Erratic Progress’, both Ulrich and Agathe open themselves to the other without any self-preservation and a wonderful communication develops between them. In Ulrich’s relation to Agathe, there is no egotism and there is pure openness and acceptance. Although Agathe is described as

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 867.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 810.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 864.

the missing part of Ulrich and the self-completion of him is realized, Agathe is not like Eve in relation to Adam, not his 'feminine side'; by representing the lawlessness and illogical sides of Ulrich, she is different from him and a real person in her own way. They do not unite and become one; instead, they complete each other. They experience a sense of different participation in the world which is beyond any cultural and ideological grounds and 'they enter into a relationship of intimacy and trust which is otherwise entirely presuppositionless and open to risk.'⁷¹ This experience rejects conventional morality which aims to give meaning to the present by regulating feelings; it is against the bourgeois order and the order of patriarchal culture, but it opposes this order by means of a way of living rather than by an ideology or an alternative belief system. What is that way of living?

It would have been easy for Ulrich to reject scientific rationality in the name of some sort of religious alternative, like mysticism or the monastic life. But he sees science and science's opponents as part of the same problem, as two sides of another binary opposition. Ulrich believes that 'even religious people are under the influence of the scientific way of thinking, that they do not trust themselves to look into what is burning in their inmost hearts but are always ready to speak of this ardor in medical terms as a mania, even though officially they take a different line.'⁷² Bourgeois morality splits into intelligence and mysticism, into 'practical improvements and unknown adventure.'⁷³ Moreover to him, the existence of a certain alternative has deeper origins than religion, partly because 'civilized communities of religious people have always treated this condition with the kind of mistrust bureaucrat feels

⁷¹ Luft, p. 250.

⁷² Musil, *op. cit.*, pp. 833-834.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 837.

for the spirit of private enterprise.’⁷⁴ Christian morality attempts to function through regulated and intelligible morality. Ulrich reads religious books not because he is a religious person but because he is trying to understand the possibility of inner movement and divergence from the ordinary which is characteristic of mysticism. But the way he describes mysticism makes it clear that he does not see it as a solution.

...a man has two modes of existence, of consciousness, and of thought, and saves himself from being frightened to death by ghosts-which this prospect would of necessity induce - by regarding one condition as a vacation from the other, an interruption, a rest, or anything else he think he can recognize. Mysticism, on the other hand, would be connected with the intention of going on vacation permanently.⁷⁵

The solution, or rather the alternative way of living, is what Ulrich calls ‘the other condition’. It would be easy to confuse ‘the other condition’ with love, or withdrawal from the world, or getting close to God, or returning to feelings in a world which has turned mechanical. But Ulrich does not regard ‘the other condition’ like this. Instead, he considers it as a state of mind which is a possibility that can be realized without being isolated from the outer world. In other words, it is possible to be in ‘the other condition’ without being a saint:

There is no need to be a saint to experience something of the kind! You could be sitting on a fallen tree or a bench in the mountains, watching a herd of grazing cows, and experience something amounting to being transported into another life! You lose yourself and at the same time suddenly find yourself.⁷⁶

He wishes to believe that people should be both intelligent and mystics and the existence of one should not exclude the other. Behind his search for the relationship between ‘the other condition’ and ‘normal condition’, there is his attempt to bring

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 832.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 833.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 827.

back the appropriate relationship between precision and soul, intellect and passion as well as between good and evil. The discussion of two sides of people, the outer and inner worlds, - thought and feeling - between siblings indicates their attempt not simply to establish a balance between these two worlds – that was a feature of the utopia of exactitude – but to experience both at the same time.

Ulrich's most explicit statement of what this means is the passage in which he compares the experience of reality in the other condition with being 'like the ocean':

...you must now imagine this ocean as a state of motionlessness and detachment, filled with everlasting, crystal-clear events. In ages past, people tried to imagine such a life on earth. That is the Millennium, formed in our own image and yet like no world we know. That is how we will live now! We shall cast off all self-seeking; we shall collect neither goods, nor knowledge, nor lovers, nor friends, nor principles, nor even ourselves! Our spirit will open up, dissolving boundaries toward man and beast, spreading open in such a way that we can no longer remain 'us' but will maintain our identities only by merging with all the world!⁷⁷

Ulrich is not sure whether or not it is possible to live in such a world without being isolated from the everyday order and from people in this order. On the other hand, the communication that has developed between Agathe and Ulrich in the short time they spent together and isolated from other people, leads them to think that they may experience 'the other condition' together, and so they decide to live together in Ulrich's house, in Vienna. This proves to be a fateful decision.

For today our lives are divided, and parts are entangled with other people; what we dream has to do with dreaming and also with what other people dream; what we do has sense, but more sense in relation with what others do; and what we believe is tied in with beliefs only a fraction of which are our own. It is therefore quite unrealistic to insist upon acting out of the fullness of one's own personal reality. Especially for a man like himself, who had been imbued all his life with the thought that one's beliefs had to be shared, that one must have the courage to live in the midst of moral contradictions, because that was the price of great achievement.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 871.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 950.

On the one hand, Ulrich himself is not sure whether he believes in the possibility and significance of another kind of life; on the other hand, he is emotionally drawn to it. Moreover, the attempt to realize the promise of a Millennium he has mentioned once is a ‘call for all the delicacy and selflessness he could muster - qualities that had been all too lacking him.’⁷⁹ In his own individual and lonely life, there was no thinking, protecting and caring for the other, taking responsibility for the other. Now, he is about to begin a shared life with Agathe who is standing in front of him with all her nakedness and who has opened to him with all her naiveté.

Ulrich and Agathe are similarly ‘without qualities’, but living in an age where qualities make the person. Their decision to live together is a way of saying that the ‘dissolution of the subject’ may mean a kind of human freedom. This human freedom cannot be achieved by living alone, as Ulrich has been doing. Nor can it be realized if the relationship they enter into has a definite purpose or a fixed aim or a social function. But a relationship without a ‘purpose’ is risky.

Perhaps the content of the Millennium is merely the burgeoning of this energy, which at first shows itself in two people, until it grows into a resounding universal communion, ... living for another person must be, must be happiness that could move one to tears, as lovely as the lambent sinking of day into the peace of evening and also, just a little, an impoverishing of spirit and intellect to the point of tears.⁸⁰

Ulrich thinks that what he feels for Agathe is nothing but an imaginary, or ‘seraphic love’ which is a ‘love without a partner’ or ‘love without sex.’⁸¹ He realizes that Agathe is his self-love which has been embodied in her instead of himself and which he has always lacked.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 950-951.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 952.

Their attempt aims to realize ‘the other condition’ for the sake of new values which they feel they can create and live accordingly. Ulrich distances himself from his previous environment for a while and just spends time with Agathe and the way they wish to live works out quite well once the company of others leaves them free. They are open ‘to live in the *fire*’ and at the threshold. The acceptance as he is or she is by the other is the crucial theme for both. The relationship between Agathe and Ulrich can be regarded as the transgression of the law of the family and of the father: it is not a love story but an experiment. Ulrich is aware that their attitude is a ‘protest against life’:

‘It is pretty obvious that the two of us are psychologically suspect. Incestuous tendencies, demonstrable in early childhood, together with antisocial dispositions and a rebellious attitude toward life. Possibly even a not sufficiently rooted gender identification, although I –.’

‘Nor I, either!’, Agathe broke in, laughing, if possibly somewhat against her will. ‘I have no use for women at all!’⁸²

Agathe’s statement here sounds like that of an early anti-feminist. But there is a more important point. I said before that Deleuze described the Musilian subject as a ‘becoming-child’. Ulrich refers to ‘incestuous tendencies, demonstrable in early childhood’, and to a failure of gender identification. He implies that the condition for overcoming gender divisions would be a return to childhood, and that we cannot imagine an adult solution to the problems that gender divisions create. Ulrich and Agathe were last together when they were children, and in a way their dialogue has begun at the point when it left off – in their childhood. There is nothing naïve or innocent about it though because Ulrich is far more of an adult than his age would suggest.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 1024.

However, once they settle down in Vienna their circumstances change, and rather than being isolated in their old house, they are living in a city where they encounter other people, people who are all adults and all members of social groups, with the 'qualities' and the limitations of such membership. Ulrich and Agathe gradually stop the conversation they carried out throughout the period they spent in the village they were born in. They never talk again about the reunion or in fact about 'the other condition', and the process of dialogue that opened them up to each other comes to a halt. Agathe becomes sadder day-by-day as she realizes that Ulrich regards their relationship as an excess of fantasy. Her sadness increases when she receives a letter from her husband Hagauer in which he accuses her of being selfish, of leaving him with no explanation. In fact, Agathe had refused to allow him to stay with her at the house during the period of the funeral, and forced him to stay at a hotel. Ulrich did not approve of this, and the letter that arrives in Vienna reminds her of this. Typically, Ulrich treats her actions in a detached and analytical way, and it seems that his return to Vienna returns him to the rationalist and skeptical views he held at the start of the novel. His justification of Agathe's actions can be compared with his attitude to the case of Moosbrugger. At the conclusion of that dramatic case he says that if humanity could dream it would dream Moosbrugger. Agathe has not murdered anybody but she has committed a kind of crime. Ulrich says:

We have established that respectable people are deeply attracted to crime, though of course only in their imagination. We might add that criminals, to hear them talk, would almost without exception like to be regarded as respectable people. So we might arrive at a definition: Crimes are the concentrated form, within sinners, of everything other people work off in little irregularities, in their imagination and in innumerable petty everyday acts and attitude of spite and viciousness.⁸³

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 1041.

VI. Conclusion: Ulrich returns to the Parallel Campaign

The last chapters of *The Man without Qualities* are dedicated to a meeting of the Parallel Campaign. This gathering, which is held in an atmosphere of a carnival, is important in that it demonstrates the absurdity and unreality of the Parallel Campaign. During the meeting everybody talks at the same time, and not only is no action taken, it is evident that there is no change in the behavior of the participants, the ideas they defend and their words. Moreover, everybody claims that he/she is right. The communication between subjects with fixed qualities and fixed positions and fixed ideas contrasts completely with the dialogue that Ulrich and Agathe have held in the family home in the village.

But after the return to Vienna, Ulrich comes to take a greater interest in the Parallel Campaign. Ulrich, who was approached with doubt in the beginning and who was not taken very seriously due to his being a ‘man without qualities’, later on, is the one who openly expresses his opinions to people in individual conversations even though he was more like an observer in the beginning. This self-confident manner, eternally trusting his thoughts and even despising others, in fact, makes Ulrich a more or less competent member of the campaign. Ulrich’s behavior and thoughts towards life seem to have given a strange power to him. Indeed, during the meeting, Ulrich is at a position where everybody asks for his opinion.

The reason that this happens is that there is an interesting parallel between ‘the other condition’ and the Parallel Campaign. ‘The other condition’, in which Ulrich and Agathe have tried to achieve, required a ‘pure relationship’ between ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ that had no purpose. When that relationship fails, Ulrich turns back to the only other example of a relationship that has no purpose, the Parallel Campaign. The

purposeless relationship between Ulrich and Agathe was, ideally, one between children who had not even established their gender identities; the purposeless relationship between the members of the Parallel Campaign is one between adults. The relationship between Ulrich and Agathe fails in a way because they cannot not be adults and cannot avoid behaving in gender-specific ways; the Parallel Campaign is bound to fail because its members are adults whose positions in life are fixed, subjects that are unready to be dissolved. The campaign becomes very well known and quite popular, indeed there are hundreds of proposals from all over the country about what it should focus on, but all of them are simply expressions of interests and positions that people or groups hold anyway. Ulrich is strangely attracted to this environment without a purpose. Without a purpose, a man without qualities whose life has no centre, no fixity, can experience a kind of freedom; the relationship with his sister was meant to realize 'the other condition' within normal conditions, but it seemed that those normal conditions became dominant after they returned to Vienna; the Parallel Campaign offers no prospect at all of realizing the other condition within normal conditions, and the man without qualities returns to the more skeptical attitude of the early parts of the novel.

I referred earlier to Nietzsche's 'trying morality'. Ulrich and Agathe may be said to have tried to live 'the other condition', and to have tried without taking the easy option of mysticism or monasticism or other escapes from the world. They tried to reconcile feeling and intellect, the rational and the irrational, masculinity and femininity. Their efforts to do this in the midst of modern urban society were much less successful than their efforts to do so in the village, away from the demands of modern society. Musil suggests that 'the other condition' can never be realized, or

that it can only be realized in certain types of environment, or that it can be realized only by certain types of individual.

CHAPTER 3. *THE DISCONNECTED*

I. Introduction

Written in 1968 and published in 1971, Oğuz Atay's *The Disconnected* can be regarded as an avant-garde novel that breaks with the realism that was approved and preferred by the majority of Turkish critics and authors at that time. The main way in which it achieves that break is that, instead of seeking to enlighten and inform, or even to entertain, people, it handles the inner conflicts of individuals. Berna Moran describes *The Disconnected* as a novel 'which has turned its back on the realism of the 19th century, with one foot in modernism and the other in post-modernism.'⁸⁴ Suna Ertuğrul states that '...Atay broke the literary taboos of the 1970s cultural milieu in Turkey, shattered the narrow frames of discussion about the uses of art, and allowed the Turkish language to find the possibilities of expressing the distress of modern existence.'⁸⁵

As in *The Man without Qualities*, the novel deals with the inner states and conflicts of the main characters, and it is difficult to outline its 'external' narrative. There is not much 'action'. Like Musil, Atay implies a critique of the modern constitution of the 'self' and the social order of his time. Also like Musil, he was a close reader of Nietzsche. On the other hand, if Moran is correct to say the novel has one foot in modernism and another in postmodernism, then this marks a difference between it and Musil's novel, which, as I said before, has one foot in realism and one

⁸⁴ Moran, p. 199.

⁸⁵ Ertuğrul, p. 629.

in modernism.⁸⁶ In the last chapter I said that some of the action and characters in Musil's novel could have come from a nineteenth century realist novel, but that Musil is also a modernist, because he is concerned with the thought processes of some of the characters and because he writes his novel in an 'essayistic' way. Because it is devoted to the internal states of people, Atay's *The Disconnected* might be said to be a modernist novel; but it also contains postmodern elements, in particular in its handling of time, which is sometimes linear and sometimes cyclical, and the fact that Atay's own narrative voice is far less evident, less 'sovereign', than Musil's. The first chapter of *The Disconnected* also contains a scene in which the central character, Turgut sends a journalist the manuscript of a book called *The Disconnected*. In Turkey in 1972 these 'postmodern' techniques were not common.

The Disconnected begins with the main protagonist Turgut receiving the news that his friend Selim has committed suicide and left a letter for him. Selim's death, and his letter, are not only personally distressing, but shatter Turgut's sense of the order of things. In fact, while holding the letter in his hand, Turgut is not only saddened, but also accuses Selim of being weak, of escaping from a life he could not bear; he also questions his own situation and daily life. He begins to direct his anger towards the objects in the room in which he is sitting; these objects become simply indicators of the order of bourgeois life. The objects in the room and the way they are placed become meaningless.⁸⁷

At first, he tries to continue with his life as it was before Selim's suicide. But the shattering event makes it increasingly difficult for him to do this, and he begins

⁸⁶ These distinctions between realism, modernism and postmodernism are never very stable and are only used here as a convenient way of pointing to what is important in the novels.

⁸⁷ This technique of problematising social relations by problematising the relations between people and objects is also found in Musil, who sometimes describes objects as not fitting into their proper place or even the walls of rooms expanding and contracting.

to question not only the objects that surround him as indicators of bourgeois life, but the actual social relationships in which he is involved, including those with his wife and children. One day, he decides to visit the flat of his dead friend; there he discovers a large number of manuscripts – diaries, plays, short stories, long stories – and begins to read them. This is the start of a journey that takes him away from his existing life in society and into the internal life of Selim. This internal life, however, is not that of Selim alone; the manuscripts in which this internal life is represented, contain numerous other people, both real people who Selim knew but Turgut did not, those who both Turgut and Selim knew at university, and characters from fiction and history, including Jesus, Don Quixote, Hamlet and Oblomov. It is clear to Turgut that Selim thinks of these fictional or historical characters as just as much friends and acquaintances as his real ones. Turgut reads these manuscripts throughout the novel, and increasingly identifies with Selim, even visiting some of the friends and acquaintances mentioned in the various manuscripts. In a way, the novel is the story of how Turgut becomes disconnected, not by detaching himself from society and withdrawing into himself in a ‘Cartesian’ way, but by becoming Selim.

Here there is a very interesting parallel with *The Man without Qualities*. Ulrich’s search for ‘the other condition’ begins as a series of internal monologues that take place while he is meeting other people and participating in the meaningless parallel campaign. It takes some time before he realizes that ‘the other condition’ depends on a kind of relationship with another person, his sister Agathe. Ulrich and Agathe seem to ‘merge’ with one another as a man and a woman who resemble one another; Turgut may be said to merge with Selim, although he does so by absorbing himself in Selim’s writings.

II. Critique of Bourgeois Morality

Like Musil, Atay explores the modern notion of the self and the bourgeois morality of his era as two sides of the same coin. A critique of one is a critique of the other.

Like Musil, he is a keen reader of Nietzsche.

As we have seen, Nietzsche claims that the need to believe in the existence of a subject, and the need to render events familiar, express nothing more than a desire for the self-preservation of the human being and the preservation of the existing order. According to this understanding, the supposed personal values are those which are imposed on individuals for the preservation of the harmony of the society. The existing order at stake in Nietzsche is the Christian-bourgeois order which regards the person as a stable unity. According to Nietzsche what is commonly meant by the word 'man' is never anything more than a transient agreement, a bourgeois compromise. It is the average man of bourgeois convention which constitutes the notion of the 'self' through generalizations. In this order it appears to be a necessity as imperative for everyone to be forced to regard the subject as a unity and to speak of the ego as though it were a one-fold and fixed phenomenon for the sake of self-preservation as well as of the preservation of the integrity of the society.

According to Nietzsche, the most radical will and the basic characteristic of a person, is the 'will to power': 'where I found a living creature, there I found will to power; and even in the will of the servant I found the will to be master.'⁸⁸ The will, when the herd person (mass) is in question, is the will to preserve the existing moral understanding and living accordingly without questioning the validity of the existing order.

⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *TSZ* in *The Nietzsche Reader*, p. 271.

This existing order is conveyed by Atay through passages such as the following:

Days passed. Monday came, then it was Sunday, and then Monday again, then Sunday came again. It was impossible to catch up with, overtake; then it was Sunday again. They woke up late. Breakfast, a large breakfast was eaten late. The Sunday papers were read, crossword puzzles were solved; the same crossword puzzles solved the previous week. Dinner was served at home, they went to others for dinner. Dinner was eaten at homes that did not resemble your homes at first sight, but that actually did look alike. Did we give the last dinner, or did we go to Kaya's? Or was it Mehmet's? What difference does it make? We eat at the same house, with the same excitement, the same preparations, I wore the same tie, all my white shirts look the same. My trousers wrinkle at the same place. Did I spill the dinner on Kaya, or was it Kaya who spilled it on me. I am Kaya. And Kaya is Mehmet. As long as Turgut, Kaya, Mehmet are together... it is something like an image reflecting on three mirrors.^{89 90}

Although this might be a standard description of the decadence of bourgeois culture, *The Disconnected* goes further by accompanying Selim and Turgut in their against life. For example, there is not only the predictable and repetitious character of Sundays in general; there is also a predictability to the details of everyday interaction. In one episode, Turgut goes to Ankara for a business trip and considers visiting his wife's relatives. But he visualizes in his mind the conversation that might occur and when he does this he feels like he has already gone and that there is no point to the visit.⁹¹

I did not encounter any difficulties in finding your new house. Your son has grown very much. I hope you will grow to be an engineer like your Uncle Turgut. Let him be worse. How is Nermin doing? She is fine, she sends her regards and love. I hope I can bring her the next time. Tell me, are you studying your lessons? He frowned. Uncles sometimes frown: you can't trust them. You will remember Süheyla: my aunt's daughter-in-law. Nice to meet you. The dinner was delicious. The location of your house is very nice as well. You look younger. I have some work to do at the hotel tonight. The next

⁸⁹ Oğuz Atay, *Tutunamayanlar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1992), p. 335. Hereafter *T*.

⁹⁰ All the extracts from Atay were translated by the author and Nilay Kacar.

⁹¹ As Sibel Irzik has indicated 'other people seem to have talked as well, but they only speak the words that Turgut expects from them and that render his cynical responses possible.' See Sibel Irzik, "Tutunamayanlar'da Çökseslilik" ve Sınırları," *Varlık Dergisi* (Ekim 1995), pp. 46.*.

time, come with Nermin. I said we would, why prolong? Don't think of going to a hotel. Fine: We will directly land here and collapse the building.⁹²

It seems that even 'spontaneous' speech, the everyday conversation characteristic of bourgeois life, is endlessly repeated, that what has happened once will happen again and again.

In *The Man without Qualities* Nietzsche's name is mentioned several times, and at one point Ulrich's friend Clarisse even proposes that the Parallel Campaign be organized as a 'Nietzsche year' (later she proposes an 'Ulrich year'). In *The Disconnected* we encounter Selim as an admirer of Nietzsche. However, he is also an admirer of Marx, another critic of 'bourgeois order'. In fact, the voices of Marx and Nietzsche (and several others) can all be heard in Selim's writings. For instance, Selim writes an essay entitled 'What is to be done?' in which he discusses what to do in order to be a genuine individual who wants to change the way things are and who wishes a revolutionary action, rather than imitating the behavior and attitudes of the people around him in a lazy and indifferent way. The title was made famous by Lenin, but Selim is less interested in revolutionary collective political action than in the question of how something can be done by individuals. To realize an action which can change society, first of all an individual must be able to govern and discipline him/herself. To him, a person who cannot understand himself/herself cannot solve the problems of the society:

What is to be done? If a prompt answer is requested to this question, of course, only through the pure reason, or, with the combination of one or two ideas compiled from here and there, certain temporary solutions may be put forward. A person may believe that these temporary solutions are his/her own inventions. Yet, for example, the slight inspection of the concept regarded as the pure reason will demonstrate that this is mostly clichés achieved through the influence of the society... There you are! Even in these basic behavior, which are thought to be found by the pure reason, supposedly in order to

⁹² Atay, *T*, p. 250.

develop and improve social action, and which are put forward as inevitable principles for all sorts of actions, you will look for the secret powers of the demand to obviously protect the self being of the individual and the society, which they do not want to change!⁹³

Selim suggests re-evaluating the respected values:

In the process of understanding yourself, we can use the skepticism Descartes applied to science. We must start by not recognizing all of our values. We should never forget that the things we assume as personal values may be nothing but fake qualities acquired by the pressure of the society. For instance, let's take abstract concepts of moral values. There are concepts such as virtue, ethics, etc. We have learnt that these concepts are valid in every society and have also learnt to comply with these rules in every society.... They, on the other hand, try to hypnotize us by these abstract concepts to survive the society no matter what the circumstances are. I don't only respect the man appraising himself to have virtues but if that person hasn't spent effort to take the society to a better place with the people who have virtues and if he hasn't tried to resist the wrong ways around him, then that person has no virtues to my opinion. Don't people even steal for a virtue when necessary?... However, let's not value such fake values which exist to maintain their order.⁹⁴

Despite the reference to Descartes, the rest of this passage is quite Nietzschean.

However, it does not yet indicate the 'dissolution of the subject'. Selim criticizes the common moral understanding which has a function of bringing the members of a society together. This common morality demands self-denial, and individuals who are connected to the order of bourgeois life and who tend to live in complete harmony with the society for the sake of the self-preservation and continuity of the existing order. Turgut was also involved in this play called life; he got married and benefited from the boons of bourgeois life, something which Selim saw as a betrayal.

For Turgut, the bourgeois system, to which he has adapted through his silence, becomes a problem only after Selim's death. The novel depicts a process in which Turgut, through his reading of Selim's manuscripts, calls into question the

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

bourgeois life he has been leading, but also struggles against the radical way in which Selim rejected it. Turgut attempts to ‘defend himself against Selim and against what he represents for Turgut: an impossible existence that, by going against every norm and order (and doing this without grounding itself in any other determinate order), perished in the end.’⁹⁵ Yet, as his reflections on his trip to Ankara demonstrate, he learns to view those norms even more cynically and cruelly, in his internal monologues.

III. The Self: Substance and Subject

What does Turgut discover in Selim’s manuscripts? He discovers a man who has withdrawn from society, become disconnected, and has tried to discover himself. This disconnection was not a voluntary act, but a process of drifting apart from society. This process occurred only gradually: it begins when Selim is a child – which is when he starts to compose the manuscripts – and continues to the point where the manuscripts stop and he finally commits suicide. As we will see, Selim’s withdrawal is not a withdrawal from the conventions of bourgeois society because his withdrawal begins before he can become a competent adult member of that society. Turgut, by contrast, is an adult and so his withdrawal begins as a voluntary act; but he becomes absorbed into the world Selim has created and taken along by Selim’s person. This procedure is not exactly what Nietzsche means in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by becoming a child, because this decentering of his adult subjecthood, takes place through his reading of Selim’s manuscripts. These are devoted to the

⁹⁵ Ertuğrul, p. 633

study of and dialogue with numerous characters, real and fictional. By inhabiting their various worlds, Turgut discovers multiple selves for himself.

In fact, Selim is in a non-position even while he was a child. From an early age Selim does not associate with others easily, a fact that he recalls in a diary entry written shortly before his death: ‘They taught me ordinary ways they showed to others. They should have treated me with another kind of attention.’⁹⁶

Abnormal. This child is abnormal. This child is not normal. I was abnormal as I read without stopping- I didn’t use to read a lot as far as I remember- and I didn’t go next to the guests- this ‘going next to’ phrase made me shiver and made me dizzy- and as I couldn’t find the proper words-they also used to call me stupid because of that. I was eager to make them feel ashamed by being normal when I grew up. I think they were right. How did they know? As I know that they were fool, insensitive and ignorant I am furious that they are right with my entire heart and mind. I should have been right. It didn’t happen that way. Damn the ones who caused this, I uttered a word that is disconnected once. Now I find this word insufficient.⁹⁷

When Selim writes about how he was misunderstood as a child, he compares his experience with that of Nietzsche, who came long before his proper time and who died in loneliness, too. Selim specifies that he is on the verge of madness by saying ‘Nietzsche also died this way.’⁹⁸ In fact, what Turgut will discover in Selim’s manuscripts is a man who has become disconnected from society at an early age and whose disconnectedness has been deepened to the point of suicide by entering into the alternative world of literature and history. Selim has embarked on a quest to find himself by finding himself in figures from the past and by writing plays about his acquaintances. The interesting point here is that these figures of the past include characters that were disconnected themselves: Jesus, Hamlet, and also Don Quixote.

⁹⁶ Atay, *T*, p. 620.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 618-619.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 619.

For me, all plays, novels, stories have different meanings from other people's perceptions. All of life, all of humanity was told and consumed in these books. Living a new experience is like reading a new book to me. I live with the novels and their writers. I live with the forewords. The writers do not astonish me: because I know their lives very well. On the other hand, in the real world as we call it, it is impossible to guess people's intentions. They astonish me everyday. It is much easier to live with my writers. He was born in 1886, in N. His/her father, mother, environment, his pains which no one knows while he/she was alive, the real reason concerning the quarrels with his friends were all told between the lines. I wonder his/her unknown aspects at the first pages of the book but I know I will learn everything.⁹⁹

This quotation is an important clue to what Selim is searching for in his reading and writing. Despite the variety of authors, 'it is easier to live with my writers' than to live with people. His way of living with people is not simply to ignore or avoid them, but to construct interactions with him in his mind, in which he is their voice as well as his own. In this way, they will always give him the responses he desires from them, and the difficulty presented by other people is overcome. The vital exception to this is his lover, Günseli. In many ways he is as closed to her as to everyone else; the difference is that he loves her. Only he cannot love her actively, in his outward behavior, because that involves sharing, clarity, responsibility and care in every sense. Whereas lovers normally experience this as something that makes relationships with others easier and lighter, for Selim it only reminds him of his disconnectedness with others, except his mother, with whom his relationship can have this lightness, but only because he is a child:

[Günseli] wants to help me, but she tires me. She cares, that means she expects care. At least she expects that her care is noticed. My mother is not like this. She knows how to be with me without involving herself.¹⁰⁰

In a way Selim is seeking a stable world to which he can belong, and the kind of stable personal identity – or subjectivity – that bourgeois society provides for its

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 623.

members and that was denied to him since childhood. But the private, disconnected manner in which he does it only confirms to him that his personal identity is opposed to the identity of society. However, Selim's search for a substantial self is a literary and historical journey in which he identifies himself with many others who he wishes to be. By tracing this movement – which in the end is a movement towards suicide – Atay shows how Selim's quest for subjecthood leads to its opposite, the 'dissolution of the subject'.

This process of identifying oneself with others goes further, because Turgut discovers Selim's manuscripts; he reads them and he too challenges the fixed character of his own 'self'. He reads Selim's accounts of his acquaintances, and then seeks them out himself, as though he were Selim's ghost. All of them turn out to be themselves disconnected in various ways. One of them, Esat, the only one who had a place in Selim's life during his high school years, confirms the statement about living in the world of writers, and then describes how Selim was regarded by others as both an 'abnormal' and a 'wonderful' child.

He was compliant about them considering him as a wonderful child. 'I am getting spoilt and then I utter such a stupid word that we all regret. However, I never want to make a mistake. I wish to be a wonderful child who is one hundred percent pure because what is one hundred percent pure is nothing but itself. I want to be my own self.'¹⁰¹

It is significant that Atay conveys the mystical and mythical side of Selim by giving him the surname, 'Işık' (light), recalling the description of Jesus Christ as light in the Bible; the word 'light' also points to the way in which Turgut is able to follow in the footsteps of Selim. As Yıldız Ecevit puts it:

The parallelism that is intended between Selim Işık, who is equipped with the abstract features of *the disconnected* and the leader of them as pure and clean as a child, and Jesus Christ is emphasized in his surname... The other story

¹⁰¹ Atay, *T*, p. 365.

characters always yearn for Selim who is rich with mystical/mythical traits. He is like Jesus whose second coming is awaited. Every step of Turgut in the way of becoming a person - thereby a writer - is taken under the light of Selim. Being Selim is the point where Turgut struggles to reach on his way to live himself purely.¹⁰²

Selim is a pure person who 'easily believes in people, never becomes suspicious about what they say.'¹⁰³ But as Atay points out, the purity is mixed with the lack and loss and disconnection that helped to nurture it:

Neither he was elected for the football team, nor did he become the class president. Somehow he managed to remain naïve/clean with an aspect of his – maybe with all his aspects.

Yet he experienced a fear mixed with suspicion/doubt;
Lived with the fear of something bad to happen at the end, he, Selim Işık.

Every event. An old wound tingled, every time he approached,
People. Always wished to live as a child and fearless,
When he is born again/reincarnates.
Growing is required only for those connected.
In his second coming he will walk around stark naked.
In the strictest sense of the word stark naked.¹⁰⁴

In *The Disconnected* Selim does not return but in a way he is replaced by Turgut, who, having read his manuscripts and diaries, seeks out Selim's friends and relatives. Some of them are mutual friends, but some of them were known only to Selim: Selim's girlfriend Günseli, his friend from military service Süleyman Kargı, his mother. In a sense, Turgut may be said to be the very opposite of open and 'innocent', because he already knows the people he is encountering for the first time; he shares no past with them – and no present, for they never discover where he lives

¹⁰² Ecevit, p. 295.

¹⁰³ Atay, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

- except the past that he has read about in Selim's account of them. But this knowledge of their pasts means that he can be whoever he wants to be. Moreover, his voice can be anybody's voice. This is illustrated in the meeting with Günseli, Selim's one-time lover.

We understand from Selim's diary that he never opened up to her. When Turgut and Günseli meet, they talk about her and Selim. After some time, in fact after many pages of where punctuation marks are not used and where it becomes impossible to say who the narrator is, Turgut seems to visualize the relationship between Selim, Günseli and Turgut. He does so in a way that makes it difficult to know which one is being imagined:¹⁰⁵

... I am not talking Günseli there are hundreds of people everybody knows them but I am not talking I am judging I despise them I do not crawl like them I I I you are tired Günseli let us give a break...¹⁰⁶

Although I have just said that Turgut is the ghost of Selim, Turgut is fully aware of the differences between himself and his dead friend. Atay conveys this difference through Turgut's surname: Özben (in Turkish, *öz* means essence, 'ben' means 'I', so that Özben could mean 'the essential I' or 'the genuine self'). Yet, even Turgut himself does not know how to define what he is searching for and calls it simply 'thing':

Shall I embark on the adventure with all my power? Shall I not be able to/shall I fail to protect it? It, that "thing"? A part no one knows, hard to describe, yet the 'thing' he is completely aware of its existence/presence. Shall he jeopardize/endanger it as well? He had never surrendered the whole Turgut. Never. He had kept it for himself. A 'thing' only Turgut appreciated...I know what I am saying. It is me, self of Turgut Özben.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ With respect to the theme 'Unity of multiple voices in *The Disconnected*' see Irzik, p. 46.

¹⁰⁶ Atay, *T*, p. 486.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.327.

This 'thing' like quality is conveyed in an episode that Turgut recalls from his years at university, where one day he and Selim had sat down together to write an essay which they called 'The Co-ordinations of Life'. In this essay Selim criticized Turgut for being overly rationalist. It begins with an unnecessarily accurate description of the location of Turgut's house: 'a house in northeast of the city, between a latitude of forty one degrees, zero minutes and one second and a longitude of twenty nine degrees, twelve minutes and one second'¹⁰⁸ This is the sort of accuracy which involves an objectivist attitude to the outside world. In so far as Turgut absorbs himself in Selim's manuscripts, becomes Selim, he moves radically away from this attitude. He finds it increasingly difficult to maintain the external appearances of bourgeois life and engages in a series of internal monologues that reflect on his own situation, and in internal dialogues with others and with his dead friend. The character of Turgut is represented by Atay – as the character of Ulrich is represented by Musil in the first two parts of *The Man Without Qualities* - through these internal monologues and dialogues.

Eventually, although he has tried to find Selim's friends, and although he has held internal dialogues with many others, Turgut speaks only with Selim. By this stage he can neither return to daily life nor can he transform his internal monologues and dialogues into an active rejection, and anticipate a different way of existence in daily life. On the one hand, such alienation is not undesirable, because it permits him to distance himself from the bourgeoisie, on the other hand such isolation is enough to drive a person to madness...and suicide.

The relationship between Turgut and the other characters is made more complicated by Atay. During a traumatic visit to a brothel with Metin, a mutual

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

friend from university, Turgut acquires an internal interlocutor of his own, called Olric, and from then on Olric accompanies Turgut both in his internal monologues and dialogues and in his external dealings with society. Olric functions for Turgut as an advisor who is present in the room with him but of which others are unaware. The most dramatic scene in which this relationship is depicted demonstrates the collapse of his relationship with his wife:

As a person who wanted to keep his thoughts to himself, he was scared of the uneasiness that could be brought by closeness in bed, so he was prolonging the conversation... He was standing by the bed without moving. He was waiting without moving, without getting undressed. Nermin [his wife] moved closer, undid his tie. A bad beginning. I don't want to be touched Olric... Tonight, I don't want her to see me getting undressed. I am in strangely shy Olric. They used to say that you were like that in the land of ice. You did not have anybody near you when you were getting undressed.¹⁰⁹

Eventually, Turgut, who feels suffocated in the ambiguity of words and noise just like Selim did, can only set himself free from the boredom of daily life and fixed patterns of behaviors if he goes on a journey - with Olric, his imaginary character:

I should let go of myself, he murmured. I should give up resisting. I must live and see. I should not be afraid of traveling to a country I do not know. I should enter the world of these indistinct people. Selim's trip was interrupted, his mind as well... let yourself go: what is better than living in a dream? You can take with you whomever you like, such as the clerk at the office who wants to be an engineer. Live your adventure... You won't have any bitterness inside.¹¹⁰

This journey is a journey to nowhere, with no fixed destination. Turgut begins to live in train compartments. He has taken Selim's diaries, a copy of *Don Quixote*, and writing paper with him. At one point on this journey he meets a journalist and hands him a manuscript with the title *The Disconnected*. Actually, this happens in the first chapter of the novel, entitled 'The Beginning of The End.' Thus in a way, the course

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 569-571.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 324-325.

of the novel is that of time folding back on itself. But this does not mean that the novel makes clear something that is obscure at its beginning. The reader is constantly left with an ambiguity: is *The Disconnected* that we have in our hand the story of Turgut's merging with his dead friend Selim, following the course of his life and thoughts and then setting them down in a manuscript of his own, or are Selim and his manuscripts and his suicide all the product of Turgut's imagination? Does Turgut inhabit Selim's mind or does Selim inhabit Turgut's?

These questions clearly raise more questions about identity and subjectivity, and complicate the idea of an autonomous or Cartesian subject. But does it justify talk of the dissolution of the subject? In the next section I will suggest that it does.

IV. Intertextuality and The 'Dissolution of the Subject'

As mentioned in the previous chapter, 'essayism' refers to a style of writing, but for Musil it is also a condition for creating a literary character such as the man without qualities. For Atay, intertextuality plays a similar role, for creating a literary character such as Selim who lacks any fixed identity.

As I said earlier, Selim does not live in isolation, but reads about and writes about many other literary characters, and identifies with many of them. This process of identifying with characters from the past is found in *Don Quixote*. I refer to this because as I said earlier, Turgut carries a copy of *Don Quixote* on the train when he goes on his long journey. Selim's relationship with his books and manuscripts is a little like that of *Don Quixote* with his books and manuscripts. And like *Don Quixote*, it makes Selim a not very competent member of society.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ For further discussion see Ecevit, pp. 245-250.

But Selim is different: while Don Quixote becomes one character – a knight from the past – Selim constantly changes the character with which he identifies. The result of this is that one day he will be Hamlet, one day Nietzsche, another Marx, another Oblomov, and so on. None of these identifications provide him with stability. The worlds of Nietzsche, Marx, Hamlet and so on are different worlds. There is no continuity to Selim’s subjecthood, no firm basis for it and no continuity of social relationships. This does not mean that he does not want continuity. One day, Turgut learns from Esat that Selim once said: ‘In *My Universities*, there is someone who is trying to reconcile Nietzsche and Marx. Isn’t that strange? He died before even having the opportunity to realize this. What could he have done if he had lived? Such unfinished works give me pain.’¹¹² In a way, his whole life is one unfinished work, an endless attempt to reconcile irreconcilable influences. Then, one day, he ‘becomes’ Jesus.

Jesus Christ appears a great deal in Selim’s diary. He sees Jesus not as a holy prophet, but as the archetype and ‘greatest supporter’ of the disconnected with his thoughts that were contrary to his era and his attitude of not resisting evil.¹¹³ His attitude to Jesus is different from his attitude to the other people with whom he identifies; these lose their popularity and others replace them, whereas Jesus Christ is described as a successful disconnected because he has truly sacrificed himself. Selim talks about Jesus as a friend whose value was underestimated when he was alive.

They flew together; they sat together in a high place. They talked about things as the beauty of the soul. They talked about the miseries they have experienced due to people, they couldn’t understand how the time passed. While it was getting dark, Jesus asked for permission and he left: his father was waiting above.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Atay, p. 374.

¹¹³ Ecevit, p. 294.

¹¹⁴ Atay, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

Moreover, he writes a humorous letter to Jesus: ‘I’ve been thinking about you for days. I can’t put your book away...On Wednesday, my mother won’t be home. We can talk freely, if you come.’¹¹⁵ However, Jesus, who is addressed in an ironic and humorous way in Selim’s fictions is addressed in a far more melancholic language in diary entries written a little before his death: ‘I haven’t shaved my beard for fifteen days. My hair is also long.’¹¹⁶

Jesus Christ also says one cannot be a prophet in his own country. They also come to us. The ones who don’t come are worse. Oh, were I not born in an underdeveloped country, were I not finished myself with my severe rage, I would show you! Your end has come: Jesus Christ is going to show you all, Jesus Christ has come to us.¹¹⁷

Jesus of course dies but his teachings live on. Selim also dies and his diaries and manuscripts live on. Jesus’ teachings lived on in the church; Selim’s live on through the efforts of Turgut. Turgut, however, is not a disciple of Selim; after starting to follow the trace of Selim, Turgut who learns how to be Selim, in other words the disconnected by imitating Selim, also identifies with the literary characters he and Selim read: ‘I, Turgut Özben, am the son of the King of Denmark.’¹¹⁸

Atay goes one step further by introducing the idea of ‘multiple personalities’. In this context, Ecevit draws our attention to the similarities, not only between Selim and Don Quixote but also between Selim and Hermann Hesse’s literary character Harry Haller in *Steppenwolf*: ‘in reality every personality is far from being a whole.’¹¹⁹ At first Haller is both a wolf and a human being; each wants to destroy the

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 607.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 667.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹¹⁹ Hermann Hesse, *Bozkırkurdu*, trans. Kamuran Şipal (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2003), pp. 57, 178.

other ceaselessly. Harry ‘finds himself a ‘human being’, that is to say, a world of thoughts and feelings, of culture and tamed or sublimated nature, and besides this he finds within himself also a ‘wolf’, that is to say a dark world of instinct, of savagery and cruelty.’¹²⁰ He is isolated, alone and struggling with conflicts. Then, Harry who is in the process of becoming realizes that his ‘self’ is not simply divided but it includes countless singularities. And he learns the ‘art of living’ by playing with these singularities as a chess player.¹²¹

Harry consists of a hundred or a thousand selves, not of two. His life oscillates, as everyone’s does, not merely between two poles, such as the body and spirit, the saint and the sinner, but between thousands, between innumerable poles.¹²²

Similarly, Selim is described as someone who ‘wishes to live too many things all together. Whichever one he hangs on to, wrong done to the other one. How many parts could he break into?’¹²³ Moreover, Selim says: ‘as a matter of fact I fall for anyone I see. In no time I am prepared to be like him, to submit my whole self to him and to absorb his whole existence into myself’.¹²⁴

Ecevit, also, draws our attention to the same inner conflicts and the theme the ‘self as a multiplicity’ in Atay’s other novels. In *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, for instance, Atay increases the number of the divisions of inner conflicts: from the main character Hikmet he creates an army of Hikmets: bourgeois Hikmet, Hikmet under the pressure of the instincts, child Hikmet, and marginal Hikmet. In this novel Atay goes one step further by building his literary character Hikmet as someone whose organs are taken

¹²⁰ Hesse, *Steppen Wolf*, trans. Basil Creighton (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1965), p. 70. Hereafter *SW*

¹²¹ Ecevit, p. 178.

¹²² Hesse, *SW* p. 70.

¹²³ Atay, *T*, p. 406.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 633.

from different people. Not only this, the organs are taken from people who lived at different times:¹²⁵ ‘By all accounts these pieces are not taken from people of the same century; they even differed in race, language and religion’.¹²⁶

Intertextuality in *The Disconnected* is further exemplified by relationships that may draw upon many sources at the same time: Berna Moran sees a parallel with Olric in Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* and with Yorick in *Hamlet*; Orhan Pamuk says: ‘Olric is very similar to Yorick in *Tristram Shandy*’.¹²⁷ However, Atay was a close reader of Musil, and perhaps he meant to make a connection between Olric and Musil’s Ulrich.

V Conclusion

I will end this chapter with a discussion of a theme that is common to the work of Musil and Atay: unfinishedness.

Atay’s novel is finished, but he repeatedly emphasizes the motto of ‘not being able to finish’. The first chapter is called, paradoxically, ‘The Beginning of the End’, but several hundred pages later there is a sense that we are no closer to the end. It ends by leaving Turgut in the compartment of the train in the middle of a potentially endless journey somewhere in the middle of Turkey, the middle of nowhere. The same thing applies to the subject. If the subject is a thing defined by possibilities that are endless, then it has no mid-point, no centre.

Musil’s novel was famously unfinished at his death. Maybe he did not intend to finish it. However, this is also the condition that makes him build a literary

¹²⁵ Ecevit, p. 178.

¹²⁶ Oğuz Atay, *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınevi, 1973), p. 336.

¹²⁷ Ecevit, *op. cit.* p. 250.

character as a 'man of possibilities' who is inclined to every quality. In other words, the principle which Ulrich practices throughout the novel is also the principle that Musil applies in his writing style: the essay – both as style of writing and as style of life - works in the sphere of possibility, although again we may ask whether essayism falls short of living 'the other condition'.

CONCLUSION

In the first chapter I explored Nietzsche's critique of the Cartesian 'self' in which the 'I' is defined as a substance. Nietzsche's own account of the 'self', on the other hand, regards it as a continual process of integrating one's habits, and patterns of action with one another. The 'dissolution of the subject' is simply losing our faith in the Cartesian account of the self. The prefix dis- does not give a negative meaning to it; instead it is a new beginning. The 'self' is creation and interpretation. This means it is to develop the ability and willingness to accept responsibility for everything we have done, since what we have done constitutes us. The 'self' is not something that must be discovered but created. This activity in Nietzsche's terms is the 'art of living'.

Nietzsche often refers to literary and artistic models to understand the world. For instance in *The Birth of Tragedy*, he saw Dionysus reborn in the person of Wagner through his art.¹²⁸ In a way, Wagner, became 'the poet of his life.' However, we should note that when Nietzsche refers to these models he does not simply want us to imitate them. Directly imitating any other person, even Nietzsche himself, would miss his point. That is why Zarathustra, who can be regarded as an exemplary creator of his own self, refuses to be followed and imitated: 'Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you.'¹²⁹ The reason that Nietzsche does not give any description of the ideal person is the idea that no one can be a best model for me.

¹²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19.

¹²⁹ Nietzsche, *TSZ:I* 'Of the Bestowing Virtue'

We saw that Ulrich rejects the morality of his era, seeks ways of creating his own values and wishes to experience his individual freedom. He refuses to become 'something' simply by imitation, in contrast to many of the other characters who appear as fairly standard types. Ulrich appreciates an experimental life which enables one to be open to new experiences, whereas Selim in his search of his 'self' not only imitates but even identifies himself with literary characters. In a way, instead of 'creating' his life and his own 'self' in a Nietzschean way, he becomes many people successively. At last, he identifies himself with Jesus, who is described as a successful disconnected. As a result of this, he also carries the sins and responsibilities of everyone on his shoulders. Turgut may be said to take Selim as a model for him; he learns how to be disconnected but only through becoming Selim, which also means that he identifies with same literary and historical characters who Selim identifies with.

Musil attempts to show Ulrich's understanding of a 'trying morality' which is open to new experiences and to the world via his description of the relationship between Ulrich and Agathe. They try to reconcile feeling and intellect, the rational and the irrational, masculinity and femininity. However, their attempt to realize 'the other condition' can also be read as a critique of Nietzsche, since although the siblings can achieve to live 'in the fire' while they are isolated, they cannot continue to live like that in the midst of urban society. In a way, 'the other condition' demands the absence of others; or at least, the absence of others with established patterns of institutional roles. Nietzsche would say, only certain types of individual, 'free spirits', can realize it. The question is, if Ulrich is not a free spirit, who is?

We encounter a similar question in *The Disconnected*. I will not simply suggest that Selim and Turgut were passive nihilists whereas Ulrich was an active

one. The story is more complicated than that: the main characters of both novels are aware of the dissolution of their subjecthood. All of them say 'No' to the existing order, and especially Ulrich and Selim feel that only saying 'No' is not enough, and that one should also create new values. Yet, in both novels, the difficulty of this aim is stressed. Selim, after withdrawing from life by identifying with different people, withdraws from life only by committing suicide. Turgut withdraws from life by going on a journey, and this is a more creative withdrawal than Selim's because he does not commit suicide but writes it all down in the novel called *The Disconnected*. But this act of writing a novel is still an act of communication with others.

Nietzsche's ideal of selfhood seems to require that each of us rejects the imitation of models, and makes his or her life a poem. But the difficulty of this was understood by both Musil and Atay. Their main characters are looking for things that are perhaps impossible to obtain: 'the other condition' is an impossibility and the things that Selim is striving for cannot be had.

In the first chapter I wrote about Nietzsche's idea of active nihilism. Nietzsche summed up this approach to life with the phrase 'so it happened, thus I willed it', meaning that one should accept responsibility for everything that happens to one. Whether or not Ulrich's experiment with 'the other condition' makes him an active nihilist, whether or not the dissolution of Turgut's subjecthood through literature is a form of human freedom, both of them do something that seems to conform to this attitude.

At the beginning of *The Disconnected*, Turgut asks: 'Why did this letter come and find me?'¹³⁰ Similarly, Ulrich is disturbed by the letter he receives from his father. Both of them could have refused to respond and thrown the letter in the bin.

¹³⁰ Atay, *T*, p. 25.

Yet both of them answer: Turgut answers the letter from his dead friend, Ulrich answers the letter from his father. In answering the call - of fate, of death - they turned 'so it happened' into 'thus I willed it'.

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