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Into the Millennium: The Never Ending Novel (Reflections on Closure)

BRISBANE. JULY. It is a particularly warm evening, but strangely dry, and I have finished work for the day. The university where I work as a part-time tutor in Australian literature while I write my PhD is in a picturesque setting on the Brisbane River - sandstone buildings, acres of playing fields, jacarandas, bougainvillea, poincianas and moreton bay figs, a lake, flower gardens...

The thesis has been three-quarters written for some time now - An Examination of the Un-ending of Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* (an examination of the what? A what of the what ending?). On the occasions when I am able to contemplate why I find myself in this stalled position I can only think of the project as artificial light thrown on a non-problem, begun in a misguided conviction of usefulness and significance.

But I enjoy teaching (the opportunity to escape into ozlit from the claustrophobia of Musil's universe), and the interaction with the two groups of second year students most of whom have actually read the texts: (Henry Handel Richardson) *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney*, (Christina Stead) *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, (Gerald Murnane) *Tamarisk Row*, (Tim Winton) *Cloudstreet*, and (Amanda Lohrey) *The Morality of Gentlemen*. It sounds like an odd grouping of novels, I know, but the idea is to trace a movement in Australian literature from a late-Victorian style through twentieth century modernism to postmodernism. It's the sort of course that could fall flat on its face, but I'm lucky to have a group of bright students who not only engage the texts and ideas, but constantly challenge me and question the theoretical principles that underpin the discussions we have in class.

Today was a good example. In one of the groups are two budding writers (I don't know this for a fact, but I have my suspicions) both of whom are interested in whether the processes of writing can be communicated and what the fiction says about the author. It is a delicate question and this afternoon it distracted us from our discussion of Tommy Quinn and the representation of unionism in *The Morality of Gentlemen*. One of the students, Karen, said she thought the author must be a communist (she was intensely scornful - "Capitalism has proved its superiority! How can an apparently intelligent person cling to such an outdated concept?")

I was a little disappointed, but Karen insisted that she wanted to get inside the author's head to try and discover what motived the writer to write this particular book in this particular way. I guess my disappointment came from the fact that it's the sort of question that should have been dealt with in Introductory Literary Theory IT102. I am sympathetic to this line of questioning though, and we spent the remaining forty-five minutes of the class grappling with it.

'Fiction is a particular type of text created by an individual in a certain historical situation in a particular manner,' I began. This satisfied no one.

'We know that,' they said. 'But what can we learn of the author's intentions? The compositional process?'

'All we have is the text,' I said. 'We can't assume an affinity between Tommy Quinn and Amanda Lohrey beyond the fact that the character is an imaginative construct of the designated author, unconnected to the person who may or may not even be Amanda Lohrey.'

'But she is,' they said. 'We've seen her interviewed.'

'Yes, but the person you saw being interviewed was not the same as the name we associate and identify as the author of this text.'

'But she was talking about this book.'

I took a deep breath. 'Let me put it this way: the author of *The Morality of Gentlemen* is one aspect of the person - Amanda Lohrey. Think of it in terms of a pseudonym,' I said. 'Henry Handel Richardson was not the "real" name of the person who wrote *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney*. George Eliot wasn't the "real" name of the person who wrote *Middlemarch*. The point is, that despite the practical reasons those women had for choosing pseudonyms at the time, our knowledge of their other identities doesn't modify "the functioning" (Foucault 122) of the authors' names in regard to the published texts.

'In fact we could go further and ask - Who is the author? Who, really, was George Eliot? or Amanda Lohrey? If you saw someone on television answering to the name and talking about a book you recognise as having been written by

"Amanda Lohrey," does this explain anything about who that person is? If you saw someone on television claiming to be George Eliot and talking about the writing of *Silas Marner*, how would you understand what she said?

'So, we are left with the text, and its value is determined by our reading of it. There is no doubting that some "author" shaped (wrote) the text, but we do doubt that any comments this person might have would contribute to our investigation of what the text has to say.'

Only the "writers" in the class seemed disturbed by these distinctions, perhaps imagining their future masterpieces would be credited to some disembodied form of themselves for which they would receive no acknowledgement.

'We know these books are written through hard work,' they protested. 'Dedication, inspiration.'

I nodded.

'By one person.'

'The name of that person forms a type of classification, but the text itself is still the only source of information about the text. If you want me to believe Amanda Lohrey is a Stalinist, or a neo-Nazi or whatever, then you have to convince me through a thorough critical analysis of the text. I'm not denying the possibility, I'm just saying you need to support it. Authors are notoriously unreliable about their own work, for any number of reasons.' I directed them to the last lines of *The Morality of Gentlemen*:

> In any investigation such as this, one must begin with the reliable witnesses - one must create
> a sane and reasonable perspective within which to construct a profile of the militant, a portrait
> of the oppositionist.
> Jaz is my perspective; the perfect blend of complicity and cynicism. (Lohrey 252)

'Aren't you saying that everything is of equal value?' Karen said. 'That if I claim Enid Blyton is a better writer than Virginia Woolf it must be true, simply because I say it is?'

'Some things are more important or better than others,' her friend said. 'We all know it.'

'Would you say that was true in regard to men and women?' I asked. 'Doesn't assigning equal attention to the various points of view encourage a better understanding of those different values and situations?' I was glad no one questioned my deferral to universal notions of tolerance, justice, and equality.

In the blackness of the carpark (the furthest, cheapest carpark from the campus centre) I make out the shape of my old station wagon by the perimeter fence that backs onto the Mercantile Rowing Club. At least I think it's mine. When I look now there are two other cars, identical in this light, parked at a short distance on either side. I head for the centre vehicle, and realise, when I get close enough, that it's not my '79 Falcon after all and stop, arms full of notes and photocopying and the manuscript of a novel I have been asked to read by a friend, trying to decide which of the other two vague outlines looks most familiar under the smoky, moonless sky.

A rustle back past the fence makes me start in nervous apprehension. It's so quiet out here, just the slow rumble of traffic towards the city. Another noise. Campus security have circulated warnings about two violent attacks on or near the grounds in the last six weeks. I have $4.75 in my pocket and I'm willing to turn it over without a struggle. I hear the noise again. Probably a bush turkey, or a cat.

In the comfort of the driver's seat I sit for a moment, breathing a little heavily, the pile of paper on the seat beside me. I could imagine a crazed sex murderer prowling the darkness; a movie-like image of a thick-necked shuffling brute appears in my head - Moosbrugger, Musil's mirror to the disintegration of modern man.

The main character of *The Man Without Qualities* is a young man named Ulrich, a trained engineer and an ex-soldier (like Musil himself) and a mathematician who has decided to take a twelve month vacation from life in order to discover some purpose, or meaning. The date is 1913; the location is Vienna. His father, a respected legal academic, convinces Ulrich to take advantage of his friendship with a certain Count Leinsdorf who is organising what becomes known as the Parallel Campaign to establish a celebration year in 1918 for the seventieth anniversary of the Emperor Franz Josef. It is called the Parallel Campaign because a similar business is being conducted in Germany to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the German Kaiser Wilhelm that same year; the Austrians wish their celebration to be more spectacular, and the pompous bureaucratic meanderings of the various committees provide rich satirical material for Musil. Combined with this is the structural black joke of world war hanging over the events, of which only the reader is aware. By the end of the first book Ulrich has served as Secretary to the campaign and decided, privately, that it is doomed to failure. He has spent a lot of time at the house of his cousin Diotima, where most of the committee meetings are held, he has crossed swords intellectually with Paul Arnheim the Prussian industrialist and intellectual, and he has had unsatisfactory affairs with three women. These plot points do not do

justice to seven hundred odd pages of literature, but this is, literally, the extent of the action. A number of other characters are introduced, amongst the more important being: Walter and Clarisse, Ulrich's childhood friends who have a tempestuous marriage; General Stumm Von Bordwehr, and the psychopath, Moosbrugger.

Who was Robert Musil?

Despite my impatience at Karen's questions this afternoon, it is a line of investigation I am sympathetic to, caught as I am, "tyrannically centred" (Bathes 143), on the work of an author. Part of the reason for this is my occasional fantasy of writing. I have a couple of short story attempts lost at the back of my filing cabinet. But it is also a problem of aesthetics.

My interest as a reader has always been in the How, the Why, and the Who, as much as the What, the Where and the When. Occasionally I think I should have been a journalist. But then literary theory is engaged in an energetic dialogue with itself that allows for this resistance (de Man), this exploration of possibilities, a source of vitality that springs from debate, a creative movement. We know that works don't appear as spontaneous, fully formed jewels - authorless; and yet the process of that creation is irrelevant to the analysis of a text. At the same time psychoanalytic theory as applied to literature, and the popularity of literary biographies, would suggest that there is at least a residual interest in the connection between the creator and created; a contradiction rarely addressed.

What is the creative process that drives a man to dedicate twenty-five years of his life to writing a book he cannot finish, some suspect would never have been able to finish? What were his intentions regarding *The Man Without Qualities* before his sudden death in 1942? Is it possible to unravel directions from the numerous notes and chapter outlines he left for the manuscript? What other information about the author, if any, can be justifiably brought to bear on a reading of the text? If I accept the authority of the text how is that authority modified by the author's relationship with language? Or, as Henry James put it:

> Why is it that the life that overflows in Dickens seems to me always to go on in the morning, or in the very earliest hours of the afternoon at most, and in a vast apartment that appears to have windows, large uncurtained, and rather unwashed windows, on all sides at once? Why is it that in George Eliot the sun sinks forever to the west, and the shadows are long, and the afternoon wanes, and the trees vaguely rustle, and the color of the day is much inclined to yellow? Why is it that in Jane Austen we sit resigned in an arrested spring? Why does Hawthorne give us the afternoon hour later than anyone else? - oh, late, late, quite uncannily late, and as if it were always winter outside? (James 15)

George Eliot said "beginnings are always troublesome, but conclusions are the weak point of most authors...some of the fault lies in the very nature of a conclusion, which is at best a negation" (qtd. in Kermode 174). Alternatively, endings can be described as endings "only when they are not negative but frankly transfigure the events in which they are immanent" (Kermode 175). [Hypertext]

In a 1934 letter to Ernest Hemingway, F.Scott Fitzgerald describes his own sense of an ending, and also Hemingway's and Joseph Conrad's:

> The theory back of it I got from Conrad's preface to *The Nigger*, that the purpose of a work of fiction is to appeal to the lingering after effects in the reader's mind.... The second contribution...was your trying to work out some such theory in your troubles with the very ending of *A Farewell to Arms*. I remember that your first draft - or at least the first one I saw - gave a sort of old-fashioned Alger book summary...and you may remember my suggestion to take a burst of eloquence from anywhere in the book that you could find it and tag off with that; you were against the idea because you felt that the true line of a work of fiction was to take a reader up to a high emotional pitch but then let him down or ease him off. You gave no aesthetic reason for this - nevertheless you convinced me. (Perkins 334)

What is this preoccupation with endings? I can't explain why I should be engaged in this project at this particular time, a time that has been called "the end of history". Where the looming symbolic date, the end of a millennium, (the end of the wor(l)d?) has infected public discourses with a melancholic expectation of doom: a public outburst of primitivism and superstition. [Hypertext] (With me it was purely coincidental.)

The project is focused on a text that doesn't end, one that appears to subvert the traditional expectation or attraction of stories is the narrative element, an unveiling of the truth (Barthes 1975:10), the what-happens-next? how-will-it-end? An eagerness best illustrated by Scheherazade's husband. (Another never-ending text?). But the story of Scheherazade and the Arabian Nights does end, and Musil's material for *The Man Without Qualities* does run out, so it would seem there is some responsibility on the part of the story teller to shape the material, and closure would appear to be crucial in achieving this. But finding endings is not simply a matter of stopping, the writer needs "to invent and establish them, to arrive at them by a difficult, dire process of selection and comparison, of surrender and sacrifice" (James 6).

The notion of shaping endings relies on the Aristotelian idea that stories have a beginning, middle and an end whose parts are related to each other. The ending cannot be examined separately from the body of the text, and is in fact often implied in the opening. The first chapter of *The Man Without Qualities* is titled, aptly, "From Which, Remarkably Enough, Nothing Develops". [Hypertext] This has been said of *The Man Without Qualities* - remarkably enough, nothing develops. Certainly the title of this first chapter could be read as a prediction for either lack of action in the world, or lack of an ending in the novel. It's necessary, therefore, to find a model of potentially wide use, to be able to describe the way that endings relate to the beginning and a middle, and so, by extension show how *The Man Without Qualities* diverges from a norm. This relationship between beginning, middle and end can be broadly categorized as circular, parallel, incomplete, or tangential (Torgovnick 13).

Circularity refers to an ending that recalls the beginning in one or a combination of either language, setting, or the grouping of characters. A parallel ending uses language, setting, or character groupings to reflect not only the beginning but also a series of elements present through the text. Incomplete endings may use aspects of circular or parallel closure but usually leave out some important connection, either deliberately or inadvertently, that would identify it with either of these two patterns. Tangential endings introduce a new character, topic, or narrative element that may suggest a continuing story of a different type.

In addition to these four terms we need to find some way to describe the author's relationship to his or her own ideas during closure in order to be able to assess the degree of control in closing the text. In other words: Does closure succeed on the author's terms? And thus: What are those terms? Which brings us back to Karen's question. The problem, as Karen and her friend recognised, is that if we totally disregard authorial intent then judging closure, particularly, becomes problematic because in answering the question - What is being attempted? - we need to read beyond the text and into the creative mind. But is that possible? What place does the creative mind have in the creative process? Does it always understand what it creates? And is that cognitive relationship important in the final result? Can we accept that an author may not know the best way to end a novel, and yet is still able to do so successfully? And does this combination of blessed luck and talent require something approaching religious faith in the individual artist?

The Man Without Qualities is a unique text that cannot easily be fitted into these categories. [Hypertext4] However, this is a starting point from which to talk about the un-ending. Does the text in fact offer a distinct type of closure, a closure that is non-closure and which places it outside the normal understanding of what endings are? Paradoxically, certain aspects of the ending in *The Man Without Qualities* can be identified as parallel, and more clearly, incomplete. In addition to this, Musil is a highly self-aware author who, according to popular opinion amongst scholars, [Hypertext5] is unable to successfully negotiate closure in his novel.

Behind me a car door slams, the sound is reassuring and solid in its familiarity. I wait for a moment, spotlit before the thick scrub along the river's edge, and then follow the receding taillights across the heavy gravel and out of the carpark towards Sir Fred Schonell Drive.

For some reason the streetlights are out and the comfortable riverside suburb of modern apartment buildings and older style Queenslanders is unusually still. A sort of theatrical anticipation hangs in the air as if at any moment lights will pick out a temporary stage and a show will begin - torch songs on the footpath; a soliloquy at a bus shelter; choruses in the park behind the ferry stop.

This absurd feeling only lasts for a moment, but for that instant I would not be surprised to find groups of actors, musicians and technicians preparing to begin some massive outdoor production, hanging around unobtrusively in groups by the bus stop or on street corners. Of course I see no one.

At the Gailey Road t-intersection I hesitate. If I turn left into the continuing darkness I'll follow a more direct route through backstreets until I cross the Western Freeway. If I turn right and follow the street lights into what appears a bright nighttime normality I'll be going in the wrong direction, but I'll meet the freeway further north and won't have to drive through Taringa. I indicate left.

This morning I found an essay on the internet discussing endings in fiction and the desire of new writers to learn about closure as a tool for originality (Brophy). The essay took as its basic metaphor the idea of creativity as "always an act already mapped-out, already begun in imitation" (Brophy 5), following from the notion that "realism consists not in copying the real but in copying a depicted copy" (Barthes 55). [Hypertext6]

The argument allowed a presumption of Cartesian duality to inform its notions of creativity.

> Spontaneity/planning, original/copy, art/craft, new/old, uncanny/familiar...highlight the way [creativity's] presence shifts under our gaze or slips through our fingers or the way it takes us by surprise despite and because of our maps (Brophy 3).

Accepting the rigidity of oppositions but at the same time acknowledging the fluid nature of creativity seems a contradiction that points to a flaw in the thesis of maps as metaphor for writing. If we continue the author's list of

polarities to include black/white and male/female it becomes necessary to question the neat divisions; the relationships are not symmetrical. To accept these oppositions as static and equal is to overlook difference, and does not adequately explain *how* creativity is related to dualism.

Barthes' notion of secondary mimesis is a critique of realist writing that questions the possibility of originality. But, as has been said of Kafka: "Innumerable attempts to write a la Kafka, all of them dismal failures, have only served to emphasise Kafka's uniqueness, that absolute originality which can be traced to no predecessor and suffers no followers" (Arendt Illuminations 3). This is not to say that Kafka invented the novel. He was working within a tradition described by Barthes, but to a high degree of originality. Mimesis does not have to be a mirroring. Deleuze and Guattari, for example, see it as camouflage. The Greeks saw it as a powerful artistic tool which cut "across the more familiar characterisation by poetic genres" (Burnyeat 6).

Fiction is a thought experiment, and good endings are dictated by the material of the story. [Hypertext7] It is necessary for the writer to bring his or her individuality to the work. If the writer is honest then the conclusions should be inevitable, he or she would create "what seems, at least by the test of his or her own imagination and experience of the world, an inevitable development of story" (Gardner 65). The manuscript I have beside me is a case in point. My friend, Hugh, told me that he felt there were very few possibilities he could use for endings because the weight of story up to that point lent itself to a certain type of ending. When he called me he said he was still uncertain about the ending but he thought I would be able to offer some useful advice, seeing as how it was my speciality.

Perrin Park is a black hole, invisible on the right, as I head up the hill towards the roundabout at the northern end of Indooroopilly Road. I don't know this area well, and as a consequence have had to study the street directory on previous occasions when I've thought I could find a back way through Taringa. Tonight I am determined not to admit defeat; I won't stop and look at the Refidex. Perhaps because of this I miss the turn into Swann Road and head straight over the crest at the roundabout down alongside where the St Lucia golf course on the left winds its way up from the river. I realise my mistake almost immediately, but still, stubbornly I suppose, decide not to turn back but to find another route through to Moggill Road.

Robert Musil died in 1942 at the age of sixty-two having spent some twenty-five years devoted to writing *The Man Without Qualities*. He has been placed among the high modernists, described by Frank Kermode as a distant third to Joyce and Proust. Kermode is critical of Musil whom he believes has been overpraised and his reputation guaranteed prematurely. [Hypertext8] He believes that Musil harks back to the epistolary works of Samuel Richardson and so the form of his novel is atavistic. But he says it is atavistic in a most sophisticated way that aligns Musil with the contemporary avant-garde, adding that he would not care to read the book twice. [Hypertext9]

Lack of plot and economy of structure are not relevant criticisms in the case of this 1130 page text. Ulrich says that

> the basic law of this life, the law one longs for, is nothing other than narrative order, the simple order that enables one to say: 'First this happened and then that happened...' [but Ulrich] had lost this elementary, narrative mode to which private life still clings, even though everything in public life has already ceased to be narrative and no longer follows a thread, but spreads out as an infinitely interwoven surface. (Book II 708-9)

Musil recognised the impossibility of the individual living comfortably under the principles of Enlightenment aesthetics in a time of change and uncertainty, and he also clearly saw that this change had begun to take place. The old way of thinking, the search for unity of intellect and feeling, the "narrative order," belonged to a previous tradition that had not been let go. But Ulrich has broken away from this, and he knows that society has too although the message hasn't yet been received. Musil's representation of Ulrich's way of being, therefore, denies the simple novelistic structure of narrative (linear or otherwise). Musil anticipated these criticisms, he noted:

> People will find the excuse - because they don't want to explore the idea - that what is offered here is as much essay as novel. [Hypertext10] [And] 'Superfluous,' 'Wandering' discussions: that's a reproach that's often been made against me, in which it was perhaps graciously conceded that I could tell a story. But these discussions are for me the most important thing! (Musil 1995: Posthumous Papers 1723)

A good deal of Musil's energy in the first section is devoted to establishing the different characters, debating their points of view, and describing the recent cultural and intellectual climate of Austria, and therefore by extension Europe. His method is realism, and his language is brilliantly clear and elegant so that the ideas may be more clearly discerned. [Hypertext11] As he wrote in his notebooks: "When I cannot work out some particular thought, the work immediately becomes boring for me: this is true of almost every individual paragraph" (Posthumous Papers 1750). In a sentence *The Man Without Qualities* can be summarised as "the search through uncertain possibilities for a firm support of belief" (Pike 139). [Hypertext12]

Now I'm rapidly becoming confused about which direction I am heading. I was sure there'd be a connection through to Indooroopilly, but I'm facing a cul-de-sac (where was the No Through Road sign?) and there's nothing for it but to back around and return the way I came, try the opposite direction around the railway station, another possibility. At least the streetlights are on now and I can see a little more clearly.

On the north side of the station is a bridge across the railway line, and here ... now I know where I am. Just a right turn into Coonan Street up from the El Dorado Cinema and I'll hit Moggill Road near where Swann Road cuts in. Only took me ten minutes longer than it should have - would've been less if I hadn't been distracted. Driving becomes such a mechanical process. Sometimes I have the scary feeling of arriving somewhere with no recollection of the journey; as though my mind distracts itself from the endless passage of images so that they may never even have existed, as though the car is driving itself [Hypertext13] (but I know this is not true, it is merely boredom that allows me to perform a straightforward action without my mind fully engaging with it).

Writing and reading, on the other hand, leave a trail of impressions that can be recalled instantly with a flip of a page (or a click of the mouse). Do writers know where they are going? What they are "in search of"? Is it a matter of knowing when you get there? A reading journey is only slightly different; a privileged passenger, a navigator perhaps. I may not be holding the steering wheel but I am certainly alive to the images as they pass, ordering them and creating them in my imagination. But then, as with certain films, an ending can be guessed. Even the unexpected ending can be expected in so far as you suspect something unusual will happen: the incomplete ending, the sudden dramatic ending.

The third part of *The Man Without Qualities* is titled "Into The Millennium", and it is here that the other major character, Agathe, Ulrich's sister, is introduced.

One of the key themes through all Musil's work is the tension between a private desire for unity in spite of the fact that "everything in public life has ... ceased to be narrative and no longer follows a thread, but spreads out as an infinitely interwoven surface." Into The Millennium continues to explore the theme principally through the characters of the brother and sister, and importantly this unity is never achieved.

At the opening of the volume Ulrich and Agathe meet for the first time in many years at their father's funeral. They discover a mutual attraction which begins to take on a physical aspect. This relationship, its mythical origins and its never explicitly detailed conclusion, can be read in a poem Musil published in 1923. He noted that the poem contained "the novel in nucleus". This poem is concerned with the story first told in Plato's Symposium of how the gods divided the original human being into two halves. In Chapter 25 of "Into The Millennium" Ulrich compares himself and Agathe to this original myth of the unity of humanity. [Hypertext14]

Also in this chapter Ulrich comes to realise that his much contemplated connection with the murderer Moosbrugger is that he has always experienced "the inclination to women as a violently inverted dislike for people." For Ulrich to be able to revalue his relationships with women, to move from the short lived opening relationship with Leona through the hierarchy that includes Bonodea, Gerda, Diotima and finally Agathe, is to be able to reconstruct his inner life and live happily without pretence. The myth is used to expound on possibilities within the real world.

For Musil fiction offered the possibility of integration, the synthesis. But it was a possibility that needed to stand the test of his rational intellect. He does not wish to create an alternative world for his characters to escape to, he wants them to find a way of living within the world in which they exist, a reflection of the world as he saw it, a world of relativism and possibilities. This would suggest that the synthesis, the unity, if it ever exists, can only be momentary, not a total solution. But this is entirely consistent with Ulrich's sense of dialectics, that "every action and its opposite are accompanied by the subtlest arguments, which can be defended or attacked with equal ease" (Book II 234). There is no universal solution, no completeness.

The big, multi-spoke roundabout between the Westfield Shopping Centre and the railway line on Moggill Road spins an endless line of traffic heading from the city out towards the suburbs; a stream of late commuters - blank faces flashing in the headlights - passing before me from right to left. Crowds move along the footpath towards the cinema where there'll be a queue for cheap tickets stretching to the corner of the block. At a break I move into the line of cars and I'm on Moggill Road driving the left lane, one road all the way to Pullenvale.

In taking up the story of Ulrich and Agathe Musil establishes that brother and sister are both dissatisfied with their experience of romantic love. Ulrich finds

> that the ideal demand to love thy neighbour is followed among real people in two parts, of which the first is that one cannot endure his fellow beings, while the second is made good by bringing oneself into sexual relations with half of it (Book III 23).

The relationship with Agathe becomes what Musil refers to as "the other condition." Ulrich has already experienced this once in his affair with the major's wife (Book II Ch19). He wants to recover value and feelings, to dream without distorting reality or diminishing the intellect. "I believe perhaps that some day before very long human beings will be

- on the one hand very intelligent, on the other mystics. Perhaps our morality is even today splitting into these two components" (Book III 122). ^{Hypertext15} He is not interested in carnality for its own sake, nor the emotional upheaval of romantic love, but rather, in "the real inward experience of love: it simply does not necessarily have anything to do with the other two parts at all"(Book III 185).

Only Agathe manages to find a degree of harmony and completeness in her personal experience of love and the mystical condition. Ulrich's tendency is to constantly analyse and redefine oppositions, but Agathe succeeds in bringing absolutes together. Away from Ulrich's rationalising influence her intellect does not reject the notion of love as a primal force, her mind is capable of grasping reality in a complete and different way than her brother.

Musil's idea of mysticism was not that it is identical with "the other condition," but that it is one form of its expression (like politics, ideology, morality, and ethics). Morality, however, is central to an understanding of "the other condition" because it is morality that gives form to the feelings. A large part of the novel is devoted to the portrayal of contemporary morality and ideologies. And through the various metaphors and images of movement, light, water, and fire, Musil describes a condition of being that he believes is more fundamental than moralities, religions, or ideologies. Ulrich's relationship with Agathe is a search for the experience of "love that has no goal, that isn't like a flowing stream, but like the ocean - a state of existence!" (Book III 159).

The road unfolds before me, an easy drive, cambered bends and long shoulders. The traffic has thinned and only the lights at Fig Tree Pocket Road and Marshall Lane slow me down. The police have a booze bus set up before the roundabout at Brookfield Road, but they wave me through. This surprises me because I always imagine the old station wagon with its unwashed, vaguely dissolute look is an obvious target. (Karen says it looks like a drunk's car.)

Agathe's solution is personal, whereas Ulrich still believes his answer lies in a political and intellectual arena. Agathe rejects this, and though her solution may yet become political it relies on Ulrich discovering the personal solution himself.

Critics of Musil have seen this as the cul-de-sac that trapped *The Man Without Qualities* in an impossible situation. At best the evolution of the feminine provides the glimpse of an answer but because it is a personal solution, and 'real' life is lived in a hard-minded intellectual world, this is only ever a momentary and escapist answer. Another way of looking at this is that it is a challenge offered to masculinity to make the personal political, and while the personal is still seen as literally belonging in the world of myth then it is a project that has not ended. The ending has not been "pilfered", it is in fact incomplete but it is incomplete because Musil's belief in the relation between art and life required that he leave open the possibility of remaking an answer to this problem.

Out through Kenmore the suburbs start to thin towards Pullenvale and the Mount Crosby State Forest. Karen loves living here. She says it's as close as she ever wants to be to the city. She teaches at the Kenmore High School - catches the bus from Pullenvale Road with her students, except days when I drive her on my way to the university.

It's still a fairly busy area, but I can smell the bush smells in the night air and I know I'll soon be climbing the hills towards home along the unlit roads where, on afternoon walks, we've seen wallabies, the occasional koala, and dragon lizards from the nearby creek sunning themselves in the grass. Once we saw a six-foot carpet snake eat a possum, watching in horrified fascination as first it strangled the animal and then proceeded to swallow it whole from nose to tail. Afterwards it tried to climb a tree but gave up when it kept sliding back down with the weight of its meal, and instead slithered noiselessly down a gully.

Did Robert Musil bite off more than he could chew? The apparent structural clumsiness and uncertainty at the end of Book III prompts two observations. First, to arrive at a particular ending for this novel would by definition devalue the preceding whole. Musil recognised there was no prescriptive formula that would satisfy everyone, let alone himself. To allow a second rate ending would be to accept artistic defeat. He wrote in a notebook that he had considered ending the novel in the middle of a sentence with a comma. ^{Hypertext16} Second, the end variations fit within the framework of theme in *The Man Without Qualities*. Ulrich wishes to "live on the edge of the possible." It is the various possibilities that attract him, indeed the *promise* of uncertainty.

What is a good ending? And, what is it good for? Bernard Malamud's *The Tenants*, has four endings. Does that mean the novel is suggesting that endings are illusory and never achieved in life? If so, is the inability to conclude a sign of weakness or of strength? Many critics have asked the same questions of *The Man Without Qualities*.

Musil's overwhelming preoccupation with cultural decline and morality, and a startling awareness of the importance of gender politics at a time when this particular issue was only forming on the fringe of cultural consciousness, suggest why *The Man Without Qualities* has been overlooked or criticised for lack of true novelistic intention.

As Walter Benjamin wrote: "'The meaning of life' is really the centre about which the novel moves. But the quest for it is no more than the initial expression of perplexity with which its reader sees himself living this written life" (Benjamin 98). ^{Hypertext17} Benjamin believed that the novelist cannot go beyond the point where he asks the reader to see that meaning as laid out in the text, the point marked by - The End. The reader looks for human beings,

characters, from whom he can derive some meaning for life, and therefore he knows in advance that he will share their experience of death, "the figurative death - the end of the novel" (Benjamin 100). The fact that Musil's novel has no end, not a multiple ending like *The Tenants*, but an un-ending, can be read as a failure, such as Burton Pike and Frank Kermode see (the former a glorious failure, and the latter a confused waste of talent) but also as an affirmation against ending as death, and a refusal to be placed within the realm of the ideological by narrative closure (Stewart 25).

Just past Rafting Ground Reserve, where Moggill Creek flows steeply towards the Brisbane River, the suburbs of Brookfield, Kenmore, Pullenvale, and Pinjarra Hills meet at the Pullenvale Road turnoff. A dusty, red four-door sedan with its bonnet up is parked near the telephone booth on the corner as I slow down to make the turn. A large-bellied man leans over the telephone, one arm resting on the grey box. I swing into Pullenvale Road, half watching the phone booth as I turn, half watching for oncoming traffic. Pullenvale Road is black ahead. I'm committed to the turn and in front of me, crossing the road, is a tall, elderly man. I know he's old, he's wearing a felt trilby like the sort my grandfather wore, the sort of head gear young people just can't carry off (I actually think this while I nearly run him down). He's leading an equally old dog that lags behind, a blonde Labrador. I pull the wheel further right. I can't stop or I'll be on the wrong side of the main road. There's a headlight coming over the hill down Moggill road, probably doing seventy or eighty heading straight at me. It all happens in a couple of seconds. I swerve, the old man looks up - caught in the glare of the headlights. I turn into the wrong lane (luckily there's nothing coming here). A serious bump under the front left hand side. Jesus, I've killed the dog! Dog's dead and I've killed him! I slow down and pull over to the left-hand side of the road. I'm sweating under my arms, heart's pounding, heat prickling across my forehead. I can see the old guy, a skinny shadow between the streetlights back on Moggill Road. He glances in my direction a couple of times as he heads up the hill towards the Kenmore Repatriation Hospital. His dog seems all right, thank God. Must have hit a pothole.

For Walter Benjamin there was "no story for which the question as to how it continued would not be legitimate." Yet he believed the writer (storyteller) cannot "take the smallest step beyond the limit at which he invites the reader to a divinatory realization of the meaning of life by writing 'Finis'" (Benjamin 99). The reader's interest in the novel is governed by death. How do the characters make the reader understand that a particular death is waiting for them? The reader is drawn to the novel in "the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about" (Benjamin 100). This apparent ghoulishness does not describe an obsession with violence and murder, nor a simple didactic transaction, but rather a natural reflexivity of which most successful writers are instinctively aware.

Death can be a good career move for an artist. But more than this art is specifically concerned with death, as much as death is inextricable from life. The unnamed weight hanging over the first part of *The Man Without Qualities* is the impending Great War. Much of the irony of the Parallel Campaign, the structural black joke, lies in the fact that the Austrian Year planned for 1914 will be altogether different from anything imagined by the committee. *The Man Without Qualities*s is shadowed throughout by war and the rise of fascism in the twenties and thirties. In spite of this the novel proclaims possibilities, hope, and love.

Musil's sudden death in 1942 may not have been as good a career move as Van Gogh's, Keats', or even Buddy Holly's in terms of increased commercial cachet, but it provided a practical solution to his problem of closure for *The Man Without Qualities*. He had variously told his publisher and friends that he planned another complete book to finish the novel, that "Into the Millennium" would be the end, and that he would have to stop writing the novel through lack of finances. He was saved the difficulty of presenting to the public an un-ending as closure. Combined with this dubious luck is a sort of harmony between the novelist's death, his relationship with his work (for which he literally sacrificed himself), and the un-ending of the novel which in refusing traditional closure arms itself further against ideology and death. In doing this it is not simply foreshadowing poststructuralism's retreat from closure, but it is pre-figuring arguments to come and inviting us to look beyond a desire for unity and narrative order and engage in a dialogue of "differentiated cosmopolitanism" (Poster 51).

Pullenvale Road is uphill for the first half kilometre before it drops into a gully and then winds back up through the hills. I've taken the climb slowly, and at the crest I let the engine pick up speed. The first bend is gentle and wide and I follow it at close to fifty. The road dips sharply now and I touch the brakes to keep the speed at sixty. The next bend is tighter, but I bank into it easily. At the bottom the road crosses a creek and then climbs steeply into a right hand hairpin and I realise going in that I've shot the creek too fast. I touch the brakes again, not wanting to throw the car, holding the wheel into the bend. The engine'll slow us. I'm struggling with the speed, the soft edge of the road, the line of the bend. I hold it, feel the back start to slip out and I'm glad I'm not going any faster. A month ago our nearest neighbour, Jim the plumber, rolled his ute here coming home from the pub.

The first part is the tightest. Good thing there hasn't been any rain lately. It straightens again, and there's one more shorter bend.

As I come out of the corner, picking up speed, I catch a small movement in the darkness by the side of the road and then immediately, flashing to the left of the headlight, a figure walking towards the car. I swerve, unnecessarily, heart

pumping. I'm still spooked by the near miss at the Pullenvale Road turn off. Why are there no footpaths? And then he's gone and I can't see anything in the blackness behind. I don't even know it was a man. It could have been a woman. No, there was something about the way he was walking, something purposeful, aimless, something masculine. But it could have been my imagination.

I don't know what I'll say to Hugh. He's expecting a considered, insightful response. We've known each other for a long time, I guess I'll tell him what I think and it'll be fine. It's not that I didn't like the read, but I kept trying to work out the genesis of his characters, to see if I knew who they were based on. The fiction writer is a metaphysical mirror (Levi:51) who reproduces an image as he sees it. This position, I believe, comes closest to defining the author's creative role.

Our reading practice always modifies our relationship to the text, but it seems to me that a lack of initial objectivity makes theoretical principles impossible, or at least extremely difficult to apply. And if 'objectivity' is a problematic area connected with representations of 'reality' and notions of 'universal truth', and all readings are in fact interpretations then these readings must also apply to theory.

The author of this text is a real person to me, not just a name on a dust jacket. I know some of the story of his life and it was an instinctive reaction to identify elements of the novel with what I know about Hugh. [Hypertext18] But as soon as I was able to create some distance between myself and the text this ceased to be a problem. As soon as I could separate my relationship with the physical person from my relationship with the text then I could see in practice what I understood in principle. With some difficulty I could read the way I expect my students to read. Musil based most of his characters on people he knew and of course this is entirely irrelevant to my reading of *The Man Without Qualities*. The author constructs an identity through his relationship with certain types of writing discourse; that individual's relationships with other individuals, particularly myself, defines him (in Hugh's case) as the person I've known for so many years.

Float is a novel about three friends, Derek, Rob, and Nick, and specifically Derek's relationship with Nilufer. The point of view switches between Derek and Nilufer, but the story is ultimately about the longer trajectory of the lives of the three friends going back to the drowning of Sarah, a childhood friend, and forward to Derek's life after Nilufer has left him.

The ending of *Float* works well as parallel closure. Derek has returned to India to cover the 1996 cricket World Cup for his newspaper. Dissatisfied with his work he decides to leave the tour and join a documentary crew making a film about a decrepit nuclear power plant in northern Maharashtra. The same day he receives two letters from Nilufer, whom he has not seen for some time, telling him that the daughter he never knew has just died, aged two. His state of mind in these last pages, and the attention of the writing to details of setting, recall the first, short chapter where Derek is sitting alone in his flat on a stormy summer morning. Then, too, Nilufer had left and he is alone waiting for the rain. The intervening ten years have wrought significant changes, and Derek's dream demonstrates, through its metaphors, the journey he has travelled but is unable to admit to other than in the language of dreams.

This sense of time passed, and the progress of the character, situate the ending within the definition of parallel rather than circular closure. In the opening scene Derek's mood is dictated by an inability to comprehend Nilufer's actions or communicate effectively with her and a residual feeling of guilt following Sarah's death. By the end of the novel he has a far greater understanding of himself, Nilufer, the damage they have unwittingly inflicted on each other, and what this means in the wider context of their individual and shared lives. The character's progression, and the setting of the final scenes, points to an author who is conscious of the deeper themes at work in the novel and who has allowed the story to lead his character to a point where he can be left aware of his condition, scarred but willing to take on the future, to delve further into life.

As a reader the ending of *Float* stayed with me for some time. The dream of the mountain track, as described by Derek to Kali, shows an awareness by the character of his place as an individual in the procession of life where all carry similar burdens. Paradoxically, just as he leaves his job to pursue an uncertain professional future he is now able to see himself as part of a community connected to his fellow human beings. Whereas before he had merely observed, his detachment a liability, now he has learnt to recognise this construction for what it is.

The individual/society argument can be refined to state that the journalist, whose profession requires objectivity and calculated detachment rejects this position as impossible and, in reading his own life, decides that he cannot sustain the illusion expected of him because he is, after all, involved. His whole working life has been a subjective interpretation of events that at the time appeared a truthful rendering, now he sees the illusion in this way of thinking.

Two general categories of closure in the novel can be identified as the 'closed' or nineteenth century 'novelistic' ending, and the 'open' or twentieth century modernist ending. Henry James dismissed the former as "a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks" (James 27). John Gardner has described the latter as passe due to its conventionality. Marianne Torgovnick concludes

> Every novel, including an 'open' one, establishes by its ending a 'closed' network of internal relationships. And even endings that produce a feeling of finality, as most endings involving a shift in time scale do, may be relatively 'open' or relatively 'closed' when compared to similar endings.... Moreover, application of the terms 'open' and 'closed' can sometimes be very much a matter of interpretation, as it is in *War and Peace* (Torgovnick 208).

As such there is a continuous line between popular nineteenth-century fiction and late twentieth-century fiction. All novel length works can be placed within the broad descriptions of circular, parallel, incomplete, tangential, or linking techniques of closure allowing some form of comparison to be drawn between the strategies used in very different texts.

There are major differences between the endings of *The Man Without Qualities* and *Float*, as there are differences in style and scale of ambition in the texts. However, both can be fitted into the category of 'open' endings. *Float* follows a pattern of closure identifiable with a number of contemporary novels, whereas *The Man Without Qualities* is unique among published works of fiction for its defiant un-ending. In this way, perhaps, *Float* could be described as falling conventionally within the tradition of modernist 'open' endings, while *The Man Without Qualities* subverts this conventionality in a non-parodic extension of the definition that works in very subtle ways, entirely consistent with the beginning and middle of the novel.

The Man Without Qualities genesis in late 19th century Austrian society and its concern with the decay of high European culture align it with the Victorian novel of manners; its thematic concerns (ideology, morality, existential isolation) and structure identify it as a modernist work; the radical nature of its open ending, and the allowance for (insistence on) possibilities, relativism, and the claim that it is a novel for a future generation of Germans places it within a definition of postmodernism.

Much of the criticism of closure in nineteenth-century fiction centres on the mechanical nature and the lack of sophistication employed in negotiating endings. In this way twentieth-century endings are seen as truer, more interesting and more complex. While this thesis does not set itself the task of examining novelistic closure in nineteenth-century fiction, it is necessary to acknowledge that there are some common techniques and that the dominance of the 'open' ending in twentieth-century fiction has led to a similar stagnation of interest and expectation in closure as was apparent to Henry James regarding 'closed' endings. However, this only reinforces the notion that an ending must be "an inevitable development of story".

It has begun to rain, not the heavy downpour you would expect but a hot, misty drizzle that clings to every surface and creeps like a gas into houses and cupboards and gets in your clothes. The windscreen wipers count - two, three, four, wipe, two, three ... - the dew seems to bubble up from the glass of the windscreen rather than fall onto it. I'm close to home now and suddenly I feel a wave of tiredness, a stifling airlessness that makes me yawn widely. I wind down the window and feel the fine spray on my face. The warm evening wind lifts me for a moment and in that second I pass a figure, again on the left hand side of the headlights, walking heavily with head down and a bag in each hand.

There is no danger this time. I pass the woman with the width of half the road between us. She looks across as I pass, her face in shadow but the tilt of her head describing a detached superiority.

I turn into my street a moment later. At the top of the short, steep hill the house is in darkness. I park the car and let myself in the front door, uselessly calling out Karen's name even though I know, from the silence of the house, that she's not home. This is a surprise. I had expected she would be here marking year ten essays - I can see them in a pile on the living room table. I stand in the semi-darkness of the living room for a moment, the light from the front door throwing long angular shadows towards the kitchen. I try to remember if Karen had said anything about tonight, but I don't even have that residual feeling of uneasiness that signals some forgotten appointment or promise. Instead I feel vaguely disappointed, as though I am still not home yet but merely stopping for a while in this place. The familiarity of the furniture and the objects around me do not allay these feelings but in a strange way compound them as if the objects themselves have betrayed my expectations.

Standing in the dim room the feeling intensifies so that I begin to imagine the house itself is conspiring in my discomfort. But this is irrational, and I know it. And then I know why.

I hear the rustle of plastic bags at the front door followed immediately by Karen's footsteps in the hall. She stands at the lounge room door framed by the light behind her. She has a bag in each hand, her face is in darkness. 'It was you,' she says. 'You nearly ran me over on Pattersons Road.'

'No. I didn't recognise you.'

She harrumphs her displeasure or disbelief. 'It's bloody dangerous walking on these streets.' She puts the bags on the floor and turns on the light. 'Why are you sitting in the dark?' she says, and then without waiting for an answer goes

through to the kitchen. 'There's a bottle of wine in one of those bags,' she calls. 'and when you've poured a couple of glasses you can come and peel some potatoes. I'm starving,'

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