

nite pecking-order emerges. Zulus, Tswanas, and Sotho in the north, for example, feel much closer to one another than any of them do to Xhosas in the south. And despite all the fashionable black rejection of white (English-speaking) liberals, all black groups feel far closer to English-speaking whites than to Afrikaners. Strikingly, Jews were the group disliked second most, ahead even of Indians—this despite the fact that Jews have played so prominent a part in anti-apartheid politics.

Horowitz feels, surely rightly, that a peaceful and democratic future for South Africa depends on the recognition not only of the reality of these ethnic groups but of the inevitability of stress and rivalry among them. Fights between the ANC and the Zulu-based Inkatha have made headlines around the world and led to more than 5,000 deaths, but the ANC has also clashed with every other black liberation group. To accommodate such rivalries, Horowitz argues, Pretoria must adopt a federal structure of government.

There are many obstacles in the way of such a rational political course. As Horowitz admits, he found that ANC activists have for so long repeated their mantra about a unitary state—just as they have insisted upon inheriting the same state apparatus their oppressors used—that even those who concede the value of federalism have not thought it worth the immense effort that would be required to change the movement's mind about it. And indeed,

there is such ready recourse to violence within many black communities that it is not clear that elections of any kind are going to be at all easy to conduct.

Yet despite such difficulties Horowitz is still right, even right about federalism, whatever the resistance to it within the ANC. South Africa is probably the most fiercely divided society on earth. Its racial cleavages are infamous, but it is also deeply divided along ethnic, linguistic, regional, class, and religious lines. Everything we have learned from the experience of other nations suggests how easy it is for such societies to collapse into civil war, and South Africa could, all too easily, provide the world with the spectacle of a giant Lebanon. Such mosaic societies can be ruled for a time by authoritarian elites—Afrikaner or African—but violence will break through in the end. The only hope for long-term peace (and the economic growth which is probably indispensable to it) lies in a truly open-minded search for supple, enabling democratic institutions. The danger is that some will feel that the arrival in power of African nationalists will be the happy democratic ending South Africa needs. The point of Horowitz's work is that that ending has to be merely a part of a new democratic beginning.

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The Writer Without Certainties

PRECISION AND SOUL: Essays and Addresses. By Robert Musil. Ed. and trans. by Burton Pike and David S. Luft. Univ. of Chicago. 301 pp. \$29.95

Among the great modernist writers only Robert Musil's name has failed to become a household word in the English-speaking world. His mind was as original

as the philosopher Wittgenstein's, and his fiction shrewder than Mann's or Proust's in its analysis of a world without certainties. Yet one obstacle stands in the way of Musil's reputation. His most celebrated work, *The Man without Qualities* (1930–43), is one of the longest novels ever written, and, despite its wit and brilliance, no one ever quite seems to finish it. Indeed,

Musil never finished it himself. The novel, with all its exploration of tenuousness, doubt, and moral formlessness, was not so much unfinished as unfinishable. (A new translation, to be published by Knopf early next year, may finally bring the novel wider recognition in America.)

Robert Musil was born in Austria in 1880, and thus he belongs to that exceptional generation of German-speaking novelists—Mann, Kafka, Hesse, Hermann Broch, and Alfred Döblin—who came of creative age in the decade before World War I. Son of a professor of mechanical engineering, he was educated, mostly in Berlin, on the assumption that science provided the most reliable access to reality and that the best hope of philosophy lay in positivism. When Musil moved toward psychology, literature, and forms of philosophy other than positivism, he found himself unable to make up his mind about anything. Musil's intellectual uncertainty became the creative provocation of *The Man without Qualities*. His fictions hover above certain feelings—doubt, misgiving, equivocation—without settling upon any of them as the basis of life. Of course most people, even writers, do not consciously establish a “basis of life” but simply accept or fight the facts of their life as they occur. But Musil proposes an intriguing question: What would one's life be like if one attached no particular privilege or meaning to the fact that something exists? Something else might have existed instead of it. Then what?

Musil had the genius to see that this predicament was not his alone. Like many of his generation, Musil found the social world encumbered by “outworn ideologies such as Christianity, monarchism, Liberalism, and Social Democracy.” These ideas were no longer actually put into practice, Musil said, yet people acted as though they still believed in them, thus lending those ideologies “the illusion of meaning and sacredness, which in addition to everything else is also a sin against the spirit.” In his essays, collected in *Precision and Soul*, Musil was trying to understand a civilization that was just then com-

ing into being and that no ideology had begun to describe.

The title of this collection comes from *The Man without Qualities* and points to one of Musil's constant preoccupations: “We do not have too much intellect and too little soul, but too little precision in matters of the soul.” These essays treat such subjects as Austria and Germany, the nature of a nation as distinct from a state or a civilization, the sociology of film, the question of ideas and ideologies, the status of women, and the hope for a new world after the Great War. All are connected by Musil's attempt—after the crisis of European culture that had led to the catastrophe of World War I—to develop new ways of thinking to enhance an individual's flexibility in responding to an uncertain civilization.

The editors of this volume claim that Musil was a great essayist, and so he was if the essay as a genre is best found among fragmentary perceptions, spurts of enthusiasm, broken flights. Musil wrote most of his essays upon invitation, and when he saw them in print he thought them merely occasional pieces. He felt about his writings what his character Ulrich in *The Man without Qualities* feels about his own life:

For a long time there had been a faint air of aversion hovering over everything that he did and experienced, a shadow of helplessness and isolation, a universal disinclination to which he could not find the complementary inclination. At times he felt as though he had been born with a gift for which at present there was no function.

Musil's great theme was indeterminacy: His characters are invariably found among choices they are unwilling to make, rival vocations between which they scrupulously dither. *The Confusions of Young Törless* (1906), Musil's first novel, is appropriately a story of adolescent wavering. In later stories—in *Unions* (1911), *Three Women* (1924), and the endlessly postponed *Man without Qualities*—even when adolescence is left behind, the wa-

vering continues. In that last book Clarisse says: "A Man without Qualities does not say No to life, he says Not Yet, saving himself up." No wonder Musil often felt disgusted with storytelling, an art that can't avoid making the local commitment of saying that something happened and then something else happened. If you believe that these happenings are arbitrary, you are bound to think their recital a specious affair. In any case, Musil discovered his genius behind the appearances he could hardly bring himself to narrate. His characters stare at events without really participating in them, and the interest of the events lodges itself in the stare more than in the actions. In *The Man without Qualities* we read of Claudine:

What attracted her in the unintelligible passage of events was all there was in it that did not pertain to herself, to the spirit: What she loved was the helplessness and shame and anguish of her spirit—it was like striking something weaker than oneself, a child, a woman, and then wanting to be the garment wrapped about its pain, in the darkness alone.

Mostly, the unintelligible passage of events took the form—or the formlessness—of the crowd, the masses. In 1912 Musil wrote that "the fundamental cultural difference between this and any other age" was one's experience of dissolving in the crowd; he speaks of "the loneliness and anonymity of the individual in an ever-increasing mass." The same motif recurs in the essay on Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918–22), where the individual mind is seen bewildered by the multiplicity and chaos of the images—the facticity, as Musil calls it—it has to confront:

What characterizes and defines our intellectual situation is precisely the wealth of contents that can no longer be mastered, the swollen facticity of knowledge (including moral facts), the spilling out of experience over the surfaces of nature, the impossibility of achieving an overview, the chaos of things that cannot be denied.

Musil's answer was partly Nietzschean: Perhaps we can overcome the facticity "by becoming a spiritually stronger type of human being." But he couldn't bring himself to accept the other part of Nietzsche's answer: Lighten the burden by consulting only those facts that bear upon our future. Nietzsche had urged his readers to seek "a past from which we may spring, rather than that past from which we seem to have derived." Musil felt a scruple, and yet another misgiving, about this stratagem. "It makes no sense," he writes, "to try to remove from the facts, through a false skepticism, the weight of their facticity."

In 1938, after the *Anschluss* of Nazi Germany and Austria, Musil left Vienna and settled in Switzerland. He died in Geneva on April 15, 1942. There is a certain propriety in his having removed himself to neutral Switzerland. The essays in *Precision and Soul* show that virtually every social or political position he adopted was overwhelmed in the event. He derived dire satisfaction from the notion that events are arbitrary and therefore interchangeable. Hitler acted upon a different notion. Musil's Switzerland was fiction, not fact: There, if nowhere else, he could ordain things differently, dissolving the sinister forms of reality and projecting a "second state of being" from his choice feelings and desires. Not that he was content with fictions of utopia. He continued to believe, or rather to hope against hope, that genius could somehow float free of every limiting condition. Rainer Maria Rilke was his example—a poet released from the ordinariness of ordinary thinking.

The emergence of a Rilke could not indeed be explained, but Musil derived from the naturalist Baron Alexander von Humboldt the idea that "significant individuality" is "a power of the spirit that springs up without reference to the course of events and begins a new series." Humboldt saw "nodal points and points of origin in creative people who absorb past things and release them in a new form that can no longer be traced back past their point of origin." Unfortunately, a theory of free-floating genius is just as applicable to Hit-

ler as to Rilke. Musil hoped that such genius would commit itself "to purely intellectual endeavors," but he lived long enough to see that it did not.

The essays in *Precision and Soul* are mostly a record of bewilderment, including self-bewilderment. Some of them—the critique of Spengler, the obituary on Rilke—have the desolate and desolating beauty of a noble mind at the end of its tether. Musil's mind was always there. He

was never content. As in the novels, so in the essays, he thought he could make a new world by talking it into existence; coaxing, cajoling, threatening, summoning. And then he broke off, his novel incomplete, knowing that the magic would not work. Not yet, anyway.

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King Oil

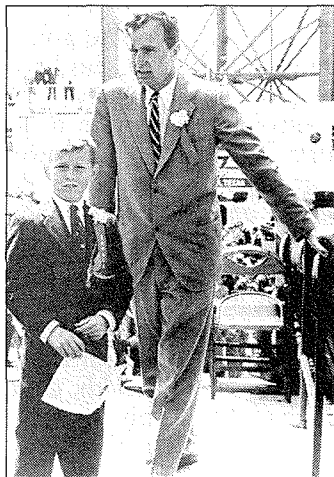
THE PRIZE: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power. By Daniel Yergin. Simon & Schuster. 877 pp. \$24.95

Every author dreams about good timing, some stroke of luck that will distance his book from the pack of 50,000 titles published annually in the United States. During the seven years he worked on *The Prize*, Daniel Yergin may have imagined some sort of crisis in the oil-rich Middle East that would make his book a hot property when it was published. But

even in his wildest reverie Yergin could not have dreamed that publication of his oil saga would coincide with the greatest American military expedition since the Vietnam War.

But coincide it did. Five days after Yergin delivered his epilogue to Simon & Schuster, Saddam Hussein's troops invaded Kuwait. The publisher immediately embarked on a crash publishing schedule. In four months, or one-third the time it normally takes to publish a book, *The Prize* was in bookstores.

Critics of the war have pointed to a base motive behind American policy ever since George Bush uttered the words, "This will not stand." If Kuwait exported, say, artichokes instead of oil, the United States would have cared considerably less about the fate of the emirate. But readers of *The Prize* will recognize an enduring principle at stake. In our century, oil begets national wealth, which begets state power. Americans differed over whether the resort to force was premature or wise. But unless one had been a pacifist or consid-



Two oilmen: Iraq's Saddam Hussein; George Bush (with George, Jr.) in 1956, when he was president of Zapata Off-Shore Company.