

## A Comparison of the Worlds of Redl and Ulrich

The two worlds, which are portrayed in Robert Musil's The Man Without Qualities and in the movie Colonel Redl, differ very much from one another. The differences between the two worlds are mainly a result of the different viewpoints of the main characters and their role in society. The first viewpoint is that of an educated middle class man, while the other comes from a career officer in the military. Despite their differences though, the characters also share many similarities with one another with regards to their attitudes and how they interact with those around them. This is caused partly by their ambition for power, which seems to be a common theme, and the fact that they had shared a common profession at one point.

In The Man Without Qualities the main character, Ulrich, an educated and intelligent middle-class citizen of Vienna, has been successful in many professions, including mathematics, civil engineering, and a stint in the military. Despite his achievements and accomplishments in life, he is still disappointed in himself for not having reached any measurable goal. Upon realizing this, Ulrich decides to take a year's leave of absence from his own life in order to try and determine what it is he would like to pursue. He is rather critical with regards to other people's ideas, and has even "learned to give his disdain for other people's ideals international scope" (Musil 14). He is constantly in conflict with himself and his own thoughts. He also allows himself sometimes to be controlled by his emotions, and one of the results is that these emotions or stimuli trigger almost an opposite effect within him, as we see from Walter's

description of him that “when he is angry, something in him laughs. When he is sad, he is up to something. When something moves him, he turns against it” (Musil 63) Ulrich is likened to a man without qualities because he is considered to be a product of society at that time, and he has all the qualities, yet he doesn’t truly because society is the one that imbued him with these traits.

The character of Colonel Redl is quite a bit different than that of Ulrich. Redl began life as a peasant, yet due to the “graciousness of the Emperor” because of a poem he wrote, he was offered a spot in the officers’ military academy. His ambition and leadership brought about his success in this career. While at the academy, the differences separating the upper class and lower class were very much present. The fact that Redl came from a lower class family was constantly hanging over his head, as the fact that he owed his position to the graciousness of the Emperor is constantly brought up throughout the film, and his lower class standing was eventually one of the main factors that caused his downfall. Redl enjoys his position of power and clearly exercises his control over other people. He goes to great lengths to hide his feelings and emotions, especially his homosexuality, from just about everybody around him. He even goes so far as to threaten to kill the woman who knows the most about him if she were to ever tell anyone what is inside him. His desire to hide almost everything about who he truly is makes him much more of an enigmatic character, and it is often times difficult to discern his moods or intentions.

Much of the similarities between the two worlds overlap in areas where the main characters have a common background. Ulrich joined the army and enjoyed the power that came with that profession, much like Redl. He also seemed to share much of Redl’s

philosophy, as evidenced in the quotation "...it seemed to him that because the soldier's profession was a sharp, white-hot instrument, this instrument must be used to sear and cut the world for its salvation" (Musil 32). This attitude certainly seems to parallel Redl's view of the virtues of the military and of how those in the military should act, especially when he takes over a command in Vienna and gives his speech on the etiquette of officers.

The relationship between Redl and Christoph on the surface almost exactly mirrors the one that was described between Ulrich and Walter. If one discounts the underlying sexual tension in Colonel Redl, in both instances the pairs were good boyhood friends while in their younger years, but their attitudes towards one another changed as they grew older. Granted, the relationship between Alfred and Christoph eventually became much more deceitful and destructive, but the relationships had been basically identical in the earlier years.

There were some notable differences between the two characters. Redl's world seemed to be going through radical changes, such as the growing bitterness of the populous towards the aging Emperor and the influence of the military was expanding with the threat of war. Ulrich's world was indeed changing, but the changes that are described in Ulrich's world are those of decadence. There are also some inner character differences between the two, which were best illustrated while Ulrich was in the army. His idea of the duty and responsibility of a soldier was contradictory to Redl's. For example, Ulrich felt that the wives and daughters of civilians were legitimate prey for soldiers to go after, which Redl seemed to feel was unacceptable for an officer. Alfred himself did not contemplate things or question them nearly as much as Ulrich does. In the

end he allowed himself to be easily manipulated into a position by his commanding officers that eventually caused his death. In this instance Redl seemed to have more in common with Moosbrugger in Musil's novel than with Ulrich. The quotation "Ulrich well understood the deep resignation with which Moosbrugger at such moments lamented his lack of an education, which left him helpless to undo the knots in this net woven of incomprehension," (Musil 75) which describes Moosbrugger's feeling at the trial could just as likely be applied to Redl, but instead of a lack of education, it is Redl's lineage and lack of foresight that leaves him helpless before his death.

Though there are many differences between the two worlds that are portrayed, there are also areas that visibly overlap. Both the differences and the similarities found within these portrayals help to provide us with a clearer picture of these parts of society in Vienna at that time by covering two different styles of life. The behavior of the individuals in both of these instances was at time admittedly confusing and it was also difficult sometimes to determine what their main priorities are due to both their emotional and personal turmoil. This most likely was caused by glimpses of social values that were present in Vienna that haven't been touched on enough to gain a full understanding of them.

## Works Cited

Musil, Robert. The Man Without Qualities. Trans. Sophie Wilkins. New York, 1995. pp.

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